Arc
The Journal of the School of Religious Studies, McGill University
La revue de l'École d'études religieuses, Université McGill

Decolonial Affordances
Sounding and Listening Interventions in Higher Education

Miranda Crowdus

Volume 51, 2023

Decolonization and the Study of Religion

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1117997ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/arc.v51i1.1469

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

McGill School of Religious Studies

ISSN

0229-2807 (print)
2817-1799 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Crowdus, M. (2023). Decolonial Affordances: Sounding and Listening Interventions in Higher Education. *Arc*, *51*, 76–120. https://doi.org/10.26443/arc.v51i1.1469

Decolonial Affordances: Sounding and Listening Interventions in Higher Education

Miranda Crowdus, *Concordia University*

This article considers the affordances of utilizing practical applications of music, sound, and orality, as alternatives to the dominant visual-centric, text-based forms of communication in Religious Studies pedagogical settings. The premise of this article is that sound and musicking can be explored in terms of their potential to dismantle academic, discursive, visual-centric, and linguistic forms – some of which are so ossified in a particular collectivity or conversation that we can no longer "say somethin'" as the bass player Charles Mingus puts it in the context of jazz.[1] This approach attempts to revise the colonial structures upon which much of higher education was built by modifying and destabilizing the foundation through which concepts in Religious Studies are introduced and processed.

The focus of this article came about through my teaching experiences as a professor in Religious Studies with training in Musical Performance and Ethnomusicology. I had long been aware of a gap in Religious Studies education that, even while the communities and practices that we study are arguably rooted religiously and ontologically in sonic, musical, aspects and oral practices, such aspects are ignored or glossed over as extraneous or mere embellishment to "hard" and more erudite "scientific" content.

1. Cited in Ingrid Monson, *Sayin' Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Arc – The Journal of the School of Religious Studies, McGill University
Volume 51 (2023): 76–120

In various teaching settings – both graduate and undergraduate – I found myself grappling with how to communicate the importance of musical, musical-liturgical, and sounding practices, and, more broadly, the lived experiences of religious and cultural minorities in a situation where the very language that we use, as well as the dominant visual-centric modes of communication, are arguably embedded in (neo)colonialist legacies and the uncritical promulgation of an underlying secular pluralism in Religious Studies education, often hegemonically applied as an ideology-free, self-explanatory frame through which to make sense of religious practices.[2] In some cases, imposed frames were even antithetical to describing the religious and spiritual practices that we were studying, particularly in the contexts of Indigenous ways of thinking and sounded and musical practices relating to religious and spiritual communities. It was in response to this state of affairs that I began to investigate the potential of musical and sonic interventions. In this, I follow Mignolo and Walsh in that these approaches consider that "'decoloniality' is 'neither a field of study, nor a discipline, but a way of being in the world, interrogating the structures of knowledge and of knowing that have thrown us."[3]

My positionality as an observant Jewish person of colour embodying Middle Eastern Jewish, Islamic, and Shamanistic (pre-Islamic) and Eastern European Jewish practices and roots, and also as an active musician and Jewish prayer leader, also impacts my approach to this topic. In recent times, I and others have been the

2. Critiqued by Talal Asad, *Secular Translations, Nation State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Also described in detail in the context of Religious Education in a special journal issue is Liam Gearon et al., "Decolonizing the Religious Education Curriculum: International Perspectives in Theory, Research and Practice," *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 1 (2021): 1–8.

3. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018): 381.

victims of politically expedient narratives and propaganda in the public sphere that, while arguably not totally without merit or good intentions in every instance, present themselves as attractively decolonial using symbolic language and currency, even as they erase minority history, diversity, identities, and lived realities of individuals and communities that do not fit comfortably within these narratives. Jewish people are arguably particularly impacted by this reductionist rhetoric. Indeed, one of the major patterns of anti-Jewish discourses is the mobilization of depictions of Jews and Judaism either as "strong, white and privileged" or "dark, weak and undesirable" to further – often relatively unrelated – agendas.[4] Moreover, Jewish people themselves and many minorities who do not fit reductionist or dominant narratives must arguably continually morph identities as a destigmatization strategy.[5] It is beyond the capacity of this article to address these problematic issues: but at the root of them, there is often a top-down, reductionist formulation of the acceptable parameters – dates, geospatial spheres, categories of identity and belonging, victims of colonialism – of decoloniality.

Thus, there is more at stake than classroom reform and intervention, rather decolonizing Religious Studies becomes a necessary way of understanding ourselves and the other outside the colonial matrix and also has the potential to combat the dehumanizing impact of the appropriation of subversive and decolonial language – or its uses in ways that exclude those who do

4. This problematic construction of Jews and Judaism as black or white to serve hegemonic non-Jewish agendas is discussed in a variety of scholarship including Sander L. Gilman, *Multiculturalism and the Jews* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006) and Abraham Melamed, *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture. A History of the Other* (London: Routledge, 2003).

5. Described as "ethnic shifting" in Miranda Crowdus, "Blackness, Mizrahi Identity and Ethnic Shifting in Contemporary Israeli Popular Music," in *Selected Racial Boundaries: The Social Life of Blackness in Israel*, ed. Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020), 113–129.

not fit comfortably in boxes or with large-scale narratives. This positionality and these experiences prompted me to draw on my own insider knowledge and musical experiences to mobilize the affordances of practiced sound-based dismantling practices to explore decoloniality which I define as a way for us to re-learn the knowledge that has been pushed aside, forgotten, buried, or discredited by the forces of modernity, settler-colonialism, and racial capitalism and other subjugating forces.

One of the challenges of writing about decolonization is that scholarship dealing with decolonial themes, draws upon many different interpretations of "decolonial." Therefore, it is important to define the term as it is being used here: this article uses "decolonial" rather than "decolonization" – which I associate with Indigenous restitution - to describe the affordances of practiced sound-based dismantling practices. I understand decoloniality as something that can be mobilized and processed pluralistically. This follows scholars who consider that we require a heterogeneity of conceptual, strategic, and practical approaches to taking up the decolonial project given our diverse positionalities and what Mbembe calls "entanglements" with the world.[6] The approach here mobilizes the polyvalence of sound to create – not only a singular approach to add to an array of heterogenous decolonial approaches – but approaches that can be interpreted differently by different positionalities that engage with them.

6. Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*, trans. Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 20–21; also discussed in Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *Decolonizing the University* (The Hague: Pluto Press, 2018).

Scholarship and Literature

While it would be impossible to chronicle the totality of scholarship on decolonial thought and practices, the following will outline some of the scholarship and approaches on which this article builds. In the vast literature on decolonization, much has been written about "decolonizing knowledges" and "decolonizing the mind" inspired by Fanon's groundbreaking work on the psychological impact of colonialism[7] but until recently there were few current attempts at practical rubrics for transformation to take place in the everyday. Moreover, discussions remained within the realm of academic publications read by academics. Although many might argue that discourse too can incite change, without practical rubrics that can be applied, it makes it very little for practitioners to incite reform. The study of religion is arguably just as embedded in what Aníbal Quijano calls the "colonial matrix" as much as any other discipline in higher education.[8]

There have been some relatively recent and important contributions to scholarship on decolonial approaches in higher educational settings including contributions by Shahjahan, Estera, and Surla; Andreotti; Hayes, Luckett, and Misiaszek.[9] Ahenakew and

7. This includes many publications by Fanon such as *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

8. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,'' *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 168–178.

9. Riyad A. Shahjahan, Annabelle L. Estera, Kristen T. Edwards, ""Decolonizing" Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review Across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts," *Review of Educational Research* 92, no. 1 (2022): 73–113; Vanessa Andreotti, et al., "Mapping Interpretations of Decolonization in the Context of Higher Education," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 1 (2015): 20–40; Aneta Hayes, Kathy Luckett, and Greg Misiaszek, "Possibilities and Complexities of Decolonising Higher Education: Critical Perspectives on Praxis," *Teaching in Higher Education* 26, no.7-8 (2021): 887–901.

others investigate this topic specifically in reference to the use of Indigenous pedagogies. Mallory Nye addresses the specific topic of the Religious Studies classroom and argues that how scholars talk about religion "remain[s] steeped in the ongoing legacies of European colonialism and assumptions of white supremacy."[10] Recognizing the problematic colonial origins of religious studies, several scholars tackled the question of where how Religious Studies can realistically adopt decolonial approaches. Some strides were made in identifying the degree to which approaches in Religious Studies are informed by colonialist legacies, whether directly engaging with Religious Studies or commenting on the colonialist matrices present in higher education.[11]

Furthering conversations about decolonization and the study of religion, scholars such as discussed how Religious Studies was created within the colonial matrix and continues to perpetuate ideas rooted in colonialism.[12] Another branch of inquiry including the works of Yountae, Maldonado-Torres, Tayob, and others proposes a move away from structured and canonical narrative of the history of religion and drew visibility to alternative histories of minorities from inclusive and pluralistic positionalities.[13] There are also emergent

10. Malory Nye, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," *Open Library of Humanities*, 5, no. 1, (2019): 2.

11. Such publications are too numerous to itemize here but include Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Munyaradzi Hwami, "Frantz Fanon and the Problematic of Decolonisation: Perspectives on Zimbabwe," *African Identities*, 14 no. 1 (2016): 19–37; Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

12. Examples include David Chidchester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Kwok Pui-Ian, "American Empire Building and Religious Studies," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2: 285–303; Kwok Pui-Ian, *Post-Colonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World* (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2021).

13. See: An Yountae, *Beyond Man: Race Coloniality and Philosophy of Religion*

publications that suggest the benefits of decolonial readings of canonical religious texts.[14] However, as many aptly pointed out, decolonization and diversity are not the same thing: "[d]ecolonization is about changing how people think, talk, and act through a radical engagement with a plurality of voices and perspectives that have been historically marginalized and silenced. Thus, decolonization is not the same as diversifying."[15] Decolonial activity therefore cannot just be about changing a reading or two on a syllabus – it must start from even beyond the syllabus itself and address the foundations of how we learn and communicate. If decolonization must occur at the foundation of education in Religious Studies, then arguably the very language and methods that we use require revision, which requires building on subversive and self-reflexive scholarship that questions the language that we use to talk about religion. Scholars have problematized the reification of the term "religion" focusing on more pluralistic, practiced, and embodied ways of understanding what religion constitutes in the everyday,[16] there have been few attempts to reimagine changes rooted in the language that we choose to talk about religion in higher

(Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Religious Studies and/in the Decolonial Turn," *Contending Modernities*, March 3, 2020, https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/religious studiesdecolonialturn/; Abdulkader Tayob, "Decolonizing the Study of Religions: Muslim Intellectuals and the Enlightenment Project of Religious Studies," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, no. 2 (2018): 735.

14. For example see Stephen D. Moore *Decolonial Theory and Biblical Unreading* (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

15. Nye, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," 5.

16. Scholars have articulated religious practice in various decentralizing ways. For instance, Orit Avishai describes religious Jewish women "doing religion." See Orit Avishai, "'Doing Religion' in a Secular World: Woman in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency," *Gender and Society* 22, no. 4 (2008): 409–433.

education, for instance, a lexicon that implies the multiplicity of religion and religious practice.

Nye specifically addresses decoloniality in the Religious Studies classroom. He refers to "soft approaches" that merely make small changes to pre-existing processes such as including more diverse readings on a syllabus. However, according to Nye, such approaches are insufficient for initiating the necessary change: "such a soft approach may succeed in weeding out some of the most blatant roots of colonialism but in doing so it keeps intact the shell of the current terminology, disciplinary structure, and academic power structures."[17] Refining Nye's discussion, Ahenakew problematizes recent tendencies in higher education to insert or graft Indigenous knowledges into non-Indigenous contexts, a process that he argues distorts power imbalances and can result in neo-colonial matrices: "the utilitarian risk to all too-quickly instrumentalize and embrace Indigenous research methodologies as quick-fix solutions to or escapes from deep-rooted and ongoing (neo)colonial thinking" often are appropriated in extractivist ways.[18]

This article follows both Nye and Ahenakew in advocating for a more holistic approach to decolonization in Religious Studies and to an extent Tuck and Yang in the sense that decolonial approaches should be ontological and radical.[19] However, since completely restructuring the modes through which we learn is often not practically possible for educators who work within pre-existing systems of higher education, I strive for a middle ground between "soft" and "hard" approaches. Thus, this article looks at dismantling

17. Nye, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," 3.
18. Cash Ahenakew, "Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being," *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9, no. 3 (2016): 323.
19. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

Religious Studies pedagogies through interdisciplinary intervention, namely, the bringing in of pedagogical practices and forms of communication from outside the discipline to destabilize how we think, talk, and conceive of it in pedagogical settings and beyond. I also follow in a line of educators that seek ("conspire") to decolonize language, teaching, and learning "given the inherent coloniality of the concepts that shape the very disciplines we seek to decolonise.[20]

I also draw to an extent on the fields of Sound Studies, Ethnomusicology, and Musicology: although I feel as though there is much work to be done here. Traditionally, studies in Ethnomusicology engaging with the topic of music and decoloniality have examined instances in which the music-making of communities has a decolonial, activist function.[21] Recently, a handful of academics and musical composers alike have grappled with questions that engage with or arguably overlap with decoloniality. For instance, Robin Attas and Margaret E. Walker have edited and contributed to a journal volume that explicitly addresses decolonial approaches in Music Studies.[22] While not explicitly labelled as such, Christopher Small's contributions are pivotal here: his inclusive term "musicking" to replace what he considered to be the overly simplistic, overly reified term "music" – to describe any form of

20. Peter Browning et al., "Conspiring to Decolonise Language Teaching andLlearning: Reflections and Reactions from a Reading Group," *London Review of Education* 20, no. 1 (2022): 42.

21. Such publications include discussions on the music of groups that describe their practice as decolonial and also cases in which the decoloniality of the groups is explored by the researcher. These publications are too numerous to itemize here. Most noteworthy see Marco Cervantes and Saldaña, Lilliana, "Hip Hop and Nueva Canción as Decolonial Pedagogies of Epistemic Justice," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 1 (2015): 84–108; Tina Ramnarine, ed., *Dance, Music, and Cultures of Decolonization in the Indian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2020).

22. Robin Attas and Margaret E. Walker, "Decolonizing Music Pedagogies," *Intersections: Canadian Review of Music* 39, no. 1 (2019): 3–20.

musical behaviours, from the playing of a Bach violin concerto, to buying a CD, to a toddler humming, arguably has impactful decolonial potential.[23] John Cage's work while not explicitly decolonial questions the very idea of "music itself" in Western art music settings. Robinson's recent work interrogates a process that he calls "hungry listening" shaped by settler-colonial – harmful, unsustainable – modes of listening. However, very few initiatives utilize the decolonial potential of music and sounding practices. My Berlin-based colleague Shanti Suki Osman has done inspiring work here largely outside academia.[24] Indeed, scholarship has yet to suggest mobilizing music and sound approaches in university Religious Studies contexts to stimulate decoloniality.

Sound- and Music-Based Interventions in Religious Studies University Courses

One challenge that needed to be overcome to implement music- and sound-based decolonial approaches in the classroom was that current musical practices and processes often require an advanced musical and/or artistic ability and tended to occur outside the classroom. As such, these were not accessible to Religious Studies students, requiring – from my perspective – the development of inclusive exercises and approaches that would be accessible to students regardless of their artistic expertise. In this, I follow my colleague Eldad Tsabary who strives in his approach to music

23. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).
24. Osman's interventions often reach a wider audience by taking place outside the traditional boundaries of academia, but some exist in the form of more conventional publications e.g. Shanti Suki Osman, "Ein Dekolonisierendes Zuhören?" in *Revisionen No.1 KontextSchule 2014 - 2021*, ed. Danji Erni (Universität der Künste Berlin, 2023): 260–279.

composition to develop practices that "orient themselves towards the development of adapting the educational environment to emerging contexts, goals, and ways of knowing/learning among neurodiverse and culturally diverse individuals, the adaptation of research-creation for co-creation, and mediation for equitable, collaborative, inclusive, co-creation, sounding practices that encourage critical self-reflection, provide informative timely feedback, and foster self-motivated growth."[25] Along these lines of communal and inclusive music-making and creative expression, rather than imposing ideas of how these interventions are decolonial, they have been presented here in such a way that allows for a polyvalent interpretation of their disruptive potential. Indeed, I invite students and the readers of this article to consider the degree to which their articulation performatively interrogates traditional university Religious Studies teaching contexts to convey different ontological approaches to understanding religious and cultural practices, with the goal of better conveying emic experiences, a re-focus on lived experience rather than abstract discourse.

The following section introduces a series of different sound-based categories of intervention that could take place in a Religious Studies higher education setting as a form of decolonial practice that have the potential to disrupt the linguistic, social, discursive, and highly visual-centric and written-text-dominated foundations of pedagogical communication in Religious Studies educational settings. What these exercises have in common is that they can open up safe spaces for improvisational exploration that can be key to applied decoloniality: "improvisational spaces are generative sites for embodied decolonial enunciations where dis-identification re-identifications emerge in "a world that is constantly invented in the

25. "Eldad Tsabary," Concordia University, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.concordia.ca/faculty/eldad-tsabary.html.

enunciation"…therefore, it involves decentering and self-organization in relation to other bodies, actions, the environment, objects, affects, and ideas."[26] These can thus be mobilized to draw attention not just to voices and identities that have been currently and historically silenced by colonialism – but how they are talked about and engaged with in the Religious Studies classroom. Thus, the exercises draw attention to content and how we process it, including raising an awareness of the bodies and sensory receptors through which we process it and include some of the following goals:

1. Put the spotlight on practice and performance in cases in which discussions of music and orality are ignored or are inserted as complementary to the study of religion in religious practices that are *already* formed by orality. This involves the insertion of decolonial practice into a colonial matrix that silences (or "quiets" the sonic dimensions of religious practice)
2. Challenge approaches in which the existence of sound is addressed in religious practices but is merely verbalized.
3. Reflect on whether – or to what extent – religious practices taught in academic settings are cleansed of their sonic properties. Reflect on instances where audiation might be useful in situations in which performing music or playing musical examples would not be inappropriate.

26. Carmen Lilliana Medina, Mia Perry, and Karen Wohlwend, *Playful Methods: Engaging the Unexpected in Literary Research* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2022).

Interventions

Category 1: Ways of Listening

Intervention A: Introduction to Audiation

Close your eyes for a moment and listen to the space you are in. From my chair, I can hear the rhythmic sound of cars passing by on the rain-drenched street outside and the occasional speech of passers-by going for a late evening stroll in the woods across the road. In the rooms below, I hear the faint sound of someone playing the organ located on the first floor. Even further away, the hint of a low drone, like that of a jet passing by in the sky, reminds me of the presence of the refrigerator in the staff's kitchen. If I concentrate more, I can hear the distant whine of leaf blowers down the street, though what they could possibly be blowing in the middle of the winter is beyond me. And right next to the physical vibrations of my voice as I speak to you and the inhalations of my breath, is the purr of a hard drive that I do not see but hear pulsing somewhere nearby.

These are the sounds of my daily life at the university. These sounds possess many commonalities shared by the peoples of the world: sounds of the body, sonic reminders of electricity, indoor plumbing, and the combustion engine. Yet they are also simultaneously totally unique to the place they occur and may include the far-off cry of the rooster, or a call to prayer, or the sound of Belz Chasidim chanting the Kedushah prayer outside on Lajoie Street in Outremont at the peak of their daily prayer service, in 2020 during the peak of the COVID-19 restrictions. Sounds can be processed as very general or very specialized, rooted in time, tradition and place, and from various vantage points.

As you listen to the above passage, you may have heard the sounds described in your mind – this is a process called audiation.

Simply put, audiation is the process of imagining sounds or music in one's mind that is not – or may have never been – present.[27] While my audiation may be different from my fellow student's, the vivid mental sonic imagery illustrates the power of sound as a medium for communication. It can relay meaning, emotion, memory, practice, and facts. Moreover, the collection of sounds described above as an immediate holistic environment can be termed a soundscape. Imagining these sonic fields can constitute a powerful tool that helps human beings relate to and make sense of their surroundings. They can be consciously designed by an individual or group of individuals or be mimetic reenactments as traditional and practiced is handed down through sonic/oral transmission and invariably changed in the process, they may be the byproduct of historical, political, and cultural circumstances. They may be musical compositions, ethnographic anthropological field recordings, the sounds of a city absorbed by an urban planner, the recordings of a rainforest taken by an ecologist, or the imaginings of someone thinking about the sounds of the past – or the future.

Following such an exercise in audiation, questions for the participants might include:

> Why do you think it is important to take the opportunity to study topics in Religious Studies through the medium of sound or using soundscapes as a starting point/point of emphasis? What decolonial potentialities are afforded by such an approach and how can this enhance our understanding/perception and our research?

27. This term was coined by Edwin Gordon and generally only applied in music pedagogy and music theory. Gordon summarizes his approach in "All About Audiation and Music Aptitudes," *Music Educators Journal* 86, no. 2 (1999): 41–44. The process has yet to be sufficiently studied, even in the fields of Music Cognition and Neuroscience more generally.

Audiation practices can stimulate a process of disengagement from the visual and the linguistic, especially the usual linguistic forms through which concepts about religious practice are articulated. The imagining of sounds "in the mind's ear" creates a subsequent internalization of the sonic descriptions that are converted into impressionistic inner sounds through cognitive processes. While much more needs to be undertaken by scholars in various fields in terms of the potential of audiation practices for dismantling colonial legacies, I introduce this concept as one of the ways this can be explored through sound. Conscious and guided audiation cultivates the processes of imagining everyday sound, a disruptive intervention in text- and visual-centric modes of teaching in higher education settings; such practices have the potential to stimulate thinking that draws attention to religious and cultural practices characterized by orality traditionally ignored and suppressed by colonial agendas and legacies – or where orally transmitted traditions and ways of listening are ignored, even in cultures that now receive scholarly attention. Cultivating processes that pay attention to what is not typically heard promotes an engaged, embodied understanding of racialized, settler colonial modes of listening and their alternatives.

Intervention B: The Anecdote as the Main Focus

What teacher has not used an anecdote to "draw students in"? However, anecdotes are not usually considered the "meat" of the class, but rather, to use a music analogy, mere embellishment to lead into and compliment the "hard" scholarship and ensuing information. The following is a written transcript of an anecdote as the main part of a class to illustrate what I call music's disruptive productivity in causing its listeners to reimagine situations in new ways, but also as a medium that opens grassroots access points to intercultural communication and dialogue. Here both the anecdotal medium, oral

delivery and the content of the anecdote draw attention to emic theological experiences from the point of view of migration and histories of genocide and how the experiences of certain minorities are unacknowledged in the public sphere experiences of marginalization and migration. Interrogating the imposed frames of decoloniality mentioned in the introduction, the interpolation of the religious Jewish boy (son, person) draws attention to how even minority narratives that are largely acknowledged in the public sphere can be harnessed for "the greater good" in ways that ignore the lived experiences and diversity of the minorities themselves.

Anecdote transcript:

It is a sunny late afternoon in Montreal, Quebec, near Plamondon metro. Plamondon constitutes an ending of sorts and also a beginning. Plamondon constitutes the end of the orange metro line to the West. The metro is in and of itself a matrix that colonizes the city. It is a stone's throw from my beginning, the non-descript apartment in the "ghetto" that had loads of cockroaches and no central heating, that space that still has not undergone gentrification like the areas around it. The neighbourhood of Kosher Quality where Yiddish was heard in the streets along with Tagalog, Jamaican Patois, Vietnamese, Polish, multiple dialects people and faces that made up this neighbourhood. It is a space in which preachers of different faiths and religious backgrounds sound their positionalities in the urban space, sometimes simultaneously in ebbs and flows of enthusiastic, earnest vocalizations.

In my opinion, the metro desperately needs to extend to the West to service the many diverse people who need it. A mother and her son are passing through Van Horne Park. They wear religious symbols that they would be banned by the Quebec government should they wish to become civil servants: both wear modest clothing and the mother covers her hair while the son sports a knitted kippah and long

earlocks (peyos). As they pass by the buildings that house a meeting area and picnic tables, there is the usual flurry of activity.

A sudden eruption of sound diverts our attention to the flat area facing West. The sound is loud, vibrant, rhythmic, and compelling. A voice in a high tessitura floats over synthesizer accompaniment that is propelled forward by light rhythms on a snare drum. I find out later that the piece is "Ven Purave" sung by Nirosha Virajini.[28]

The music draws us in. Our feet are propelled forward by its dispersion, its swelling allure. Two men are setting up a large sound system while two others try to raise a flag on one of the poles. The busy professional inside me wants to hurry on to the bus stop but the anthropologist stops and observes. The men are friendly, and they see my son and I looking. They are also wearing symbols that they might be asked to remove in certain contexts. They talk to us, the music now turned down forms a backdrop, but it is still loud, so we have to annunciate:

"We are remembering the Tamil genocide in Sri Lanka. The people who died. If we don't remember them, no one will."

"What happened?" I ask, ignorant of what they are speaking of except for faint recollections of news reports.

He looks pointedly at my son's earlocks and skullcap.

---

28. Nirosha Virajini, "Sri Lanka Tamil Song 'ven purave' - On Rupawahini Sri Lankan Life," YouTube, October 26, 2009, https://youtu.be/VykLQYyLrnw?si=eeFTqYMYmp-SQBtl.

"You understand but this place where we live, it might tell your story about genocide, but it does not tell our story. People don't recognize what happened."

"People don't tell our story either," my son tells them gravely, "at least, they do a lot, but not properly, and not for us."

He speaks very precisely shaping the words carefully. He examines the faces of both men as he speaks, and I can almost hear him saying, "try to be aware of social cues." He wants to engage, and he is happy. He is happy even when he is sad. I know because I am his mother and I feel this even though I do not see it.

The man nods understandingly, although I am not precisely sure whether he understands what the young man has said or whether he has extrapolated something from it that is meaningful for him.

In this brief exchange, stimulated by the musical broadcast, personal and collective experiences with genocide and its representation had been broached. The exchange may have taken a couple of minutes, but already as strangers, we (the characters) had delved into topics – or at least started to – that can be at the forefront of many people's minds – but that might not ever be mentioned aloud, particularly not to strangers from other minority groups. Afterwards, I went to the library and looked up all that I could on Sri Lankan history, Tamil communities, and current events. But what was it that had led to the exchange? Thinking back on it, I realized that it was the musicking. It had captured our attention and drawn us in. There was something that it was saying, something that it "performed" that transcended language, that triggered the affordance for contact and public engagement. Music can do that even when we do not understand the words or precisely what is being said: "[t]ogether they

[song and poetry] dislodge the text, and disrupt its rhythm, at once setting it in motion and arresting it."[29]

It was the unusual nature of the musical occurrence in part that did this. After all, when the latest pop sensation is placed in the supermarket, this would likely not have had the same effect.[30] This was not music designed to stimulate intercultural contact. This was music saying many things to many people with its loudness in this public space in this urban space at the beginning and the end, of Montreal diversity, but one of the things that it said that I heard loud and clear was "Listen. We are here, we are alive, and we want to tell you something." Here, the unusualness of that music in the public space in our usual trajectory from school/work to home had formed an intervention that had caused us to stop and listen.

Poetry can do that too. And stories. That is not to say that those media – including music and sound – do not possess their own baggage and hierarchies that can be potentially oppressive and stifling, but rather that they can be mobilized to create a change in texture. Using these creative inputs to disrupt the rhythm and the flow of the text can have decolonial affordances in both research and teaching situations. Indeed, even in places and contexts that are equity-oriented and aim to destabilize real and imagined discriminatory approaches. Disrupting the usual flow of conversation with different media can create what Badiou calls "the Event" referring to the cornerstone of revolution, a rupture that succeeds in

29. Phillip Bohlman, "*Das Lied is Aus*: The Final Resting place along Music's Endless Journey," in *Music and Displacement*, ed. Erik Levi and Florian Scheding (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010).

30. Examples like these abound, but I have used this particularly example partly because conversations about minorities almost always take the approach of "minorities versus the state." In fact, in my fieldwork, I have observed that in scholarship and in practice, there is a pervasive reluctance to look at conversations between minorities in multicultural Western societies or to create spaces where they can happen.

making visible that which was previously invisible.[31] Here, it can be applied as epiphanic moments triggered by sound that cause the listener or practitioner to reassess a situation or context as a result of the sonic occurrence or mobilization.

This anecdote tells a story of that happening, but it also aims to create a sonic event as well. The telling itself is sonic and starts off as third-person and detached and deliberately reverts to first-person and a personal story with specific identities and relationships in terms of kinship, but also in relation to the city space in which it takes place and the negotiations of sound and identity within it. The telling of the anecdote deliberately destabilizes boundaries between the objective and the personal; between story and history. The anecdote told in such a way has multiple destabilizing functions rooted in the sonic that cannot be fully discussed here, but some of which have been introduced.

Following the performance of the anecdote, I might invite students to think about events in their own lives in which a musical or sound-based intervention caused them to rethink a situation or perception. The points below enumerate areas of practical/potential reflections for students that correspond to aspects buried, unacknowledged etc. by colonial-oriented apparatuses, such as modernity, capitalism, settler-colonialism, and even reductionist applications of the decolonial. In pedagogical settings, such anecdote performances allow for the problematization of concepts and practices – and the mediums themselves through which information is communicated to students. Students might be asked to reflect on:

1. stories and representations that are heard in public spaces and stories that are not.

31. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2006).

2. the way in which great hardships and tragedies inflicted on groups of people are represented in the public sphere, e.g. as a moral guide for "everyone" while some experiences do not enter the public sphere. Instead of seeing minorities as "being in competition" reflect on how these are both problematic.
3. the "state versus minorities" narrative that attempts to disable minorities from speaking to each other.
4. the idea of the professor as a detached conveyor of information in academic spaces – here as a mother, a religious practitioner, a musical practitioner.[32]
5. the potential of music and sound as springboard for the creation of spaces in which verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication becomes possible.
6. grassroots representations of minority religious or cultural groups. This example can be understood through what Lekakis refers to as "mnemeiotic," referring to "bottom-up memorialisation,"[33] which in and of itself forms a critique of which stories might be privileged in the narratives in Quebecois and Canadian public space in this instance – even while "bottom up" does not imply that there are no power structures and internal politics within minority communities.

32. This category is obviously dependent on the positionalities of the professor and students, but certainly the incorporation of the personal and the acknowledgement of being enmeshed in the topics that we discuss are what is of importance here.
33. Stelios Lekakis, "The Archaeology of In-Between Places: Find under the Ilssos River Bridge in Athens," *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 5, no. 2 (2019): 151–184.

Intervention C: The Parable

A parable can be a relevant way to open a pedagogical workshop using sonic forms to stimulate decolonial modes of thinking (or un-thinking) and being. Rooted in oral tradition and forming the basis for many traditional religious teachings, parables tend to act as guides for moral behaviours. They are porous and flexible forms that can be adapted for different situations.

Finding meaningful parables from one or more religious and cultural contexts with which one is aligned or identifies can encourage us to seek the decolonial in ourselves. If we are all a product of our environments, but our identities seldom align with reductionist and profiling types of identity designations. If we do not have stories to tell in our classrooms or oral histories then we can go and find them. My own background is rooted in various forms of orality – including the telling of stories and parables. Therefore, I am comfortable drawing on the stories of traditions with which I consider myself connected to in some way. Interventions rooted in orality can only be enacted based on the comfort level and positionality of the person or people from whom they emanate. Therefore, decolonial approaches cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution in which decolonial methods can be posited and then discussed or applied in the same way by all practitioners.

The point of this parable in decolonial terms is that it presents ontologies of knowledge – oral storytelling – as a central mode of communication, one that has polyvalent meanings that can exist simultaneously. The above is one possible interpretation of many – but its introduction is intended to encourage students to think about the trappings versus the goal. This could translate in various ways for different students, but ultimately it is an incitement to think critically – the form of oral storytelling in the classroom – particularly in the case in which – as with the one below - the teller's own enmeshment

in traditional storytelling practices rooted in her experiences as a religious minority and person of colour have been traditionally silenced in the Religious Studies classroom in favour of hard facts, secondary sources and attempts at "impartial objectivity."

I might start a workshop or a class on decolonization and Religious Studies with a parable – that has been transcribed here in written form. Before I recite the parable, I might ask students to not only reflect on the content of what has been communicated, and relate it to the theme of the class, but also to think about aspects such as the common physical gestures that accompany its delivery, as well as the linguistic register used and the tone and contours of my voice as I recite it. I might ask them to pay attention to the soundscape of the room, to any audiation (hearing sounds within the mind) that occurs as I recount the parable.

The following parable was told by Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov. He was a Jewish mystic and healer who is regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism. Baal Shem Tov means "Master of the Good Name," a term for a magician who wields the secret name of God. He was born in 1698 in Okopy, Ukraine. Some of you may be extremely familiar with his work and some of you may have never heard of him until now. The parable goes more or less like this – but as I am reciting it from memory, I may leave bits out or add my own embellishments:[34]

> *A wealthy king, in some time or place, issued a decree that every person in the kingdom should come and see him and he would grant one wish to each. The news passed quickly across the kingdom until it reached a village, far on the*

34. This version is influenced and inspired by a contemporary translation and retelling by the author Tzvi Freeman and also by an oral retelling by our Rabbi Benyamin Wolff of Hanover, Germany, who passed away in 2020. May his memory be a blessing.

outreaches of the land. It reached the ears of a homeless man who had no money and only the clothes that he was wearing as his earthly possessions. Upon hearing the decree, he expressed incredulity that the king would want to see the likes of him.

Assured that the king wanted to see everyone in the kingdom, the beggar left with the rest of the villagers to visit the king's palace. The group gradually joined a larger group of merchants, farmers, bards, seamstresses and others, flowing in to see their king.

The people reached the capital city and were stunned by what they saw. The merchants of the city were selling their wares. Never had many of the people seen such an array of clothes, crafts, and goods. They were stunned and stopped to examine the stunning array of items. Many of the people became so distracted that they never reached the palace area. The homeless man was not enticed by the objects. In any case, he did not have any money to buy anything. He moved on towards the palace.

After passing through the palace gates, the group halted and gazed at what was before them. On the ornate, carefully laid-out lawns, minstrels played beautiful music, and birds with colourful plumage flew about amongst beautiful flowers and elegant trees, many with succulent fruits. The royal lake sparkled in the sun and was riddled with small boats. All was so pleasing to the senses that many of the people stopped, utterly captivated. The pauper, on the other hand, was focused and asked only where the king was. But even the royal courtyard had been no preparation for the magnificence those few who entered now encountered – the towering columns of marble bordered with silver and gold, the stupendous and intricate tapestries of many colours that

hung from a ceiling that seemed to be in the heavens, and the imposing guards in shining armour that stood at each entranceway.

The group was escorted from one room to another each more stupendous and captivating than the last. As the group progressed through the palace, more and more people were left behind, mesmerized by the splendour of what they saw. The stunning sights held no interest for the beggar who insisted on asking anyone who saw whether the king would really see him. Eventually, he found himself among the few to come before the king.

One person asked the king for a carpet. His request was granted. Another person asked for a supply of royal sweets. Her request was granted. Another asked for one of the birds of paradise that flew outside on the lawn. That too was granted. Finally, the beggar stood before the king. However, he found that he was unable to say a word. The king asked the beggar to make his wish known. The beggar looked around to make sure that the king was really speaking to him. He was in awe. He stood before the king and the king spoke to him and asked him what his wish was. The beggar stammered but finally gained the courage to speak.

"Dear king," the pauper said "I have no request. I only came to see you. And now have the honour of meeting you."

The king only repeated that he should state his wish. The pauper paused again, and uttered, "I am not sure what my heart desires or if that is something we can even know. But my wish is that I see you again. I wish to see you three times a day, if that is possible. And then, if I have any thoughts or hardships, I can pour them out before you."

"That is all that you wish for?" asked the king.

"There is nothing else but that," replied the pauper.

So, the king had it declared to all the ministers and officers of his palace that this pauper must be allowed to see him three times daily and whenever else he so desires and that he be allowed to take all he wants from the king's treasury. For there was no person to whom the king felt greater kindred of spirit than to this pauper of paupers, the man who desired nothing else but the king alone.

Following the telling of the parable, it is important here to speak about some of the contexts of the parable and its subsequent retellings, as well as its application in traditional Jewish religious ritual beliefs and practice. Otherwise, use of the tale can become overly reductionist or extractivist or simply become broadly relevant through its universalisation, which arguably undermines its decolonial affordances. Traditionally, in Jewish religious ritual contexts, this parable refers to a human being's spiritual connection with the divine through prayer. It was/is used to communicate the following message inciting moral and spiritual correct behaviours and goals:

> As the people who journeyed to the palace were distracted by the attractions along the way, so we all have our distractions in life. For some, it's the marketplace in the big city. For others, it's the garden of the heart. For others, the palace of the mind. But if we could strip ourselves of all distractions, we would bare a simple and singular desire—here to be one with our beloved King, Master of

> Heaven and Earth. And if we can do so, heaven and earth, as well, are ours.[35]

The parable is formed by layers of Jewish history and commentary, including connections with the Talmudic-era midrash on the Book of Lamentations written in 500 CE called Eichah Rabbah. The historical networks forming the parable, including its current manifestations as part of the written forms of wisdom communicated by sages such as the Baal Shem Tov, told and retold over time and today told by the leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement and others in current times.[36] The parable has been chosen to form part of this pedagogical intervention owing to its applicability to the current discussion, not just in the content, but also in the telling of it. Commentaries on the parable consider that "choosing the king" is not merely a slogan but is an act, a striving that must permeate every aspect of the individual's being.[37]

The use of the parable in the Religious Studies university classroom presents a reformulation of ontologies of knowledge – oral storytelling – as a central mode of communication, one that has polyvalent meanings that can exist simultaneously. One of my own interpretations is that if we remain too distracted by the trappings – possibly because we are under the pressures of publication or student deadlines – then we miss the ultimate core or the goal of what we are trying to accomplish. When we talk about or imagine decolonization,

---

35. Keter Shem Tov, 97, as interpreted in Maamar Bayom Ashtei Asar 11 Nissan, 5731 (1971).
36. This version is based on spoken teachings about the words of the Baal Shem Tov that were published in 1794 and later explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in the Jewish year 5731. The Rebbe's commentary and retelling was later transcribed and published with edits from the Rebbe in the year 5751.
37. Some interpretations consider this striving as futile given the mortality of human beings and the transcendent nature of the divine; as such, "shepherds," namely, religious leaders are required to support people in this process.

are we thinking about it or are we thinking about the trappings of decolonization?

Tuck and Yang's seminal article "Decolonization is not a metaphor" can be understood as a response to the proliferation of symbolic and discursive applications of decolonization. The authors called out what they perceived to be a proliferative and performative, purely symbolic use of the term "decolonizing."[38] One of their main critiques was that "decolonization" had become a catch-all phrase mobilized to align oneself with the positive and progressive attributes of the term without realizing it in practice or thinking about how it might be conceived "on the ground." Most particularly, they objected to what they perceived to be the erasure of the concern that is at the heart of decolonization, namely, Indigenous land, water, subsistence, and autonomy. While these approaches do not align with Tuck and Yang's views on what constitutes decolonization, they do align with the need they identify to pay closer attention to how they defined decolonization and how the results of their work would manifest themselves in terms of supporting colonized populations. In a way, this is perhaps a less tangibly oriented echo of Tuck and Yang's seminal article. If the trappings remain an object of fascination rather than the on-the-ground objective, the trappings eventually becomes a substitute for the goal, sometimes without one ever noticing.

This deviates from Tuck and Yang's approach in that it does not attempt to impose a more correct definition or application of the decolonial but encourages a focus on lived experience "beyond the trappings" for however one might understand decolonization. In retrospect, I perceive resonances with Anthony B. Pinn's work engaging with Religion, Hip-Hop and the Black experience, specifically his concept of "nitty gritty hermeneutics," an approach toward theological and religious thought that mobilizes Hip-Hop to

38. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor."

"push past the nonsense" and engage with the realities and hardships of lived experience.[39]

Students tended to see this intervention as particularly relevant in situations in which slogans – and corresponding "merch" – are often marketed as decolonial. Following this game, one student remarked on stickers and T-shirts in a local coffee shop window that they had observed emblazoned with the attractive words "Decolonize Now!" in bold colours. Indeed, many such posters, trinkets, bracelets, and related paraphernalia with attractive symbols with words defined as decolonial fill Amazon marketplace. Lekakis attributes phenomena like these to the centrality and impact of consumer practices on contemporary culture and the "pervasive influence of advertising on all forms of communication" including the role that industries and commerce play in negotiations of social or environmental justice.[40]

Category 2: Sound Games

Human beings are intrinsically playful creatures, and, some have argued, need to play to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Moreover, play can be an incredibly useful pedagogical tool. In his seminal work, *Homo Ludens*, Dutch historian Huizinga describes play as a significant activity that seems to be spatially and temporally separate from other aspects of life.[41] The French sociologist Callois built on this work, emphasizing the important role that play and playing takes

39. Anthony B. Pinn, *Humanism: Essays in Race, Religion, and Cultural Production* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).
40. Eleftheria Lekakis, *Consumer Activism: Promotional Culture and Resistance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2022).
41. Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, [1938] 1955).

across human culture.[42] Current scholarship emphasizes the importance of play from health-related, pedagogical, philosophical, and theoretical perspectives[43] and other approaches have explored decolonizing play.[44] Yet, games and play, with a few delimited exceptions, are considered uniquely the domain of children and/or relegated to certain places, certainly not the hallowed halls of institutions of higher education. In fact, play and games in particular have tremendous decolonial pedagogical potentials that have yet to be explored by the academic community. The following demonstrates some examples of sound games that took place in a Religious Studies higher education setting as a form of decolonial practice.

Intervention A: Warm-up Sound Game – Decolonial Non-Language and Community-Building

Restrictions:
You cannot communicate using an organized language, only sounds.

Phase one:
Every person in the group must make the same sound twenty times without ever speaking at the same time. Your voices cannot overlap.

Phase Two:
The group should do the same exercise, using an utterance with more

42. Roger Callois, *Man, Play, and Games* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961). It should be noted that both the works of Huizinga and Callois can be read as rather colonialist and orientalist according to today's standards.
43. Emily Ryall, Wendy Russell, and Malcolm MacLean, eds., *The Philosophy of Play* (London: Routledge, 2013).
44. Aaron Trammell, "Decolonizing Play," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 39, no. 3 (2022): 239–246.

syllables. This time participants should shut their eyes for the duration of the activity.

Phase three:
Now, with the same restrictions as level two, move to different corners of the room and attempt the exercise.

Reflection questions for the students might include: What can we learn from the exercise? What are some of your thoughts on community teamwork and engagement in connection with the exercise? What about language versus non-language?

This introductory sound game aims to get participants to use only sound to communicate. It aims to get participants to explore non-verbal communication – but given the purpose of the assignment, the "sounding" is not based on "exploratory competencies," a free form of vocalization inherent to very young children. Rather, this "sounding" needs to be constituted in a streamlined and coordinated effort for the purposes of completing the assignment. As such, this constitutes a sort of sound-based, non-linguistic form of community-building that can destabilize the dominance of text-based, linguistic interactions, but also disrupt hierarchies in the demographic composition of the classroom itself. But most importantly, perhaps, it gets participants to actively listen to other students, not with the goal of "consuming" or dissecting the discursive "meaning" of words, but to interpret anew and react accordingly in line with the goal of the exercise.

Of particular importance is the potentiality of musicking practices to stimulate community and inclusion. In the words of Ian Cross:

> Music exploits the human capacity for entrainment, increasing the likelihood that participants will experience a

> sense of 'shared intentionality'. It presents the characteristics of an 'honest signal' while under-specifying goals in ways that permit individuals to interact even while holding to personal interpretations of goals and meanings that may actually be in conflict. Music allows participants to explore the prospective consequences of their actions and attitudes towards others within a temporal framework that promotes the alignment of participants' sense of goals.[45]

Specifically, this draws on the properties that Cross has so aptly summarized – and extended them to sound and orality as well as "music" – to destabilize teaching approaches. Mobilized in these contexts, music and sound have the potential to disrupt (neo)colonial matrices – in the words of Phillip Bohlman, music can disrupt even when we do not understand the words or precisely what is being said: "[t]ogether they [song and poetry] dislodge the text, and disrupt its rhythm, at once setting it in motion and arresting it."[46] The central question underlying this research is: what are the decolonial affordances of this "rupture" from traditional academic modes of discussing religion that draw attention to orality and narrativity in a sound-based, embodied fashion bring to our experience and how does this further the transmission of knowledge?

Intervention B: Sounding Concepts in Religious Studies

The following approach uses sound games to engage with key concepts in Religious Studies. For instance, the following sound game attempts to explore the term "Diaspora" through doing music – but such games can be developed for a plethora of terms or to

45. Ian Cross, "The Evolutionary Nature of Musical Meaning," *Musicae Scientiae, Special Issue* 13, no. 2 (2009) 179.
46. Bohlman, "*Das Lied is Aus,"* 16.

engage with experiences that do not have linguistic terms attached to them or for fix linguistic terms are arguably unsuitable – the decoloniality inherent in these games is their revelation of the buried or the un-heard through sounding practices. This particular example explores "diaspora" in sonic terms, namely, what it really "means" and how sounding games can draw attention to how it is experienced – the emotional, embodied and listening responses, and information can be drawn out to an extent in these practices. These are not meant to replicate the experience of "diaspora" but to open up collective, sound-based ways of thinking about it – and other critical terms in Religious Studies – differently on a foundational level. This exercise can open up embodied knowledge about, for instance, the effect on dispersion and forced migration on liturgical, musical, and other practices; on religious practices and their change over time, the changeability of orally transmitted music(s) and information.

1. Teach students a simple tune from your tradition(s), with or without words.[47] The melody could be sung, drummed, or performed in some other way. Play it multiple times.
2. Divide students into separate groups – some can hear each other as they are close or in the same room, and some cannot, as they are in another room or building. The student should now sing their songs in the new spaces for around 30 minutes. The singing should be interspersed with conversation and making the space around them more comfortable for the group.[48]

47. Another option if there is time is to collectively come up with a simple melody.
48. If the instructor has the use of a larger space such as a theatre or a gym, then the groups can be divided and sent to far off corners of the space to complete the exercise.

3. Some groups should be assigned a small room and others in a huge space where other noises and distractions might be going on. The diversity of the space and the individuals forming the group is flexible – but the experiences should be significantly different.
4. After around 30 minutes, the students should return to the main room and sing/perform the melody together as a large group; ask students to reflect on their different experiences.

Following the game one might ask students what different experiences are being evoked through this musical exploration and how they feel this activity is engaging with the concept "diaspora." The results of this game cannot be unpacked in this article, but here decoloniality is evoked through a music-based activity that draws and formulates new ways of engaging with subaltern experiences in the classroom. This is not a music-based reenactment of a diasporic condition – but rather reorients its conceptualization from the visual and conceptual to the sonic and the lived. This exercise has enormous creative and decolonial potentials that have yet to be explored/fully documented.

Intervention C: Expressing Critical Terms in Religious Studies through a Sound Play

Instructions:

1. Get into groups of two or three.
2. Select a topic from the hat (do not reveal your topic/concept outside your group)
3. Create sounds that best communicate your topic.
4. Write, draw, or make a script using materials available in the room to create a sound-based process that represents your topic. The script can use visual cues and language as you wish

– but do not use technology and the main aspect should be sound-based.

Criteria:
The script needs to be designed so that other people can follow it.
It must use the voice in some way and be for two voices that must not always be sounding in unison.

1. Hand your script to the group to your left. Everyone should have a script now. If they do not, I will give them one.
2. Rehearse your "Sound Play" – come to a consensus on what concepts motivated the production (do not share these with the rest of us).
3. Perform the sound play to the rest of the group. Those involved in the steps should discuss the concept being communicated.
4. The two groups should now join the conversation.

This game involves the formation of "interventions" of the status quo constructed by newly composed or applied religious musicking in different contexts as the construction of something akin to what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet calls "metacultural production"[49] but that I will instead call "trans-religious creation", which refers to practices that have meaning within religious ritual contexts but that have been deployed or are listening to (or attention is drawn to them) in such a way to communicate the nuance and meaning of religious ritual practice to people outside the community. This approach draws attention to emic modes of being in religious groups. Moreover, the game disrupts what Pasley and Jaramilla-Aristizabal term "the

49. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Cultural Heritage as Metacultural Production," *Museum International*, 56, no. 1–2 (2004): 52–65.

colonialities of chrononormativity"[50] in the sense of what is relegated to childhood but in this case, I also include the immediacy of the linguistic utterance of a term and immediate seeming comprehension within a few seconds as a form of coloniality that requires deconstruction through the different temporal and conceptual axes afforded through their articulation as music and sounding practices. An apt example of this is the term "ritual" articulated through consistent articulation of the same sounds in the same postures. Overall, this engagement has a dismantling effect and starts to get participants to think away from linguistic restrictions and baggage, destabilizing and focusing on lived experience rather than the labels and categories discursively applied to it.

Some reflections for participants following sound games might include thinking about how we can divest ourselves of the colonial legacies of language or how we can avoid (or be aware of) replicating hegemonic practices through the standardization of language around decolonization. Students might reflect on why sound games and telling stories are often considered "soft" forms of education reserved for children of primary school age or younger. What are we doing by creating sound scripts to express religious concepts? What, if anything, does that dismantle? Reflecting on experiences in the classroom with this exercise, it was found that because of the polyvalence of musical and sonic expression and interpretation, students almost always fall back on sonic stereotypes to convey the concepts. This is particularly relevant because it raises awareness about how sounds are interpreted differently by different people with different positionalities and life experiences, and therefore, aims to increase awareness of cultural sensitivity and intercultural com-

50. And Pasley and Alejandra Jamillo-Aristizabal "Colonialities of Chronormativity: Exploring the im/possibilities of un/becoming childhoods" in *Policy Futures in Education*, 22, no. 3 (2023): 308–453.

munication. The formulation of key concepts in a "sound play" attempts to make participants conscious of the nuances of the terms themselves and the denotations and connotations associated with them.

Concluding Reflections

This article has introduced some music-, sound-, and orality-interventions from the author's own repertoires of teaching in Religious Studies contexts aimed at exploring the decolonial affordances of music- and sound-based pedagogical interventions. This is not to state that music-making, sound, orality, and music-oriented academic areas are free from the legacy of coloniality. As Stanton notes:

> Musicology is not an autonomous and equitable structure, which made missteps in its examination of different ways of making music. Rather, it exists within a larger Eurocentric modernity, a modernity that authors such as Anibal Quijano have demonstrated to be hopelessly entangled with economic, political, and epistemic sources of power established through European colonial violence[51]

Indeed, it should also be noted that music and sound are not bereft of their own baggage and hierarchies, including those rooted in colonialism. Recent scholarship in Ethnomusicology has looked at the decolonial potentialities of the discipline.[52] Moreover, some musics are, from a community perspective, private and in some cases

51. Burke Stanton, "Musicking in the Borders toward Decolonizing Methodologies," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 26, no. 1 (2018): 6.
52. For example. see Luis Chávez, and Russell Sklechy, "Decolonization for Ethnomusicology and Music Studies in Higher Education," *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education* 18, no. 3 (2018): 115–143.

should not be recorded or described using musical language. Indeed, the term "music" is at times an unsatisfactory term to reference sounds of ritual performance for one thing because it "immediately suggests the centrality of non-referential sound."[53] However, when used as a sound-based intervention applied anew, transplanted to another discipline sound-based interventions are a ripe field for this sort of exploration: "[m]usicking's profound connections to embodied experience make it a locality ripe for decolonial activity."[54] In other words, approaches can be tailored and widely applicable in different Religious Studies contexts. Moreover, more broadly, the introduction or transplantation of rubrics from one discipline to another – possibly even those formed in similar underlying colonial contexts – can arguably be mobilized to have decolonial potential. Key in these discussions is to constantly question what we mean and to account for a polyvalence of understanding of concepts. Music- and sound-practices can form powerful interventions in starting these conversations both inside and outside of pedagogical settings and it is my hope that in future publications, I will be able to thoroughly reflect on and analyse the results more broadly of the implementation of these interventions in Religious Studies in Higher Education contexts.

53. Michael Frishkopf, "Against Ethnomusicology: Language Performance and the Social Impact of Ritual Performance in Islam," *Performing Islam* 2, no. 1 (2018): 6.
54. Stanton, "Musicking in the Borders," 4.

Bibliography

Ahenakew, Cash. "Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing Onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being." *International Review of Qualitative Research* 9, no. 3 (2016): 323–340.

Andreotti, Vanessa, et al. "Mapping Interpretations of Decolonization in the Context of Higher Education." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 1 (2015): 20–40.

Asad, Talal. *Secular Translations, Nation State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Attas, Robin, and Margaret E. Walker. "Decolonizing Music Pedagogies." *Intersections: Canadian Review of Music* 39, no. 1 (2019): 3–20.

Avishai, Orit. "'Doing Religion' in a Secular World: Woman in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency." *Gender and Society* 22, no. 4 (2008): 409–433.

Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham. New York: Continuum, 2006.

Bhambra, Gurminder K., Dalia Gebrial, andKerem Nişancıoğlu. *Decolonizing the University*. The Hague: Pluto Press, 2018.

Bohlman, Phillip. "*Das Lied ist aus*: The Final Resting Place along Music's Endless Journey." In *Music and Displacement,*

edited by Erik Levi and Florian Sheding, 15–30. Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Browning, Peter, et al. "Conspiring to Decolonise Language Teaching and Learning: Reflections and Reactions from a Reading Group." *London Review of Education* 20, no. 1 (2022). https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.20.1.42.

Callois, Roger. *Man, Play, and Games*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.

Cervantes, Marco, and Lilliana Saldaña. "Hip Hop and nueva canción as Decolonial Pedagogies of Epistemic Justice." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 1 (2015): 84–108.

Chávez, Luis, and Russel P. Sklechy. "Decolonization for Ethnomusicology and Music Studies in Higher Education." *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education* 18, no. 3 (2019): 115–143.

Chidchester, David. *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Cross, Ian. The evolutionary nature of musical meaning. *Musicae Scientiae, Special Issue* 13, no. 2 (2009): 179–200. https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864909013002091.

Crowdus, Miranda. "Blackness, Mizrahi Identity and Ethnic Shifting in Contemporary Israeli Popular Music." In *Selected Racial Boundaries: The Social Life of Blackness in Israel*,

edited by Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian, 113–129. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.

Francis, Hilary, et al. "Decolonizing Oral History: A Conversation." *The Journal of the Historical Association* 106, no. 370 (2021): 167–281. Tayob, Abdulkader. "Decolonizing the Study of Religions: Muslim Intellectuals and the Enlightenment Project of Religious Studies." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, no. 2 (2018): 7–35.

Frishkopf, Michael. "Against Ethnomusicology: Language Performance and the Social Impact of Ritual Performance in Islam." *Performing Islam* 2, no. 1 (2013): 11–43.

Gearon, Liam, et al. "Decolonising the Religious Education Curriculum: International Perspectives in Theory, Research and Practice." *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 1 (2021): 1–8.

Gilman, Sander L. *Multiculturalism and the Jews*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.

Gordon, Edwin. "All About Audiation and Music Aptitudes." *Music Educators Journal* 8, no. 2 (1999): 41–44.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

Hayes, Aneta, Kathy Luckett, and Greg Misiaszek. "Possibilities and Complexities of Decolonising Higher Education: Critical Perspectives on Praxis." *Teaching in Higher Education* 26, no. 7–8 (2021): 887–901.

Heleta, Savo. "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa." *Transformation in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.

Huizinga, Johann. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, [1938] 1955.

Hwami, Munyaradzi. "Frantz Fanon and the Problematic of Decolonisation: Perspectives on Zimbabwe." *African Identities* 14, no. 1 (2016): 19–37.

Lekakis, Eleftheria. *Consumer Activism: Promotional Culture and Resistance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2022.

Lekakis, Stelios. "The Archaeology of In-Between Places: Find under the Ilssos River Bridge in Athens." *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 5, no. 2 (2019): 151–184.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Religious Studies and/in the Decolonial Turn." *Contending Modernities*, March 3, 2020. https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/religious studiesdecolonialturn/.

Mbembe, Achille. *Out of the Dark Night*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Medina, Carmen Lilliana, Mia Perry, and Karen Wohlwend. *Playful Methods: Engaging the Unexpected in Literary Research*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2022.

Melamed, Abraham. *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture. A History of the Other*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine Walsh. *On Decoloniality*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018.

Monson, Ingrid. *Sayin' Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Moore, Stephen D. *Decolonial Theory and Biblical Unreading*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.

Nye, Malory. "Decolonizing the Study of Religion." *Open Library of Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–45. https://doi.org/10.16995/ olh.421.

Osman, Shanti Suki. "Ein Dekolonisierendes Zuhören?" In *Revisionen No.1 KontextSchule 2014 - 2021*, edited by Danji Erni, 260–279. Berlin: Universität der Künste Berlin, 2023.

Pasley, And, and Alejandra Jaramillo-Aristizabal. "Colonialities of Chronormativity: Exploring the Im/possibilities of Un/becoming Childhoods."*Policy Futures in Education* 22 no. 3 (2023): 308–453.

Pinn, Anthony B. *Humanism: Essays in Race, Religion, and Cultural Production*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Pui-Ian, Kwok. *Post-Colonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2021.

———. "2011 Presidential Address: Empire and the Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (2012): 285–303.

Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. .2–3 (2007): 168–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353.

Ramnarine, Tina, ed. *Dance, Music, and Cultures of Decolonization in the Indian Diaspora*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Ryall, Emily, Wendy Russell, and Malcolm MacLean, eds. *The Philosophy of Play*. London: Routledge, 2014.

Shahjahan, Riyad A., Annabelle L. Estera, and Kristen T. Edwards. "'Decolonizing' Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review Across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts." *Review of Educational Research* 92, no. 1 (2022): 73–113.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

Stanton, Burke. "Musicking in the Borders toward Decolonizing Methodologies." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 26, no. 1 (2018): 4–23.

Tuck, Eve, and Tang K. Wayne. “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

Yountae, An. *Beyond Man: Race Coloniality and Philosophy of Religion*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2021.