Nineteenth-Century Music Review (2025), **22**, 412–440
doi:10.1017/S1479409825000072

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sonic Techniques of Colonization and Resistance: Libya 1911–12

Peter McMurray

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom
Email: pm638@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

In 1911, Italy invaded the region now known as Libya, then part of the Ottoman Empire, as part of a larger Italian colonizing foray into northern Africa. Many scholars have pointed out in recent years how intense the sonic environments of war can be, and the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–12 was no exception. Not only was the war itself full of sound and sonic media such as gramophones and telephones, the narration of the war, including most (in)famously that of Futurist author F.T. Marinetti, focused from the outset on the sonic intensities of the conflict. In addition, the war became a site for the cultivation of sonic media: Guglielmo Marconi not only deployed his radio technology for the Italian cause, he personally travelled to Libya to test and refine radio in the unique geographies there. In this article, I consider these Italian-centric narratives of war alongside accounts of the sonic experiences of the Arab and Ottoman Turkish forces in their resistance to the Italian occupation, considering the sonic techniques deployed both for and against Italian colonialism. I focus on three particular sonic techniques of that resistance: first, 'counterlistening', or ways of listening that subvert empire's auralities; second, ululation (mostly by women) on the battlefield and beyond; and third, jihad, especially its sonic articulations as a set of declarations, battle cries, religious chanting, and even poetry. For both sides, sound played a much greater role in the war than just being a by-product of activity; these sonic techniques both shaped the war and were shaped by it, producing new forms of sonic experience that played important roles in constituting the colonial and anticolonial in Libya.

'The word Africa has certainly an ominous sound in Italian ears'.

Francis McCullagh, *Italy's War for a Desert* (1912)

'Today we can admire nothing except the tremendous symphonies of shrapnel'.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *La bataille de Tripoli* (1912)

Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 'Sounding (Out) Nineteenth-Century Italy' conference, organized by Francesca Vella; the 'Sounding Modernism' conference, organized by Anna Snaith and Imogen Free; and the Turkologentag conference 2023. I am grateful to the organizers of those events, my co-authors in this issue, as well as co-panellists and interlocutors at those events whose input helped refine my thinking, especially Marco Ladd, Kirsten Paige, Daniel Walden, Fiona Smyth, Nazan Maksudyan, Onur Engin, Carole Woodall, Michael Bull, and Yektan Türkyılmaz. I also thank Emily Giles for her brilliant research assistance as part of the Queens' College research internship programme, as well as Dana Al Shahbari for support with language and copyediting. Any mistakes that remain are my own. This research was funded by the Leverhulme Trust (PLP 2018–102) and a UKRI-funded ERC Starting Grant, 'Ottoman Auralities' (EP/X032833/1).

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'How many lions are there in Tripoli
To defend the country and protect the den?
The screaming of guns only increased
The roaring of her starving lion cubs'.

Aḥmad al-Shārif, '*Raḍīnā bi-ḥatf al-nufūs raḍīnā*' (We were content with sacrifice, ca. 1912, translated by Sed M. Abu Dib)

'Truly, I wished I could have been a gramophone and a photograph to capture the "Stimmung" [atmosphere] of this evening and send it to you'.

Enver Bey, letter from outside Derna, eastern Libya, November 1911

Prologue: Night Raid, Tripoli 1911

In December 1911, the Italian army captured the oasis town of Ain Zara, just south of the city of Tripoli, from a mixed force of Ottoman Turkish officers and local Arabs.[1] A few weeks later, on 28 January 1912, during a nighttime raid, an Arab/Turkish group encountered the following:

> They found the enemy amusing themselves with songs, through which the raucous voice of a gramophone could be heard. Suddenly they fired a volley. The Italians left off singing, put the lights out, and when they recovered from their confusion they returned the Arabs' fire. At the same time an outpost hidden among the palm-trees a little farther south, of whose existence our men were apparently unaware, joined in the music, and there ensued a skirmish in the dark, each side firing, but neither being able to see what they fired at.[2]

According to George Frederick Abbott, the English war correspondent who relates this event, the military consequences of this 'skirmish' were minor, though it did prompt two Arab women to flee from a tent in the Italian camp, crying out to the attackers and pleading, "'Save us or kill us!'"[3] Two weeks later on a moonless night, a second, smaller raid took place, with the group moving stealthily up to Italian trenches (unmanned at night), from which they took 'several hundred yards of telephone wire and four poles'; they then announced their spoils to their camp with invocations ('God save the Sultan!'), and were in turn 'greeted with loud cheers' when they returned to camp.[4] The raid's success led at least one Turkish officer to speculate on the possibility of building a local telephone system, while another noted the failure of Italian military technologies, especially the newly developed searchlight which had failed in its sensory/surveillance duties.

In these accounts, sound plays a number of roles (in roughly this sequence, in Abbott's telling): it serves as a means of entertainment away from battle itself; it is produced as part of the actual shooting, and by extension can also signal the commencement of hostilities; it functions as a metaphor for the violent encounter (for example, a second outpost 'joined in the music'); it becomes a medium of expressive communication (such as the women pleading with the raiding party); at the same time, it creates and also mediates between gendered domains; the cultivated absence of sound (that is, stealthy quiet) can be part of

[1] Where Arabic and other names/titles have relatively common transliterations, I use those (e.g., *Ain Zara* instead of *ʿAyn Zāra; pasha* instead of *paṣa*).

[2] G.F. Abbott, *The Holy War in Tripoli* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912): 256–7.

[3] Abbott, *Holy War*, 257.

[4] Abbott, *Holy War*, 258.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an attack; sound technologies (such as telephones) provide crucial infrastructure to support and facilitate war-making; sound announces the outcomes of battle; and it conveys affective response. In short, sound not only pervades the site of war; sound becomes a site of contestation itself, simultaneously reinforcing, extending, and intensifying the physical and affective reach of colonial warfare.

Sonic Techniques as/against Colonial Warfare

In this essay, I explore the role sound played in Italian attempts at territorial expansion and colonialism in Africa, with particular emphasis on the Italian invasion of Libya of 1911–12, commonly referred to as the Italo-Turkish War. Sound studies has a long-standing interest in the sound of war generally – what Martin Daughtry has termed the 'belliphonic' – and war around the turn of the twentieth century in particular, and the Italo-Turkish War has no shortage of sonic activity in the war and in written accounts about it.[5] The brief close reading/listening of these raids illustrates some of the ways this war (and perhaps war, more generally) can be a profoundly sonic event, but the challenge of going beyond a kind of catalogue of sounds remains. How do these various types of sounds make meaning? How do they articulate (and perhaps give rise to) power and violence? What kind of relationship exists between sounds and sound technologies, especially during war? To what degree does war intensify those medial relationships? Several other questions emerge in the particular historical context of this war. To what degree are these sounds commensurate when created or heard by Italians, Arabs, Ottoman Turks or other combatants? (And this question already elides other groups like Tripolitan Jews who were certainly impacted by these events but whose allegiances were less clear.) In a colonial/imperial context, what does it mean to excavate these sounds from the archive, and what kinds of archives are available to draw on? And more broadly, how might an exploration of the entanglements of colonialism and sonic media shed light on the co-constituted nature of both in this period?

The unique trajectories of Italian colonialism are particularly instructive in thinking about sound and sonic media at this time. Despite its comparatively late unification as a formal nation-state, the Kingdom of Italy quickly joined other European states in colonial expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, Italy played a late but significant part in the so-called Scramble for Africa, with military and colonial activities in Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia (failed) and present-day Libya, including the regions

[5] For Daughtry, the 'belliphonic' is 'the spectrum of sounds produced by armed combat', including both those directly related to weaponry and military machinery as well as a wide range of related sounds (the drone of electrical generators, propaganda recordings, recorded music deployed in war and in protest against war, and so on) 'that were connected, through causation or inference, to the war. In short, the belliphonic in Iraq [the war he focuses on] is the imagined total of sounds that would not have occurred had the conflict not taken place'. J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 4. Even before Daughtry's book, the sounds of war figured prominently in sound studies dating back at least to Mark Smith's groundbreaking work on the American Civil War, with more recent scholarship on contemporary war and state violence exploring these issues further still. See Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Recent studies on the Crimean War and the First World War raise historical and historiographical questions quite closely related to my own concerns here. See Gavin Williams, ed., *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Axel Volmar, 'In Storms of Steel: The Soundscape of World War I and its Impact on Auditory Media Culture during the Weimar Period', in *Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe*, ed. Daniel Morat (New York: Berghahn, 2014): 227–55; Michael Bull, 'Into the Sounds of War: Imagination, Media and Experience', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination*, ed. Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, Mads Walther-Hansen, and Martin Knakkergaard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 175–202.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.[6] Colonialism has never been a purely political or territorial process, but also one that engages and entangles the bodies of colonizer and colonized in particular sensory relations. As a result, sound, sound technologies, sound-media practices, and cultural techniques related to the sonic all tend to be found in the colonial archive – although sometimes in ambiguous ways – whether documented through written records, audio and film recordings, or other material objects. This complex web of auditory culture and its mediums plays a formative role in what, following Jairo Moreno, we might call 'imperial aurality'.[7]

I understand such wartime sound production and perception, along with their associated technological mediations, as a set of cultural techniques – that is, bodily practices, technical modes of performance, and relationships with the material world (landscape, animals, machinery, weaponry) that, through their deployment, shape those people and places involved, producing key distinctions between colonizer and colonized through war and its mediations.[8] In other words, I am not merely interested in, say, the soundscapes of the Italo-Turkish War, but also in the kinds of technologies and techniques that gave rise to it, emerged through it, and perhaps sustained it, but also resisted it. In doing so, I am influenced by historians of neighbouring parts of North Africa, especially Algeria and Egypt, and the way sound, sound technologies, and other communications media were deployed there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whether as part of colonialism or in resistance to it.[9] I also write in response to David Forgacs's *Italy's Margins*, which explores how photography and visual culture contributed to the production of Italian identities through forms of social exclusion at Italy's cultural 'margins', including in colonial

[6] On Italian colonialism prior to the invasion of Libya, see Giuseppe Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism, 1860–1907: Europe's Last Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[7] Jairo Moreno, 'Imperial Aurality: Jazz, the Archive, and U.S. Empire', in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 135–60. Moreno writes that 'aurality' (in the formulation of 'imperial aurality') is not synonymous with or reducible to listening; rather, it is an 'intersensory, affective, cognitive, discursive, material, perceptual, and rhetorical network' (p. 139). He is especially interested in how (U.S. American) empire has historically shaped the multifaceted network/archive of aurality in the context of jazz history, but the broader notion is resonant with the Libyan/Italian context, as well.

[8] Bernhard Siegert's writings offer the most expansive articulation of cultural techniques in English. He writes that theorizing cultural techniques is not meant to remove distinctions between ontological categories (in his example, between human animal and nonhuman animal; in this case, between colonizer and colonized) or to deconstruct such categories discursively, but rather to decentre 'the distinction between human and nonhuman [or any other ontological distinction] by insisting on the radical technicity of this distinction'. In other words, such distinctions emerge through technical processes. Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015): 8. I largely follow Siegert's usage, though I would add that in colonial contexts, it is not merely (sonic) technicity that produces these distinctions, but also other forms of power that are bundled up with such techniques. Once again, Jairo Moreno's work offers an important further elaboration: in his application of such writings to the context of imperialism (specifically, the Spanish–American War), he argues that *empire itself* is a kind of cultural technique that leverages available media technologies to further its necropolitical ends. That power-inflected reading of cultural techniques seems a necessary addition to Siegert. See Jairo Moreno, 'The Anacoustic: Imperial Aurality, Aesthetic Capture, and the Spanish-American War', in *Acoustics of Empire: Sound, Media, and Power in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Peter McMurray and Priyasha Mukhopadhyay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024): 269–94.

[9] On Algeria, see Arthur Asseraf, *Electric News in Colonial Algeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). On Egypt, see Adam Mestyan, 'Upgrade? Power and Sound during Ramadan and *'Id al-Fitr* in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Arab Provinces', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37/2 (2017): 262–79; and Ziad Fahmy, *Street Sounds: Listening to Everyday Life in Modern Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). On Italian colonialism in this period, see Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) and Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contexts.[10] Sound and the sonic techniques of (and in resistance to) colonialism played a similarly significant role, I argue here. Furthermore, some of the foundational figures in the (European) history of sound and sound studies, such as the Futurist author Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and inventor Guglielmo Marconi, are also entangled in histories of colonialism through their involvement in this war. Drawing these strands together in this article, I aim to intensify sound studies' engagement with colonization and to show how discussions of wartime acoustics could be enriched by thinking more expressly about colonialism as an integral part of modern militarism. At the same time, I hope to better attune Middle East and Italian studies to questions of auditory culture in the early twentieth century.

This colonial war, I argue, is a particularly violent instance of what Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne Cusick, speaking of an earlier period, have termed 'acoustemologies in contact'.[11] I trace out the sonic techniques of both sides of this conflict, and indeed, how those sonic techniques *produced* these two sides: on the one hand, the Italians, and on the other, the Libyan resistance forces, a complex, multiethnic alliance between the Ottoman Empire and local Arabs, as well as Amazigh (Berber) and other inhabitants and tribes of the region.[12] As I discuss below, the viability of the resistance forces' uniting against the Italians seemed sufficiently unlikely that the Italians explicitly planned on the basis of its impossibility; after all, the Ottomans were themselves understood as a foreign empire ruling in the region and had dealt with various uprisings in the decades leading up to the Italian war.[13] But conditions of colonial occupation and its attendant sonic and sensory techniques gave rise to a new, realigned set of distinctions between colonizer and resistance forces.

In narrating this conflict and its sonic techniques, I begin with an overview of some key technologies that shaped this war, exploring both the militarization of sound technologies generally and also the particular forms such militarization took in Italy's colonial ventures in Libya. I then consider a series of Italian accounts of war which both highlight the auditory experience of war and also draw frequently on aestheticizing metaphors that transform the horrors of war into an object of pleasurable contemplation, comparable to European symphonic music. Examining one particular subset among Italian colonizing sonic techniques, I briefly consider how Marconi took advantage of colonial warfare to refine the development of wireless telegraphy and imagine new, militarized possibilities such as wireless telegraphy in military aircraft.

I then turn to accounts of the Libyan experience of the war, especially that of the Arab/Ottoman alliance, but also with reference to Jewish communities in the region. I am especially interested here in three particular sonic techniques of anticolonial resistance

[10] David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[11] Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne G. Cusick, *Acoustemologies in Contact: Sounding Subjects and Modes of Listening in Early Modernity* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021).

[12] It is clear that the Imazighen (plural of Amazigh) made important contributions to the resistance, including that of key figures like Sulayman al-Baruni, discussed below. But they seem to have played a smaller role overall than the large-scale Arab uprising and the smaller but significant corps of Ottoman military forces (especially officers). In this article, I try to specify as clearly as possible which groupings were involved in various resistance efforts, but sometimes for simplicity resort to a more generic description of a 'Libyan resistance' (referring to the joint resistance forces) or to Arab/Ottoman where that seems most suitable based on what sources relate in given contexts. Such nomenclature is not meant to diminish the role of Amazigh or other participants in the struggle. On the general complexities of delineating Amazigh culture, especially in (contemporary) contexts of music and sound, see Leila Tayeb, 'Our Star: Amazigh Music and the Production of Intimacy in 2011 Libya', *The Journal of North African Studies* 23/5 (2018): 834–50, especially 836–9 and 848.

[13] On the tensions between the Ottoman government and local inhabitants in the period prior to the war with Italy, see Lisa Anderson, 'Nineteenth-Century Reform in Ottoman Libya', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 325–48, and Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016): 19–39.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

deployed by the Arab/Ottoman side: 'counterlistening', ululation, and vocalized calls for jihad. As the opening accounts here make clear, both sides deployed 'modern' technologies such as telegraphy in the war, but the sonic techniques of Arab and coalition resistance underscore their simultaneous cultivation of a sonic, affective arsenal they deployed to counter the more expansive, literal arsenal of military weaponry available to the Italians. Sound thus serves as an index of that ostensible disparity, as well as the insurgent potentiality of more traditional sonic techniques available (in this case) uniquely to the Libyan resistance.

On a methodological note, I draw heavily on journalistic sources from the period, including many foreign war correspondents. I do so in part because many of these journalists (especially George Frederick Abbott, who was also an amateur scholar of music and folklore in Greece and the Ottoman Empire) pay particular attention to sensory experience. Relying too heavily on such sources obviously risks reproducing some of the colonial dynamics they (and I) are interrogating, but these accounts add crucial details, albeit filtered through (sometimes considerable) cultural bias. They also highlight the sprawling growth of 'war's media output', which proliferated greatly since the 1850s.[14] The Libyan historian, religious scholar, and resistance fighter, al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī, serves as a particularly important eye/ear-witness source on Arabs' (and their allies') experience of the conflict, which I explore more fully in the latter half of this article. As a final note, I use the term 'Libya' – a term adopted more widely during the Italian occupation that followed – somewhat anachronistically but with hopes of clarifying the overall narrative, since the scope of the paper exceeds either of the primary regions involved: Tripolitania (the region around Tripoli; Arabic: *Ṭarābulus al-gharb*, or 'Western Tripoli' in contrast to Tripoli in Lebanon) and Cyrenaica (Arabic: *Barqa*) to the east. In any event, the Italian invasion and occupation of these lands were part of a single military and cultural venture.

Martial Modernity and Colonialism: Gramophone, Film, Telegraph (and Airplane)

Narratives about the Italo-Turkish War have often highlighted its connection to other major conflicts, including Italian colonialism, and, somewhat separately, the particular uses of new military technologies in this war; I propose that these two narratives of colonialism and military technology should be understood as being intertwined. With regard to other conflicts, this war is seen as a minor precursor to two larger wars: locally, the Italian colonization of Libya, a campaign that lasted decades, intensifying dramatically under Mussolini in the early 1930s; and globally, the First World War, through the attack on the Ottoman Empire, followed in quick succession by the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. In the Libyan conflict, Italy followed the lead of Great Britain in Egypt and France in Algeria by asserting its right to colonial possessions in Africa – in this case, the regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Those claims were ostensibly rooted in critiques of Ottoman governance, but related more closely to ongoing Italian settlements in the region, including the aggressive real estate ventures led by the Bank of Rome.[15] The war technically ran from 29 September

[14] Gavin Williams, 'Sound Unmade', in *Hearing the Crimean War*, xix. Williams argues that the Crimean War (1853–1856) was a crucial inflection point for this increase in the European mediatization of war, with wartime journalism playing a particularly important role. Whatever its precise historical growth, embedded wartime correspondence was a major part of the media apparatus of the Italo-Turkish War.

[15] For a contemporary account of the Bank of Rome's activities in Libya in this period, see Francis McCullagh, *Italy's War for a Desert: Being Some Experiences of a War-Correspondent with the Italians in Tripoli* (Chicago: F. G. Browne, 1912): 14ff. He describes Enrico Bresciani, the de facto head of the bank in Tripoli, as the 'Cecil Rhodes of Tripolitania' (15) and 'the promoter of the Tripoli enterprise' (21), arguing for 'peaceful penetration' of Libya through financial patronage (16). McCullagh's descriptions inadvertently underscore the widespread link between

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1911 to 18 October 1912, with Italy taking coastal areas from Ottoman forces with relative ease, only to encounter unexpected resistance from a combined force of Ottoman military (especially officers, including Talat Pasha, Enver Bey, and Mustafa Kemal Pasha – later known as Atatürk) and local Arab and Amazigh forces throughout the interior. Ultimately the Ottoman military was forced to leave in 1912, because of both the Treaty of Ouchy, which ended the war, and the urgent proximity of the Balkan Wars. Italian forces remained in Libya and continued to try to expand the occupation against the ongoing Arab-led resistance.

From the outset, accounts of the war – whether those of war correspondents or Futurist poets – focused heavily on technological inventions (sonic and otherwise) that were being used by the Italians, including airplanes, balloons, and both wired and wireless telegraphy. On some level, this kind of techno-sensorial form of warfare resonates with Friedrich Kittler's aphorism that entertainment media are 'nothing but an abuse of army equipment'.[16] Yet for all its sweeping bluster, Kittler's maxim – especially aimed at the rise of new technologies around 1900 – fails to do justice to the uniquely *colonial* context at work here and in so many parallel circumstances, suggesting the need for a reading more aligned with postcolonial theory. For instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's widely embraced deconstructivist critique argues that philosophy, literature, and history not only portray perspectives/voices of 'the dominant', but also simultaneously 'trace a subliminal and discontinuous emergence of the "native informant": autochthone and/or subaltern'.[17] In the context of media histories, we might understand Spivak's argument to extend to newly developed technologies that also show traces of historical encounters with indigenous and subaltern peoples. To use the concrete example of Marconi's wireless telegraphy – which I discuss in more detail below – Kittler would highlight how it was militarized early and often; Spivak might in turn specify that such militarization was not just a generic act of militarism somewhere on earth, but rather one bound up with colonialism and, crucially, still bearing traces of that colonial origin. In other words, we might question whether it is accurate or ethical to recount the history of, say, wireless telegraphy or aeronautic warfare (including its sonic components) *without* considering those global entanglements.

In that spirit, I recount here some of the technological 'innovations' that were part of this initial moment of the Italian colonization of Libya, starting with the telegraph as a device that predates Kittler's technological rupture at the turn of the twentieth century, featuring the triad of gramophone, film, and typewriter.[18] The beginnings of the war were articulated with great precision, as the telegraph transformed Italy's declaration of war – an idiosyncratic genre of utterance in its own right – into a communications relay: Italy sent

colonial infrastructure and banking across Africa. For a more detailed history of the events leading up to the war, see Charles Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911–1912: The First Land, Sea, and Air War* (Ticehurst: Tattered Flag, 2014).

[16] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): 96–7. Kittler's thinking on such questions is elaborated at much greater length in *Operation Valhalla: Writings on War, Weapons, and Media*, ed. and trans. Ilinca Iurascu, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, and Michael Wutz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

[17] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999): xi. Similarly deconstructivist explorations of the traces of colonial power in the emergence of sonic media, in particular, can be seen in Alejandra Bronfman, *Isles of Noise: Sonic Media in the Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), and in Moreno, 'The Anacoustic'.

[18] Jonathan Sterne calls attention to the changing techniques of electric telegraph operators in the mid-nineteenth century and, in a gentle challenge to Kittler's technological triad of sound/image/writing, to the ways that telegraphy became a multisensory medium as operators learned to listen to the telegraph's audible printing of morse code (rather than waiting to read it). In any case, I see the Italian declaration of war here as a continuation of these evolving techniques of telegraphy over the long nineteenth century, especially in colonial contexts. See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 138-154.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an encrypted telegram to the Ottoman Empire with a 24-hour ultimatum, including particular requirements for how they expected to receive word back via telegraph; when the Ottoman response failed to satisfy Italian demands, Italy declared war by telegraph, specifying a starting time of 2:30 pm on 29 September, roughly 48 hours after the first dispatch.[19] At the same time, Mostafa Minawi has described the Ottoman push to extend telegraphy into Libya around 1900 as the cultivation of 'technologies of resistance' in response to the threat of European colonization.[20] Whatever the case, wired telegraphy played an important role from the outset: besides its presumed function as a self-contained mode of communication, it was also used to augment more traditional forms of horseback relay and informal gossip (or what journalist Ernest Bennett calls 'human telegraphy'), targeted for attack, and even deployed as a makeshift gallows in times of treachery.[21]

One British correspondent, Francis McCullagh, frames his book-length account with the question of Italian censorship of journalists, making frequent reference to specific telegrams and the telegraph infrastructure as part of the Italian wartime apparatus. From the beginning of the invasion, he suggests, Italian military leaders tried to ensure that no negative reports were 'permitted to leave the country'. He situates that censorship within a complex, transnational network of telegraphy and other media:

> The Italian commanders became desperately afraid that any tidings regarding their condition should reach the Turks through Press cablegrams from Tripoli published in the European newspapers, transmitted to Constantinople, and thence forwarded via Tunisia to the Turkish commander in the Tripolitan hinterland. An order consequently went forth to the effect that all telegrams, Press or private, must go to Rome for a second dose of censorship. This meant, of course, that they would be 'held up' indefinitely .... Even commercial houses were not allowed to wire about anything in code or in plain language, lest they should convey circuitously to the Turkish leader in the interior the news of the desperate position in which the Italian landing-party found itself.[22]

Telegraphy was augmented by telephony – on both sides of the war. Another British writer, Ernest Griffin, a physician volunteering for the Red Crescent, writes at some length about Djemel Efendi, a young Ottoman telegraph operator from the Balkans, who, after the Ottoman withdrawal in October 1912, was appointed by a Libyan leader, Sulayman al-Baruni (or Bahrouni, as Griffin writes), to became postmaster general for the ongoing

[19] Thomas Barclay and Syed Ameer Ali, *The Turco-Italian War and Its Problems* (London: Constable, 1912): 21–2, 109–23. Ernest Bennett further indicates that 'the telegram from Constantinople [informing Ottoman military officials in Tripoli of the war] had been seriously delayed', creating additional difficulties for Neşat Pasha, the leader of the Ottoman forces in Tripoli. Ernest N. Bennett, *With the Turks in Tripoli: Being Some Experiences in the Turco-Italian War of 1911* (London: Methuen, 1912): 81. Bernhard Siegert has argued for the concept of the 'relay' in understanding both communications and literary practices in the long nineteenth century, and although he focuses on postal systems, he is also interested particularly in the dynamics of telegraphy in overtaking that pre-existing system of media relays. See Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): especially 165–85.

[20] Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016): 95–7.

[21] Bennett, *With the Turks*, 54; Abbott, *Holy War*, 132, 159.

[22] McCullagh, *Italy's War for a Desert*, 103–4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Arab-Amazigh resistance.[23] He was first tasked with 'help[ing] to organize the post and telegraph service of the Arab State', which he did quickly, while also training 'young Arabs in the art of telegraphy'.[24] Later, Djemel set up telephone lines connecting the key outpost of Yefren to surrounding camps, with test calls to al-Baruni that elicited a range of responses from 'amazement as [Djemel] carried on an animated conversation with an unseen person' to an unfazed comfort by one local sheikh making his first call with the new technology.[25] On the Italian side, Marinetti describes a multisensory relay during battle in which an Italian colonel would look up over the trenches with *lorgnette* spectacles and dictate his observations to another officer beside him who then repeated those observations via telephone to the cavalry barracks.[26]

Gramophones and film were also present in meaningful ways. As the opening anecdote of this chapter highlights, the Italian army brought gramophones with them. An early cinema already existed in Tripoli before the Italian invasion, but during the war, the cinematograph, brought by the Italians, became a part of both wartime entertainments and documentation (however blurry the distinction between those two activities may be).[27] McCullagh reports that the Arch of Marcus Aurelius (a memorial to Roman conquest) had been 'walled over' on three sides with the interior 'converted into a tenth-rate cinematograph show', creating a kind of martial meta-medium.[28] He also describes more documentary functions of Italian wartime cinema, such as the filming of the execution of a young Arab, Hussein, after what McCullagh deemed a show-trial for the killing of an Italian soldier. Journalists and soldiers jostled for a view (and good site for a photograph) of the performative proceedings:

> Most of the correspondents and some of the officers had their cameras levelled [ready to take pictures]. All of them had cigarettes in their mouths. There was a big cinematograph installed in a prominent position. There were laughing and light-hearted joking. The officer in charge of the proceedings … went about twirling a cane and looking like a musical conductor. He knew that the cinematograph was just about to make a 'hero' of him, and that there would be uproarious applause from all patriots and right-minded men whenever his figure was thrown on the screen anywhere from Syracuse to Chiasso.[29]

These cinematographic instances are certainly not exhaustive, but they offer a poignant reminder of the close entanglements here between cinema and war, as well as the layers

[23] 'Djemel' is probably the Turkish name *Cemil* (Arabic: *Jamīl*). More generally, this initiative by al-Baruni was unsurprising, given his deep investments in transnational 'networks of Islamic reform', which included his setting up a publishing house in Cairo and participating in the Ottoman parliament in the years preceding this war. See Amal Ghazal, 'An Ottoman Pasha and the End of Empire: Sulayman al-Baruni and the Networks of Islamic Reform', in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 61–82. Orhan Koloğlu dates the arrival of telegraphy to Ottoman Tripoli to 1861, though its spread inland was uneven. Orhan Koloğlu, 'Libya from the Ottoman Perspective (1835–1918)', *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 63/ 2 (2008): 279.

[24] Ernest H. Griffin, *Adventures in Tripoli: A Doctor in the Desert* (London: Phillip Allan, 1924): 121.

[25] Griffin, *Adventures in Tripoli*, 198–9, 206.

[26] F.T. Marinetti, *La bataille de Tripoli* (Milan: Edizione Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1912): 23.

[27] Amal Sulayman Mahmoud al-ʿUbaydi, 'Cinema in Libya', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2001): 407.

[28] McCullagh, *Italy's War for a Desert*, 67. For a photographic image showing the cinema, see https://leturcq.wordpress.com/2011/05/19/libya-the-arch-of-silence/, accessed 1 April 2024. It is unclear whether this cinema is the same one installed by the Italians in al-ʿUbaydi's account (see note 27).

[29] McCullagh, *Italy's War for a Desert*, 181.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of performativity (such as the officer-as-musical conductor-as-aspiring hero) in martial media.[30]

Finally, the deployment of airplanes for the first time in war, alongside dirigibles, introduced the possibility of combat by air, land and sea. In contemporaneous accounts, airplanes were often visible but not (very) audible, but their hovering presence added a sense of surveillant dread, due to the unending possibility of bombardment and observation.[31] More generally, the sonic legacy of airplanes (and of war against the Ottomans generally) was cemented in the writings of Marinetti, such as *La bataille de Tripoli (26 Octobre 1911)*, a collection of his journalistic correspondence from Tripoli, compiled and republished in 1912, and his sound-poem, *Zang Tumb Tumb: Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912: Parole in libertà*, a foundational text for the Futurists and a meditation on the Bulgarian siege of the Ottoman city of Adrianople (Edirne) in the First Balkan War.[32] Both texts were foundational for Italian Futurism.

Imperial Aurality, or Italians Listening to the War

Martinetti's writings, especially his booklet, *La bataille de Tripoli*, exemplify a sensory celebration of colonial warfare as an aesthetic object for contemplation, though not all Italian accounts share his approach. Marinetti's *La bataille* compiles his journalistic dispatches about the Battle of Tripoli fought in late October 1911 as published in the French newspaper, *L'Intransigeant*, throughout December 1911, adding a brief but infamous introduction. It begins with a proto-fascist dedicatory statement: 'For war, the world's only hygiene and its only moral educator'.[33] He continues, speaking for/as 'We, Futurists', claiming that 'the great Futurist hour of Italy' has arrived through war, and then calling on 'Futurist poets, painters, sculptures and musicians' to set aside their art and revel in war-as-art: 'Today, we can admire nothing except the powerful symphonies of shrapnel and the mad sculptures that our artillery inspired with its rounds shot at enemy masses'.[34]

Marinetti then gives an account of the war that hovers between journalism, poetry, and political propaganda, frequently turning to music and sound as a metaphor, a military technique, and a fact of life in the trenches. For instance, Marinetti titles the second chapter of *La bataille* 'The orchestra of the night trenches' (*L'orchestre des tranchées nocturnes*), and describes war and its affective intensities through the recurring metaphor of musical sound:

[30] Luca Mazzei's work on film and photography in this war suggests how widespread some of these cinematic activities were. For instance, he quotes a January 1912 article in the Milan-based *La Stampa*: "'The numerous descriptions of the events of a war we read about daily are not enough to satisfy our craving [*appagare la nostra bramosia*]. The cinematograph has made up for this lack ... at the Cinema Centrale in the Piazza del Duomo, Portici della Galleria, where every day the most significant events [*gli episodi più salienti*] relating to the Italo-Turkish war are screened"'. Luca Mazzei, 'L'occhio insensibile. Cinema e fotografia durante la prima Campagna di Libia (1911–1913)', in *Fotografia e culture visuali del XXI secolo*, ed. Enrico Menduni and Lorenzo Marmo (Rome: Roma TrE-Press, 2018): 336. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[31] My use of the term 'dread' here echoes that of Steve Goodman in his book *Sonic Warfare*, where he emphasizes similar affective conditions or 'ecologies, in which sound contributes to an immersive atmosphere or ambience of fear and dread'. Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, xiv.

[32] For more on Marinetti's writings on airplanes and other aspects of the war in Tripoli more generally (but not sound's role in those events), see James Leveque, 'Futurism's First War: Apocalyptic Space in F. T. Marinetti's Writings from Tripoli', *Romance Notes* 55/3 (2015): 425–37.

[33] Marinetti, *La bataille*, introduction, no page.

[34] Martinetti, *La bataille*, introduction, no page.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> The Futurist stridency and dissonances in the deep orchestra of the trenches, with winding corridors and sonorous vaults, amid the coming-and-going of bayonets, violin bows, which the red baton of the sunset-as-conductor enflames with rapture.
>
> It is he who, with a grand gesture, gathers the scattered flutes of birds in the trees and the plaintive harps of insects, the creaking of branches, the crunching of stones …
>
> It is he who abruptly stops the drumming of mess-kits and the clash of rifles, to allow all the stars – arrayed in gold, their arms open, at the threshold of the sky – to sing at the top of their lungs over the muted orchestra.
>
> And look here, a lady at the show: with a grand neckline, the sprawling desert, indeed, its expansive gorge with a thousand liquid curves, all adorned with pink blush under the crumbling gems of the prodigal night.[35]

This audiovisual reverie is then interrupted by banal conversation – apparently between Marinetti and Captain Savino of the Italian army – about the impending battle, dinner, and other preparatory logistics. But it sets the stage for a recurring refrain Marinetti deploys, in which sound is foregrounded in his sensory depictions of battle, reflecting both a reality of 'observing' a war from inside a trench (where visibility is necessarily limited) and a kind of celebration of sound as a powerful modality for capturing war's intensity. Yet Marinetti goes further still: war is not only sonically intense, it is an object worthy of aesthetic contemplation, and one that is (apparently, given his choice of language) most comparable and comprehensible in relation to European art music. In a sense, Marinetti's language works to subdue or domesticate the Libyan landscape through sonic metaphors, much as the Italian forces sought to enact a more literal domestication through military force, with its attendant sounds.

Through the remainder of the chapter, Marinetti and Captain Savino collaboratively listen to the world around them, even when not directly related to warfare per se: dogs howl in the distance, compared to the 'agonizing rehearsal of an opera in the teeming darkness' (or, he speculates with a crude antisemitism, it may come from panicking Jews – apparently indistinguishable from dogs to Marinetti's ears); *darbouka* drums and fifes ('les debourkas et les fifres') sound a rallying signal among the Turks and Arabs; and roosters crow from a very early hour.[36] Cannons are compared to operatic tenors, telephones connect the trenches to the barracks, Italian military commanders' voices are described in careful detail, and so on.

The extended metaphor of militarism-as-music culminates in chapter six, 'The grand symphony of shells' (*La grande symphonie des obus*), set around dawn the same morning, as the battle crescendos to a climax, so to speak: 'The fulness of dawn finally burst like a giant powder-keg encrusted in the vibrating atmosphere. And the battle saluted her by lifting the enormous voice of its polyphony in a marvellous manner'.[37] He then focuses on individual artillery strikes: 'Here is one of those shells. Can you hear its flexible, sonorous sliding through the atmosphere?'[38] Or another: 'More amusing than the others, this shell! It falls in thunderous bursts, with a long sequence of sounds: square, flaccid, round, oblong and flat!'[39] Adding to the grotesque glee of Marinetti's writing, he describes the visual imagery of the exploding sand around him as the body of a naked woman, complete with anatomical

[35] Martinetti, *La bataille*, 6–7.
[36] Marinetti, *La bataille*, 13–16.
[37] Marinetti, *La bataille*, 35.
[38] Marinetti, *La bataille*, 36.
[39] Marinetti, *La bataille*, 37.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

descriptions – all the while casually celebrating the death count inflicted by these shells. Shortly thereafter, the rhythmic firing of machine guns is compared to ballerinas dancing to castanets, and the overall shelling as a 'growing drunkenness' with 'powerful, unsettled notes that you rush to get into the long horizontal organ pipes of the atmosphere!'[40]

Marinetti's listening is both sadistic and unstable, shifting between violent metaphors of music and dance, opera and symphony, symphony and ballet, erratic drunkenness and mechanical precision. The text, gratuitous as it may be, warrants a more detailed reading, but for now, suffice it to say that Marinetti's Futurism is not just a conflation of art and war – though it is that. It is specifically an *imperialist* conflation of art and war, a kind of colonial fever dream of the senses, in which territorial domination is not enough: that domination must also encompass the entirety of the senses, creating an aesthetically compelling form of death and global expansion.[41] In his insightful discussion of Italian Futurists in Milan, Gavin Williams underscores the need to historicize and contextualize Futurist music practices, especially those of Francesco Balilla Pratella and, more famously, Luigi Russolo, and particularly within the sonic geographies of Italy ca. 1910–1913.[42] But as Marinetti's writings here suggest, Italian sonic geographies of that period were inextricably tied to Italian imperialism and especially its military encounters in Libya and, more generally, with the Ottoman Empire. To hear Futurism (more) clearly, we must also listen to it as a product of Italian colonial expansion in that historical moment.

Yet Marinetti's listening, however significant historically, is certainly not the only Italian account of the auditory experience of the war: other journalists' and soldiers' accounts suggest more complexity in listening, even if never extricated from the context of imperial expansion.[43] Many journalists documented the war, with varying degrees of affiliation with one side or the other. I discuss journalistic accounts of the Libyan resistance forces in more detail below, but Italian-focused narratives shed light as well, especially on a less dramatic wartime soundscape than that described by Marinetti.

One such account is Antonio de Martino's *La Guerra Italo-Turca: La Conquista della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica*, with a first version published in 1911 during the first few months of the war (under the title *Tripoli Italiana*) and a second, extended version published in 1912.[44] Some of de Martino's descriptions, especially early on in his narrative, use language similar to that of Marinetti, especially in his description of 'Combattimento notturno' (Night combat), in which he recounts in considerable detail a military encounter the night of 15 October 1911, just a few days before the events described in Marinetti's narrative:

> Immediately afterwards, the characteristic noise of a large projectile was heard approaching in the dark space, that plaintive and impetuous rustling which suggests a fantastic laceration of the invisible, the tearing of an immense silk curtain; a prodigious sound that, when suddenly heard on the battlefield, produces an ineffable and

[40] Marinetti, *La bataille*, 38.

[41] Again, Leveque's characterization of Marinetti's writing as having an apocalyptic bent is useful, though I would argue the colonial context here is central – if Marinetti has imagined an 'apocalyptic space', it is most fully realized in the act of colonization. See Leveque, 'Futurism's First War'.

[42] Gavin Williams, 'Futurist Timbres: Listening Failure in Milan, 1909–1914′, in *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre*, ed. Emily I. Dolan and Alexander Rehding (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021): 321–43.

[43] Another important figure in articulating sonic experiences of Italians in the war – albeit as a second-hand response – was the poet/writer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who wrote multiple poems in response to the war and to the use of aerial bombing by the Italians. See John Wright, 'Poets, Pilots and Propaganda: Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Italo-Turkish War, 1911–12′, in *The Emergence of Libya: Selected Historical Essays* (London: Silphium Books, 2008): 238–66.

[44] Antonio de Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca: La Conquista della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica* (New York: Società Libraria Italiana, 1912).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> deep sense of suspense, and fills every fibre with a tyrannical dread. Then a dazzling flash sparked overhead, a metallic and resounding explosion, a whistling of bullets cut through the air which had become dark again and was extinguished in a dull hail [falling] on the earth, while the rumble of a shot from afar slowly reached us. ...
>
> The scream [*urlo*] of grenades was heard ever more imperiously; they exploded above us, but at times the bullets crackled near the parapets and the flurry of shards was heard. A shot passed overhead, exploding at the edge of the oasis and a stampede of frightened horses rumbled amid the olive trees in a cavalry camp nearby.
>
> In the depths of the oasis, a long, mournful howling [*ululare*] of dogs arose, a vast and eerie choir that grew without end.[45]

Where Marinetti found aesthetic wonder with a romantic sensibility, de Martino strikes a more realist tone: sound does not bring aesthetic pleasure (or whatever Marinetti might have experienced) but rather 'suspense' and 'dread', and a nearly palpable sense of 'laceration' and 'tearing' of domains he deemed otherwise 'invisible', as though he had not fully understood the world around him until he heard these horrific sounds.

Beyond these poetic musings on the sounds of battle, de Martino occasionally offers more self-reflexive commentary about how sound functions in this space. For instance, on two occasions, he describes how telephones were used, sometimes in combination with radiotelegraphy, trumpets-as-alarms, and visual signals via lantern, as means of communicating during battle.[46] He also gives details about how audiovisual (or rather: audio and visual) technologies were used to entertain recuperating Italian soldiers at the Royal Palace in Caserta, Italy, including the fact that films would be screened every evening with 'cinematographic reproductions of the sites of the war' (*riproduzioni cinematografiche dei luoghi della guerra*), and that guests made use of (and sometimes fought over) a gramophone in lieu of a live musical ensemble, with many dancing along with the music.[47] And on one occasion, he even explains unusual acoustic phenomena from the battlefield, namely the uncanny delays in sound during bombardment due to the different speeds of light, sound, and artillery munitions:

> There is a perpetual arrival of 'shrapnel' that doesn't harm anyone. First one hears the hiss [*il sibilo*], then the explosion, then afterward, when everything is over, comes the roar of the cannon, whose smoke rises on the distant horizon and whose delay in sound [*posponimento di suoni*] creates a strange impression. One doesn't immediately think of all the physical reasons for the phenomenon by which one first receives the incoming cannon-fire and then hears the shot, which is surprising.[48]

In addition to these sonic observations, de Martino documents a range of musical performance as well, including political and religious rituals involving music. For instance, when Italian troops and other leaders disembarked after capturing Tripoli, military marches and other music were played.[49] On the Day of the Dead (1 November), a ceremony was held with

[45] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 63–66. The term *ululare* is significant in foreshadowing local practices of ululation, described below. The blurring of boundaries between humans and non-human animals as a part of colonial rhetoric, while perhaps not intentional here, is a recurring issue in such accounts.

[46] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 67, 390–91.

[47] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 406–8. For further discussion of the global circulation of newsreels and other films about the war, see Giorgio Bertellini, 'Dramatizing the Italian–Turkish War (1911–12): Reports of Atrocities, Newsreels, and Epic Films in Italy and the USA', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 14/2 (2016): 131–54.

[48] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 154.

[49] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 37–8, 47–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

speeches, collective call-and-response shouting, and trumpet-playing, in memory of Italian soldiers who had fallen.[50] And a few days later, on 11 November, the birthday of the king, a mass was held in his honour, with music from a local church: 'The organ played the Royal March as the governor entered. The military musicians played Gounod's *Ave Maria* during the elevation [of the Host], and reprised the Royal March when the ceremony was finished and the procession left the church. After the mass, the priest recited the psalms of David for the victory of the army and the salvation of the King'.[51] These quasi-musicological fragments hint at the ways military, religious, and musical institutions were intertwined in the production of colonial culture in Tripoli.

While journalists were particularly prolific in writing about this war, soldiers also documented their auditory experiences through letters. As early as 1912, Baccio Bacci published a collection of letters from Italian soldiers, as has Salvatore Bono more recently.[52] In a review of these sources, Simone Colonnelli notes a number of examples of sonic experience and thinking in these letters, including: reflections by nurses on the 'laments and curses' they heard from the wounded and by doctors on the toll of war's sensory intensities, including the aural; a soldier's recollection of hearing how, during an attack by the resistance forces, 'a tremendous scream rose from all sides: Allah! Allah!'; and repeated reference to the sound of artillery.[53] One artillery gunner, Tiberio Nesi, recounts his own experience of the battle at Ain Zara on 4 December 1911, with language that resonates closely with that of Marinetti (and somewhat of de Martino):

> On the morning of the 4th, we got up early, went immediately to our posts, and shooting began. You can't believe what seemed to be happening in that moment. There was a thundering [*tonare*] of cannons from all sides, and it felt like everything was going to collapse under that uproar [*frastuono*]. This orchestra lasted until 11 am; then things calmed down a little.

Once again, the metaphor of the orchestral battlefield appears, but with an important difference. For Nesi, unlike Marinetti, this 'symphony' creates a sense of potential collapse or failure. The thunderous raining-down of artillery is a threat to life – of course, it is also a threat to life that Nesi himself deploys against the 'enemy'. But the subtle acknowledgement by Nesi about the precarity of his situation as a soldier and (perhaps inadvertent) listener suggests a more insightful understanding of the dread and violence of war – a theme touched on by de Martino, as well – and its sonic threat than some of the more extravagant narratives by journalists.

Wireless Case Study: Marconi in the Libyan Desert

While Marinetti's writings on sound have figured prominently in Futurist lore, which has in turn been prominent in (European) histories of aurality and sound studies more generally,

[50] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 156–9. A more elaborate memorial service with music was held after the Battle of Homs (1 December), see 206–8.

[51] De Martino, *La Guerra Italo-Turca*, 180–81.

[52] Baccio Bacci, *La guerra libica descritta nelle lettere dei combattenti* (Florence: Bemporad, 1912); Salvatore Bono, ed., *Morire per questi deserti: Lettere di Soldati italiani dal fronte libico 1911–1912* (Catanzaro: Abramo Editore, 1992); and Salvatore Bono, ed., *Tripoli bel suol d'amore: Testimonianze sulla guerra italo-libica* (Rome: ISIAO Libyan Studies Centre, 2005).

[53] Simone Colonnelli, 'Il soldato italiano alla guerra moderna: La campagna di Libia descritta nelle lettere dei combattenti (1911–1912)', *Italies* 19 (2015), in paragraphs 33 and 55–6; 48; and 51, as well as (again) 55–6, respectively. https://doi.org/10.4000/italies.5093, accessed 1 April 2024.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Italian invasion of Libya also contributed to another, more technical aspect in the history of sound technologies, namely, the development of wireless telegraphy.[54] As mentioned above, the Italian military made considerable use of wireless telegraphy during the war, a practice which was initially (if briefly) overseen by Guglielmo Marconi himself, who found that the new physical environment and military contingencies challenged him to refine his invention. In other words, the war offers a case study in how the use of sound/communications technologies in colonial and imperial contexts are not just an ancillary piece of military history but rather integral to the history of those media apparatuses themselves.

Marc Raboy describes how the Italians began from the earliest days of the occupation to build wireless stations to connect Tripoli to Sicily, and Marconi was sent to inspect this apparatus and to carry out experiments in the desert.[55] Raboy emphasizes that Marconi's global and colonial entanglement here was nothing new: just days before leaving, he gave a demonstration to the Italian king, Vittorio Emanuele III, showing how the station at Coltano (in central Italy) could connect with Italian colonies in Eritrea, as well as Ireland and Canada. Furthermore, earlier that same year (1911), Marconi travelled to Istanbul to demonstrate his wireless telegraphic system to the Ottoman Empire's Ministry of War in hopes of furthering his ongoing business with the empire. In this case, he lost out on his bid to the German Telefunken company.[56] But the failed bid suggests that Marconi's colonial ventures were driven less by patriotism than perhaps a relentless business drive.

Marconi travelled to Tobruk in eastern Libya in December 1911 to conduct experiments on wireless field communications in situ, then continued onward to Tripoli. On 11 December, Marconi wrote from Tobruk to his wife, Beatrice:

> I shall be a bit more busy at Tripoli with the new arrangement which I'm making them use for the field stations. As you know I tried the arrangement with the aerial wire on the ground in the desert and it seems to work awfully well. It's such a great advantage to be able to do without the poles and masts as these are very difficult to carry about, and show one's position to the enemy.[57]

These desert experiments affected Marconi's thinking in important ways, as they 'convinced [him] that the insulating qualities of dry ground allowed for great distances to be covered [by transmissions]'.[58] The physical topography of Libyan desert terrain offered an engineering testing ground, and one that apparently conferred immediate military benefits, since 'the poles and masts' were no longer necessary, making the Italians less visible to their enemies.

Marconi's stint in Libya was brief, lasting only a few weeks, but it significantly impacted his work, not only offering a test site for wireless telegraphy, but also spurring on new ideas about coupling wireless telegraphy with airplanes for war. In an interview with *The New York Times* a few months later, in March 1912, Marconi laid out this vision. Flanked by photographs of himself seated in an Italian military airplane and teaching Italian soldiers how

[54] For examples of Italian Futurism's centrality in sound studies, and especially in the history of noise and sound art within that broader disciplinary field, see Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999): especially 45–67, and Greg Hainge, *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013): especially 37–65.

[55] Marc Raboy, *Marconi: The Man Who Networked the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 328.

[56] Raboy, *Marconi*, 329–30.

[57] Raboy, *Marconi*, 332. It exceeds my scope here, but the development of wireless telegraphy (and of radio, as well) seems bound up particularly closely with landscape (or seascape) and topography throughout its existence (such as the tests at Lavernock Point in Wales or La Spezia naval base on the Italian coast). In any case, the desert itself plays a crucial role in these experiments.

[58] Raboy, *Marconi*, 329.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to use wireless, the printed interview included his speculations on (military) technologies more generally, predicting that 'the great mechanical advance of the next few years will be in perfecting and enlarging the aeroplane'. He then continued, blending an account of his experiences in Libya with his newly imagined military technologies:

> 'You know I have recently had some experience with aeroplanes. At the beginning of the Turco-Italian war I went to Tripoli to superintend the establishment of wireless telegraph stations for military uses. I made quite a number of trips in army aeroplanes. So that in talking of aviation I do not speak altogether as a greenhorn.
>
> 'One of the first things that must be done ... – and this was brought home very vividly to me in my flights over the Turkish camps in Tripoli – is that the engines need improvement. They are not reliable enough, they require too much of the aviator's attention.
>
> ...
>
> 'The aeroplane has demonstrated in Tripoli in usefulness for scouting purposes in wartime. But this usefulness would be greatly multiplied if its areoplanes [sic] could carry wireless telegraph instruments and operators so that information gathered on scouting trips could be instantly communicated to the operating forces.
>
> 'With the aeroplane and the wireless telegraph in their present respective states of development, my observations in Tripoli lead me to the conclusion that the latter is of more use in time of war than is the former.
>
> 'When the Italian warships bombarded the Turks, scouting parties equipped with wireless apparatus were sent ashore. The sending instruments that they carried were no bigger than that.' (Signor Marconi nodded toward a medium-sized traveling bag in a corner of the room,) 'and the masts and their antennae were no bigger than fishing rods. Yet with this apparatus the scouts sent messages five and eight miles – the range of modern naval guns.
>
> 'These scouting parties – Yes, I accompanied several of them' (this in answer to a question twice repeated) – 'would creep up toward the enemy's lines, sometimes getting within a mile of them, and report to the ships how their shots were falling. This is of inestimable use in long-range firing.'[59]

He then goes on to describe the 'happy fate' (presumably of his time in Libya) of thinking about airplanes and wireless telegraphy, imagining the 'development of an airship' with a wireless 'signal system' to allow such airships to 'speak' to each other.[60]

[59] 'Marconi Plans New Inventions as Useful as Wireless', *The New York Times*, 24 March 1912, Magazine (Section 6), 3.

[60] 'Marconi Plans New Inventions', 3. Marconi says (in full): 'There seems to be a happy fate in the coincidence of scientific discoveries which on first thought are quite unrelated to each other. The development of the airship would seem to have nothing in common with the perfection of wireless communication. And yet, if one looks into the future, the great airships which are to come, sailing at incredible speed and at unforeseen and varying altitudes, could never without the wireless "speak" each other [sic] as ships do at sea and so remain in touch with those safely at home. And more than this: if the aeroplanes increase in numbers and become the carriers of passengers, it may become necessary to establish a signal service along the aerial routes. It would, of course, be impossible to erect block signals and hang white, red, and green bull's eye lights in the heavens. If a signal system becomes necessary for the airship service, the gaps in space could only be bridged by wireless.'

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Marconi openly acknowledges his military 'superintending' work and seems to revel in having joined military flights and land-based 'scouting parties'. His mention of those telegraph reconnaissance groups adds another sonic dimension to the initial invasion as well. But his speculative coupling of aviation and wireless telegraphy is striking in part because he first conceptualizes it as a military technology, only later thinking about other forms of aviation such as commercial flights. We might thus augment the Kittler-Spivak theoretical dyad above with Marshall McLuhan's dictum that 'the "content" of any medium is always another medium'[61]: in other words, a communications technology is not only likely to be militarized, and to be militarized against colonial populations, but it will eventually be coupled with other militarized colonizing technologies for maximum impact.[62]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Marconi speaks indirectly about the implicit goal here: killing the enemy. (This circumlocution is not that shocking, given his ongoing entrepreneurial ambitions.) Such violence is instead reduced to high-minded descriptions of technical prowess (transmits up to eight miles, 'of inestimable use in long-range firing'). In stark contrast, a few weeks later the Titanic would sink. Wireless telegraphy was crucial in saving hundreds of lives and Marconi drew widespread acclaim for his lifesaving invention. Thomas Edison congratulated him by telegram, 'hasten[ing] to congratulate you upon the success of your beautiful invention – the wireless telegraph – and on the splendid work your system has done in saving human life in disasters on the sea'.[63] Wireless telegraphy had quickly become an unexpected arbiter of life and death in global political and commercial ventures.

Sonic Resistance I: Counterlistening, or Listening against Empire (and Phonographic Dogs)

Although the technological innovations that were part of the Italo-Turkish Wars were generally developed and held by the Italians, the Arab/Ottoman/Amazigh coalition drew on their own cultural techniques of resistance. Much as the Italians leveraged sound and its mediations for military and political purposes, so too the Arabs and their allies employed sonic techniques that bolstered their capacity for resistance. The remainder of this article focuses on three such techniques: 'counterlistening', ululation, and jihad. As mentioned earlier, I draw here particularly on the eye- and earwitness accounts of al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī, a Libyan historian and religious scholar, and of journalists such as Alan Ostler and George Frederick Abbott who were embedded with the resistance forces.

I begin with the technique of listening against empire, or what Gascia Ouzounian has called 'counterlistening'. She writes: 'Counterlistening is *listening against*: against unequal systems of power and uneven modes of exchange; against official and hegemonic narratives of events, histories, places, territories, groups, communities'. She continues, 'Counterlistening is listening against empire – against those who maintain it and "for" those who are subjected to its spectacular violence'.[64] Such acts of 'listening against empire' can

[61] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. Critical Edition* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994): 8. Originally published 1964.

[62] Charles Stephenson, who cites a portion of this same 1912 interview with Marconi, offers an interesting example of just such a technological coupling in future Italian military ventures in North Africa: so-called *compagnie auto-avio sahariane*, or 'integrated mobile air and ground units … for desert warfare' (literally: the Saharan auto-aviation company) that were deployed in the 1930s. Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, 230. Once again, the ecological component of these inventions, with a particular deployment in the Saharan desert, offers a reminder of unique, colonial topographies of media history.

[63] 'Marconi Cheered for Wireless Feats', *The New York Times*, 18 April 1912, 15.

[64] Gascia Ouzounian, 'Counterlistening', *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 42/2–4 (2020 [published 2023]): 311.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be found abundantly among the resistance forces to the Italian occupation, often in direct response to the Italians' own sonic techniques, as illustrated vividly in al-Zāwī's account of the resistance.

Al-Ṭāhir al-Zāwī was born in 1890 in a village, al-Ḥarsha, outside the town of Zawiya, and he received training in various fields of Islamic knowledge, including the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an at a young age, before joining the anticolonial resistance forces in 1911.[65] He later studied at Al-Azhar in Cairo, spending decades moving between Libya and Egypt, often as a political exile. Drawing on his own experiences in the war as well as accounts from other participants (including leaders of the resistance), al-Zāwī wrote a history of the anticolonial resistance in Tripoli, *Jihād al-Abṭāl fī Ṭarābulus al-Gharb* ('The Jihad of the Heroes in Tripoli'). The book was first published in 1944 in a very limited run, but was subsequently banned by the new government of King Idris in 1951, which was – in al-Zāwī's view – putting forward revisionist histories in schools and 'distorting the truth' by diminishing the 'national jihad' (*al-jihād al-waṭanī*).[66] He then published a second edition in 1970 after the 1969 revolution led by Muammar Qaddafi.

Like many of the accounts above, al-Zāwī discusses sound as both a literal phenomenon (e.g., cannon fire, bullets whizzing by, battle cries, etc.) and as a kind of metaphor for the chaos of war. For instance, in summarizing the stakes of the impending war, he writes, 'The people of Tripoli found themselves facing the roar of cannons and the buzz of airplanes' (*dawī al-mudāfaᶜ wa azīz al-ṭāʾirāt*), a literal auditory phenomenon. He then highlights how the first bullet fired in the war was 'a message of distress carried by the ether' (*risālat al-istighātha ḥamalahā al-athīr*) from Yemen to Morocco, drawing on a uniquely Islamic metaphor: 'the muezzin of the struggle made the call to prayer, "Come to the Arab victory!"' (*adhdhana muʾadhdhin al-kifāḥ ḥayya ᶜalā al-naṣr al-ᶜarab*).[67] Al-Zāwī's phrasing here has a clear connection to the language of the call to prayer (*adhān*), which exhorts its listeners to 'Come to prayers' (*ḥayya ᶜalā al-ṣalāt*) and 'Come to success' (*ḥayya ᶜalā al-falāḥ*). Through this sonic metaphor and its entanglement with the *adhān*, he frames the anticolonial resistance and the call to join it as pious acts.

I take these comments by al-Zāwī as part of a broader set of observations about resistance counterlistening: how the coalition resistance forces listened to the war and the Italians' sonic techniques, and, of particular note, how they listened in ways that countered Italian expectations (or at least hopes). Al-Zāwī's account of the back-and-forth battles over the oasis town of Ain Zara – discussed in the 'Prologue' of this article – highlights this kind of counterlistening. The Italians captured the city on 24 December 1911 and turned it into a strategic defence post, building a railway connecting it 15 kilometers northward to Tripoli and installing cannons and an army barracks on a hilly outcropping known as *al-raʾs al-ḥamraʾ* (literally 'the red head'). Al-Zāwī notes two sound devices employed by the Italians to defend themselves. First, after setting up a fence of barbed wire around the outcropping, they set up iron traps built into holes in the ground, which they lined with 'electric bells' (*ajrāsan kahrabāʾiya*) so that if intruders fell into them, they would jostle the bells and set them ringing.

In addition, al-Zāwī describes a second sound device deployed as part of the Italians' defence apparatus there:

> Among the things the Italians used to prevent being harassed by the mujahideen was to set up a device which had a sound like the barking of dogs [*āla lahā ṣawt ka-nubbāḥ al-kilāb*], believing that when the Arabs heard its sound, they would think it was dogs

[65] Al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl fī Ṭarābulus al-Gharb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fatḥ, 1970): 529–32.
[66] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 534–5.
[67] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 14–15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> barking at them, so they would stay away from them. The Arabs quickly realized this and understood that it was a trick meant to deceive them, because its sound was continuous and without interruption [*mutawāṣilan wa bidūn inqiṭāᶜ*], unlike the barking of dogs, which is not without interruption and periods of silence [*fatrāt sukūt*].[68]

Al-Zāwī gives no further explanation about what the barking device was, though it seems to be some kind of audio recording being played back, perhaps using the same gramophone technologies that George Frederick Abbott recounted hearing from the Italian camp in January/February 1912. But al-Zāwī is emphatic that these military sound devices and sonic techniques did not help the Italians at all, and by April, the resistance forces, which he calls 'mujahideen' (i.e., jihadists), retook Ain Zara, claiming as spoils 'telephone and telegraph devices' (*ālāt talighrāfiya wa talīfūniya*).[69]

In short, we see here counterlistening, or listening against empire and colonization, not so much as a broad conceptual practice (though it could certainly be that too), but as a concrete technique of listening, assessing, and responding accordingly within a very particular moment of colonizing warfare. Counterlistening functions here as a life-and-death technique for the resistance. And while the precise details of this barking-dog device remain unclear from al-Zāwī's account, he underscores how listening – and expectations of others' approaches to listening – was a crucial technique in this colonizing encounter. Audition was not just a contested practice between the two sides, but a domain to be acted upon by both sides as a conscious way of bolstering their power, and as such, a domain where the distinctions between colonizing and anticolonial forces became demarcated ever more clearly.

Sonic Resistance II: Ululation, or a Second Joan of Arc

Like counterlistening, ululation played a crucial role in the war as a sonic technique of resistance. Louise Meintjes's groundbreaking 2019 essay on ululating and the politics of sound in the global South and especially Africa defines ululating as 'a high-pitched trilling by means of oscillation of the tongue'.[70] She emphasizes its relational dimensions through sound: 'One ululates for or on behalf of', with the ululator 'acting in relationship to someone or something'.[71] She then elaborates further, framing the practice as (and more than) a technique:

> Ululation's defining technique is the oscillation of the tongue, using vocables rather than sung text. In ululation as a tongued body-voice performance, the sound producing technology is artful. The tongued body-voice is also the resonator, amplifier, and medium of distribution. In other words, the tongued body-voice is technology, technique, and techne (craft).[72]

[68] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 130.

[69] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 131. See also Abbott, *Holy War*, 257–258, discussed in the 'Prologue' of this article, for similar descriptions from the same general period (early 1912) in and around Ain Zara.

[70] Louise Meintjes, 'Ululation', in *Remapping Sound Studies*, edited by Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 62.

[71] Meintjes, 'Ululation', 63.

[72] Meintjes, 'Ululation', 64.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

She continues with a description that resonates strongly with this Libyan context ca. 1911: 'The tongued body-voice as technology embeds unique affective biographies and political histories in each utterance. It is always already gendered, raced, and implicated in struggle'.[73]

Accounts of the Libyan resistance to the Italian occupation tend to focus on men and their martial activities, but ululation (Arabic: *zaghrada*, pl. *zaghārīd*) is a key performative site for thinking about sound – and specifically, a 'tongued body-voice' – functioning as a relational and political technology/technique/techne that is not bound up in a Marconiesque sense of novelty or (marketable) invention. I am especially interested in the ululating of Selima, a woman from the town of Zawiya who played a prominent role in the Battle of Gargaresh (sometimes 'Gargarish' or 'Qarqarīsh') in January 1912. My narrative here draws heavily on two 'war ethnographer' journalists, Alan Ostler and George Frederick Abbott, following the more recent historical work of S.E. Al-Djazairi.[74] I also draw on al-Zāwī's history, especially for his reflections on the historical precedence and sociological force of women's presence in the resistance.

While not a clear-cut victory for the Arab and Ottoman forces, the Battle of Gargaresh marked an important turning point in stemming the Italian advance – and like so many of the battles in this war (and others), it was noisy. The whole conflict was set off by a small skirmish between the two sides, the report of which attracted the attention of the resistance camps: 'They [the resistance forces] were glad to hear the Italian guns crashing, for they knew that the noise would reach their friends behind faster than any courier, and serve as a signal for reinforcements. They were not disappointed'.[75] Animal sounds proved important too, especially in the Arab/Ottoman camp: 'In the crowd [preparing for battle], horses infected with the furious excitement of the riders, became almost unmanageable. The air rang with shrill squeals and neighings, and with the shouts and curses of the riders'.[76] Cannons, rifles, and cries of '*Allahu Akbar*' (God is the greatest) provided a constant sonic refrain.[77]

During the middle of the battle, Selima from Zawiya appeared on the scene, leading a charge into enemy territory with ululation. Abbott recounts (with a certain dismissiveness):

> And, as if their masculine ferocity was not enough, they [the Arabs] were incited to still greater feats of recklessness [such as charging into trenches] by the piercing voice of a vitriolic and frowning female from Zawia [sic], who, imperfectly clad in a dirty red-checked *ferejeh* and a dull brown cloak, had come with her husband to the fight, and ran beside him, flourishing a stick over her head, emitting shrill 'ulu-ulu-ulus!' pouring curses upon the enemy, and exhorting the holy warriors to do their duty. 'Be men!' she yelled. 'Do not behave like children. If you do not show courage, I will tell your wives!'[78]

Selima's capacity to shift in and out of semantic utterance – from ululating to exhorting fighters to be 'men' and not 'children' – is significant. Both forms of utterance seem to play

[73] Meintjes, 'Ululation', 65.

[74] See Alan Ostler, *The Arabs in Tripoli* (London: John Murray, 1912); Abbott, *Holy War*; and S.E. Al-Djazairi, *Libya: War of Independence (1911–1932)* (No location: MSBN Books, 2017). My account here draws attention to sonic elements from Ostler's and Abbott's firsthand accounts, which also feature prominently in Al-Djazairi's more recent history.

[75] Abbott, *Holy War*, 213.

[76] Ostler, *Arabs in Tripoli*, 200. On the sonic world of horses in nineteenth-century military conflicts, see also Hillel Schwartz, 'InConsequence: 1853–1856′, in *Hearing the Crimean War*, ed. Williams, 214–42.

[77] Abbott, *Holy War*, 214.

[78] Abbott, *Holy War*, 214–15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an important role in mobilizing the resistance fighters here. Abbott suggests her encouragement led to recklessness, but the Arab forces he describes hardly seemed to understand it this way, even if the results of their attack were not as focused as some (such as Abbott) might have thought ideal.

Abbott's commentary is complicated, simultaneously offering intimate glimpses of the resistance forces and drawing on sexist and racist tropes to characterize those forces. In his description of Selima, he briefly compares her to the Greek goddess Hera (presumably from her role in *The Iliad*), in part, apparently to belittle her physical appearance ('her nose was flat with expanding nostrils; her eyes deep-set and steady, but not beautiful; her chin square and strong, but not at all like that of a Greek divinity'[79]). Presumably Abbott thought his evaluations of Selima's physique would be meaningful to his readers; but despite his disparaging comments about her beauty (or lack thereof), it seems clear that she commanded attention of the men in camp, including Abbott.

Eventually Abbott bends his description from body to voice, once again dwelling on what he apparently deems to be unattractiveness, yet conceding her power as a de facto (if unauthorized) military leader:

> She was a massive female – broad of chest, broad of face, broad of speech; but she was as brave as a lioness. Her voice rang out louder than any bell. In her eye there was the glitter of an heroic flame; and in this battle she was 'decorated' with two Italian bullets, one of which went through her shoulder and the other through her left hand. … The Italian rifle bullets fell on the sand round them *pat-pat-pat* like a hailstorm, while the Italian shrapnel shells crashed overhead, showering lead upon them. The machine-guns rattled and the heavy cannon thundered. The Arabs yelled. Selima shrieked. It was hell with all its demons let loose. … The Arabs, spurred on by Selima's shrill exhortations, dashed forward, shouting, leapt into the abandoned trenches, and swarmed out again, firing.[80]

Abbott then recounts how after the battle, Selima, who had charged into battle with only a wooden staff, was given a rifle for her bravery – and fittingly, once again broke into ululation, causing the whole camp to call out in response.[81]

In some ways, Abbott's account here follows similar patterns to his counterparts on the Italian side: he uses a range of metaphors (lioness, bell, hailstorm, hell), revels in the sonic intensity (at least to some degree), and sometimes disparages the capabilities of the Arabs and their allies. However, he clearly takes seriously their potential for resistance, and he also sees the Arab/Ottoman force, including women like Selima, as participating fully in the sonic (and military) exchanges of war.

The intertwining of gender, race and voice (or the expectation of a lack thereof) plays an important role in Abbott's narrative. (Ostler, for his part, emphasizes this issue even further, as he notes repeatedly how unsure he was, observing from some distance, whether Selima was a man or a woman.[82]) Both authors seem beset by their Orientalist presumptions that an Arab woman should be beautiful and quietly seductive, rather than 'shrill' and physically powerful. Yet their accounts, however biased, document a crucial act of sonic resistance.[83]

[79] Abbott, *Holy War*, 215.

[80] Abbott, *Holy War*, 215–16.

[81] Abbott, *Holy War*, 217–18, with a similar set of events in Ostler, *Arabs in Tripoli*, 211–14.

[82] Ostler, *Arabs in Tripoli*, 215–16.

[83] Accounts of ululation appear repeatedly in war correspondents' reports, but Abbott, perhaps resulting from his musical-ethnographic writings, is particularly attuned to documenting the practice (see for instance Abbott, *Holy War*, 99, 127, 143 and 159, among others). Ostler writes much less but his account of riding out from a village on horses with the men while hearing the ululations of the women behind them captures something significant

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Al-Zāwī's account of this battle adds important details: it specifies at least one (and possibly two) other women who played similar roles and notes how their renown spread, while highlighting the fact that ululation, and women's presence in battle more generally, were a standard practice in the resistance (and beyond). He inserts two subheadings in his account: 'Courage' and 'Joan of Arc, the second'. In the 'Courage' section, he notes that women were also involved in battle, inciting the men to fight and providing other assistance with water, treating wounds, and so on. He also states that women's presence in battles is 'an old Arab custom' (*ʿāda ʿarabiya qadīma*) dating back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad.[84]

He then recounts the exploits of two (or perhaps three) individual women. He describes each of the first two as 'a black servant' (*khādim sawdāʾ*) and as '*shawshāna*', a term he clarifies as referring to those who had been enslaved by the Sudanese then freed, but who retained a collective identity after being freed.[85] The first was named Mabrūka al-Maqsiya and she had played an especially important role in the battles of Zanzur: 'She used to lead the mujahideen, urging them to face the enemy with her ululations [*zaghārīd*] and encouragement [*tashjīʿ*]'.[86] She was wounded in the thigh and was awarded a sword by Neşat Pasha for her bravery, which she then wore as she rode into battle.

Al-Zāwī is unsure of the name of the second woman, but thinks she may have been the same person dubbed 'Joan of Arc, the Second' by the international press. He quotes a French newspaper as describing 'an Arab girl' (*fatāt ʿarabiya*) who led the attack at Gargaresh, riding a black horse while wearing a brown robe.[87] Her left arm was wounded by shrapnel but she continued to urge her comrades on, causing journalists to circulate her story both in western Europe and in the Ottoman Empire. The descriptions seem close enough that Selima might be this new Joan of Arc, but whatever the case, al-Zāwī emphasizes that women's ululation at Gargaresh was part of a broader tradition across the war and in Arab and Islamicate history.

How then might we understand these practices of ululation by women in the jihadist resistance? Spivak famously asks, 'Can the subaltern speak?', but spends little time interrogating what *speaking* means in her formulation – that is, what kind of vocalizing or utterance might be entailed in (or precluded from) subaltern life.[88] Meintjes's conceptualizing of ululation as a technique of 'tongued body-voice' that sounds 'as and on behalf of the global South'[89] offers one possible answer: subaltern women's speech as such may not generally leave audible or legible traces in the colonial archive (as Spivak argues), but ululation suggests a realm of vocalizing that is simultaneously resistant and non-semantic, forceful yet flexible – and does (fleetingly) embed itself in those historical archives. As Meintjes writes, 'Ululation also erupts in political moments when women want to display communicative

(if perhaps overly romanticized) about the affective power of ululation: 'Women came out of the tent-doors as we passed, and sent up shrill, wild ululation; and at that moment, as my feverish stallion footed it like a dancer amongst the pools of blood, I understood with every fibre of my being the maddening exaltation of that cry. I understood the frenzy that stirs in the souls of the desert fighting men'. Ostler, *Arabs in Tripoli*, 121–2.

[84] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 122.

[85] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 122–3.

[86] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 122–3.

[87] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 123.

[88] Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 198–311 (an expansion on earlier versions of this essay). Amanda Weidman reconfigures the question, 'Can the subaltern sing?', implicitly pointing to the idea of utterance or vocalization in Spivak's work, but never explicitly engaging with questions of voice, vocality, or utterance, instead mostly riffing on Spivak's title and the broader idea of music among South Asian subalterns. Amanda Weidman, 'Can the Subaltern Sing? Music, Language, and the Politics of Voice in Early Twentieth-Century South India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42/4 (2005): 485–511.

[89] Meintjes, 'Ululation', 67.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

competence or get things done', highlighting the Algerian anticolonial struggle as a historical example.[90] In the anticolonial resistance in Libya, too, women 'get things done', whether directly or by spurring others on, through ululation.

As a final note, ululation in Tripolitania suggests continuities (if not necessarily solidarities) through gender that reached across ethno-religious lines.[91] Mordecai Ha-Cohen, the rabbi of Tripoli for the first decades of the twentieth century, noted multiple instances of ululation among Jewish women there, and indeed understood ululation as a tool of sonic reflection and broader cultural inquiry. For instance, when a wedding procession arrived at the groom's home, the bride was traditionally made to walk across shattered pottery shards and then throw an egg at a wall inside the home, all while accompanied by women ululating. Ha-Cohen pointed to the ululation to question whether the moment was really one of sadness (that is, for the loss of the Temple, as had been widely presumed) or happiness.[92] (Ha-Cohen heard it as signifying a 'joyous' response to the occasion.)

The rabbi went further, giving an example of ululation as a more explicit kind of media practice:

> Even though the women do not know how to pray, on Sabbaths and holidays a number of them stand at the entrance to the synagogue to look at the letters of the sefer Torah. When it is taken out [of the heikhal], they raise their palms upwards to pray for their well-being and that of their families. On the festivals, the women cry out [or ululate] joyously in honor of the sefer Torah: ru-ru-ru-ru-ru.[93]

Ululation here becomes a collective, affective response to the presence of certain sacred technologies, and thus an important technique in constructing those technologies. As such, this practice here can be seen as relating to Selima's performative resistance at Gargaresh: both are meant as affective vocalizations addressing the community in response to a kind of technological sublime, but Selima ululates to resist the technological imposition of the Italians while the women in Ha-Cohen's congregation embrace and celebrate their own community.

The multivalence of ululation here as a regional practice employed by both Muslim Arab and Jewish women also offers a useful reminder that local responses to the Italian occupation fell along a spectrum ranging from collaboration to outright resistance, with Jewish communities – many of whom already had connections to other Jewish communities beyond Tripolitania – generally being more welcoming of the Italians than their Arab

[90] Meintjes, 'Ululation', 68.

[91] While I focus on ululation across Arab and Jewish communities, here it seems quite plausible that figures like Selima and Mabrūka were perhaps not Arab, suggesting that some of the ululation in the Arab jihadist camps came from non-Arabs, whether from Amazigh women or others who joined the resistance.

[92] In Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 149. Rabbi Ha-Cohen also noted that egg-throwing was not uniquely Jewish, but rather something done by Amazigh women south of Tripoli. Goldberg summarizes, 'Ha-Cohen's questions make it clear that there was something at work in these local customs beyond their time-sanctioned Judaic explanations', thus necessitating further historical inquiry of local forms of Jewish practice as in Libya. Goldberg, *Jewish Passages*, 149–50.

[93] In Goldberg, *Jewish Passages*, 96. The brackets and bracketed explanatory notes here appear in Goldberg's original text, a translation of the original. Sefer Torah is a handwritten Torah scroll that plays an important role in religious rituals for the community in Tripoli (and elsewhere). The *heikhal* (literally 'ark') is a storage space for the sefer Torah when not in use.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

neighbours.[94] In this context, women's ululation techniques seem simultaneously to reinforce and blur the potential for anticolonial resistance through sonic techniques: ululation here was an affective practice that could both elicit an anticolonial response (as in the practices of Selima and Mabrūka al-Maqsiya) and articulate identities that did not map neatly onto the colonizer/colonized paradigms that predominated at the time.

Sonic Resistance III: Soundscapes of the Jihad

The other end of the spectrum was organized, armed resistance, most emphatically formalized as jihad, literally meaning 'struggle' but also suggesting armed conflict against occupiers or, crudely put, 'holy war'. In the past decade, scholars have begun to consider jihad not solely as a political or military movement but a broader cultural one as well, with particular emphasis on sung poetry, sermons, and the circulation of audiovisual media via cassette tapes or YouTube.[95] However, jihad does not depend on post-phonographic technologies. As I have suggested with regard to jihadist movements in the nineteenth-century North Caucasus, we might consider jihad more generally as a cluster of sonic techniques including both formal utterances (such as sermonizing, liturgical recitation, and sometimes a formal declaration of jihad) and less formal sonic elements (such as poetry, drumming in battle).[96] Following Faisal Devji's invocation of the 'landscapes of the jihad', we might similarly attend to the soundscapes of the jihad – that is, the sonic cultural techniques that characterize jihad and situate it in a particular geography, namely, Libya in this case.[97]

Even before the invasion, Italian officials expressed awareness – if also scepticism – that their actions would prompt a jihadist backlash. Carlo Galli, the head of the Italian consulate general in Tripoli, argued that the Arabs and other inhabitants would not fight with the Ottoman Turkish forces and victory would come easily. Writing on 19 August 1911, Galli wrongly predicted: 'Once we have overwhelmed the resistance of the garrison in Tripoli, the small garrisons will fall, nor should we fear in any case that there will be a call for holy war', reasoning that the coastal population would reject such a call because they understood European power, while tribes in the interior 'that might conceivably respond to such an appeal are poor, unarmed, or too distant to present any real threat'.[98] This assumption proved incorrect, and quickly so, as evidenced by accounts from al-Zāwī, the jihadist historian/cleric, and from Mohamed Fekini, a key tribal leader in the resistance.

As mentioned already, al-Zāwī suggests that as soon as hostilities broke out (that is, from the first bullet), a call went out among all Arabs – this was his metaphor of the *adhān* being

[94] Similar to the challenges noted above with respect to drawing clear distinctions between Arab and Amazigh identities and actors in this period, the question of the boundaries between Muslim/Arab and Jewish inhabitants of Tripolitania is complex, and has become even more so over the century since 1911. See Harvey Goldberg, 'Jewish Life in Muslim Tripoli in the Late Qaramanli Period', *Urban Anthropology* 13/1 (1984): 65–90, as well as Emily Benichou Gottreich, 'Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Maghrib', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98/4 (2008): 433–51.

[95] See Flagg Miller, *The Audacious Ascetic: What the Bin Laden Tapes Reveal About Al-Qa'ida* (London: Hurst, 2015); Elisabeth Kendall and Ewan Stein, eds., *Twenty-First Century Jihad: Law, Society and Military Action* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); and Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[96] Peter McMurray, 'The Revolution Will Not Be Telegraphed: Shari'a Law as Mediascape', in *Hearing the Crimean War*, ed. Williams, 24–58.

[97] Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). For my present purposes, I bracket the lively debates around the usefulness of the term 'soundscape' relative to other theoretical terms, but the most apt entry point for such discussion in an Islamic context remains Charles Hirschind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[98] Angelo del Boca, *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya*, trans. Antony Shugaar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recited – with a strong response from Egypt and Tunisia. Later in his history he goes further, observing that news of the Italian fleet's arrival spread around the country 'like electricity', with 'officials and dignitaries' urging people to volunteer for the jihad, and people responding to this call (*daʿwa*) and assembling in Tripoli before the Italians launched their attack on 3 October.[99]

Fekini similarly recounts in his memoirs that the Ottoman Empire called for jihad immediately and he gathered an army of fighters from the Jebel region in northeastern Libya. Strikingly, that process of assembly and procession had its own sonic accompaniment, as Fekini recounts: 'In the end, I was able to lead down into the prairies a great number of foot-soldiers and horsemen, to the sound of beating drums. We crossed through the regions of Zintan, Yafran, el-Azizia, and we finally reached Suani Ben Adem, which was the assembly point for all fighters'.[100]

The British war correspondent Bennett also writes about these kinds of assemblies, corroborating accounts of processions with drums, but also in tandem with ululation. He writes:

> The borders of our camp were continually enlarged during December [1911]. Contingents of Arabs arrived almost daily. A war-drum would be heard in the distance and gradually a column would appear over the gentle undulations of the desert. The Arabs, 'chattering like cranes', advanced in ragged fours, the result of the elementary drill provided by perhaps a couple of silent Turkish regulars marching with them. At the head of the column rode the sheikhs, splendidly mounted, and Crescent flags embroidered with Koran texts waved in the air. Amid loud shouts of welcome and the trilling notes of feminine joy the new arrivals would march round the camp.[101]

Once again, stereotypes seem to shape these narratives (silent Turks, Arabs chattering like cranes) but the basic narrative holds. Abbott, whose book-length account, *The Holy War in Tripoli*, foregrounds the question of jihad, recalls similar scenes of Arab columns approaching camp 'with a stupendous amount of noise, the minstrel shouting in a loud, long-sustained quaver, "Be sons of your fathers!" and the men vociferating back, "We are! we are!" ... Sometimes the contingent is accompanied by a red or green flag, which flutters over the warriors' heads'.[102] He also mentions ululation, but hears it as a kind of interactive vocal practice: 'The guttural yells of the strange warriors are answered by the strident voices of the local women, who creep out of their subterranean caves and stand on the heights, emitting their shrill ululations – a sound that seems to have a wonderfully stirring effect on the Arab male heart'.[103] Strikingly, in both these accounts by Bennett and Abbott, ululation seems to be part of jihadist vocalization, even if it is not intrinsically jihadist. In addition, not unlike how Marconi took advantage of the natural landscape to intensify his own signals, the women here appear to take advantage of natural forms of amplification for their own vocal practices.[104]

[99] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 14–15 (on the first bullet as a call to jihad), and 78 (on resistance forces gathering to Tripoli).

[100] Del Boca, *Mohamed Fekini*, 22. The precise beginning of jihad during the Libyan occupation is somewhat ambiguous. Fekini's memoirs have not been published, so we are left with only Del Boca's brief remark about Ottoman jihad. Arabs in Cyrenaica would declare jihad separately a few months later under the leadership of Ahmad al-Sharif, the head of the Sanusi Sufi order.

[101] Bennett, *With the Turks*, 173.

[102] Abbott, *Holy War*, 99.

[103] Abbott, *Holy War*, 99.

[104] Abbott includes another similar instance of new arrivals at a jihadist camp being greeted with ululation. Abbott, *Holy War*, 251. However, elsewhere he also criticizes the Turkish officers for not making a bigger show of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Much as ululations could take place during both these times of gathering and actual battles, so too with jihadist cries such as the *tahlīl* (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*, there is no god but Allah) and *takbīr* (*Allāhu akbar*, God is the greatest). Al-Zāwī personally fought in the Battle of al-Hānī (part of Tripoli) and his account highlights the sonic interplay of the battle:

> As dawn emerged and in a moment that only lasted a few seconds, voices grew hushed [*khashaʿat al-aṣwāt*] and breaths were held, and with the tongue of iron and fire, its noise filled heaven and earth [*wa-idhā bi-lughat al-ḥadīd wa-l-nār tamalaʾ ḍawḍāʾuhā mā bayna al-samāʿ wa-l-arḍ*], and the mujahideen rushed forward like a torrent .... The sound of the machine guns filled the space with a continuous din [*kāna ṣawt al-mudāfiʿ al-rashshāsha yamlaʾ al-fadāʾ fī ḍajja lā tanqaṭiʿu*], and the Italian soldiers fired aimlessly. Despite this fiery din, one soon heard the voices of the mujahideen calling on each another to advance with courage and enthusiasm, and the command went out from the [Ottoman] officers who made great effort so that the attack would be orderly, but they were few in number and so were unable to control the mujahideen. [As the conflict settled into the city] the sounds of *tahlīl* and *takbīr* could be heard there, and a fervour erupted [*fa-ishtaʿalat al-ḥamiyya*] in the hearts of some of the people, and someone charged his horse through one of the streets crying out with a loud voice [*wa-nādā bi-aʿalā ṣawtihi*], 'Jihad in the path of Allah!'[105]

Al-Zāwī concludes by describing the battle as 'a furnace of hell' (*atūn min al-jaḥīm*) where 'the only thing one heard was the sounds of mortars and the roar of cannons [*aṣwāt al-raṣāṣ wa-zamjarat al-mudāfiʿ*]'.[106] While the entire experience clearly was intensely multisensory, the literal utterances of jihad as simultaneously a battle cry and pious invocation were a central part of the sonic experience of the war for al-Zāwī and his comrades. His account also suggests that the affective intensities *produced* by these jihadist calls could lead to further vocalizations (e.g., the man who was inspired to ride his horse and cry out) as well as cause potential confusions or at least contestations (e.g., between the Ottoman officers and the Arab soldiers).

Unsurprisingly, there was more to the mujahideen's sonic experiences than battle alone; Abbott, for instance, also highlights other recitational practices of the gathered Arab armies. After sunset, they would light fires, eat, then serve tea, after which

> they squat round the glare and smoke of the wood fires chanting hymns. For hour after hour they sing either in antiphonal solos or in chorus. Sometimes one, standing up, chants out a sentence of prayer for success in the Holy War, and the rest chime in with the refrain '*Allah – Allah – Allah – Allah!*' swaying backwards and forwards with eyes bent on the flames .... The glow of the fire falls upon the stern, earnest faces, and the hymns float through the night air – a little picture of light and song framed by the dumb darkness of the desert.[107]

Bennett describes a similar scene: 'All night long groups large or small sit round a fire listening to stories – they are great raconteurs – or else joining in a monotonous chorus after

receiving the new Arab arrivals, and specifically for not encouraging Turks and Arabs to pray together publicly (198), suggesting limits to the widespread appeal of jihad and accompanying ululation – and indeed, a (potential) missed opportunity for cultivating yet another sonic technique of resistance/solidarity through communal prayers, given the shared body of Qur'anic recitation such prayers would have entailed. For an example of such sonic solidarity, see Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa*, 41.

[105] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 102–3.

[106] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 103.

[107] Abbott, *Holy War*, 103.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recitation of Koran texts by one of their number. This antiphonal chanting has a great beauty of its own in the comparative stillness of the night'.[108] While details are sparse, it seems possible that these groups are performing *dhikr*, literally meaning 'recollection' but more specifically a recitation of names and attributes of God, often performed as a ritual element in Sufi practice. There are also plenty of accounts of folk music and poetry in these journalistic accounts. Whatever the precise combinations of devotional vocal practices and other forms of entertainment, these evening sessions played an important part in the rhythms of daily life during the jihad in Tripolitania.

Furthermore, as a technique, jihad must spread – it must circulate. In al-Zāwī's history, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, he highlights his own role in a series of *wufūd*, or 'delegations' sent to invite other regional leaders and sheikhs at a later stage in the conflict with Italy (1920–1923). His first such delegation was intended to bring peace to warring local tribes but his latter two aimed to invite other leaders and tribes (such as Idris al-Sanusi, later King Idris of Libya) to join in jihad.[109] Similarly, Abbott's most extensive conversation of what he understands 'Holy War' to be comes after he meets a wandering jihadi fighter, Mohammed (Baba) el Kiani, who predicts a global jihad, contingent on people like himself travelling and communicating these ideas. In short, jihad is (among many other things) what a media theorist like Kittler might call a 'discourse network', a communications system with nodes allowing certain utterances to spread, especially to those attuned to receive and understand those utterances.[110] And indeed, amidst a multilingual coalition (Arab, Ottoman Turkish, Amazigh), the shared language – both literally and more figuratively – of Islamic theological thought, articulated in Arabic but widely circulating throughout other Islamicate contexts, might well have facilitated such a discourse network.

This final point about the circulation of jihadist declarations brings us back to the question of cultural techniques and their capacity to *produce* distinctions, such as that between (aspiring) colonizer and (potentially) colonized – or perhaps better put, between colonial and anticolonial forces. Both the ululations and calls to jihad (and, less directly, practices of counterlistening) functioned, among other things, to mobilize the anti-Italian coalition of Arabs, the Ottoman army, and other Libyan tribes. In doing so, they brought about the distinction between colonial and anticolonial fighters, a distinction that Selima's exhortations suggest was not entirely stable. That is not to say that anticolonial fighters were liable to join the Italian forces, though some such examples do appear, but rather that some inhabitants of Libya could have simply opted out of the fighting altogether. Without these sonic techniques of mobilization, there may not have been a meaningful resistance to speak of.

When contrasted with the Italian sonic techniques, which tended to be ostensibly more technologically 'advanced', these Libyan sonic techniques can be understood as both more traditional and also, perhaps, better suited to mobilizing a broad-based, popular insurgency. In other words, while wireless telegraph stations and phonographs may have helped coordinate formal military actions or boost morale among the Italians, they were not clearly more effective than these sonic techniques of colonial resistance. Sound both signals this technological gap between the two forces – though the Libyan coalition forces, as described above, showed themselves quite capable of deploying telegraphy, telephony, and so on – and draws attention to the illusory nature of such a gap. Counterlistening, ululations or jihadist vocalizing/drumming may not inflict casualties as directly as artillery fire, but insurgencies may thrive on precisely the presumption (held by occupying forces) that better technologies necessarily yield better results for the colonizer.

[108] Bennett, *With the Turks*, 177–8.

[109] Al-Zāwī, *Jihād al-Abṭāl*, 530.

[110] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Conclusion: The Poetics of (Anticolonial) Listening

As I have attempted to show here, the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–1912 was replete with sounds, and those sounds and the technologies that produced/received them played crucial roles in the war. Modern warfare becomes a cultural technique of sound and sonic media, as well as other technologies of seeing, moving, or some combination of those modalities. To conclude, I would note some of the second-order forms of listening that emerged from this conflict – that is to say, music, poetry and other writing *about* the war and its sonic qualities. I have highlighted accounts of war correspondents, many of whom were able to write quasi-ethnographic narratives to supplement the political or military details that one might otherwise expect in such writing. They were not the only listeners, and indeed, the legacy of this conflict, as mentioned above, is perhaps best known through the creative forms of writing by figures like the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio and, again, Marinetti, glorifying the speed and power of the invasion. These sentiments emerged in similar ways in popular culture. For example, one especially popular song of the day, 'Tripoli, bel suol d'amore' (Tripoli, beautiful land of love), included the refrain: 'Tripoli, beautiful land of love/this song of mine reaches you sweetly/... Tripoli, enchanted land, you will become Italian to the roar of the cannon [*al rombo del cannon*]'.[111] The song's lyrics succinctly emphasize the potent confluence of music, military technologies, martial sound ('the roar of the cannon'), and the colonial desire to possess.

At the same time, Libyan poets like Rajab Buhwaysh ('No Illness But This Place') and others also produced poetry about the conflict, but from a starkly different perspective.[112] Already in contemporary journalistic accounts like that of Abbott, we see traces of storytelling and minstrelsy incorporating the events around them into fodder for poetry ('What new quaint stories [a local poet] would have to tell of heavy cannon-shells dropping "*tlob, tlob*"').[113]

The majority of my narrative here has focused on Italian and Arab perspectives (often mediated, in both instances, through the writings of journalists). But Ottoman sources offer important insight too, and I conclude with one such perspective. İsmail Enver Bey (later Enver Paşa or Pasha),[114] who led the Ottoman forces in Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) and actively wrote letters during the war, demonstrates not just that there was sound, or even that those involved heard and acknowledged it, but also that they were actively reflecting on it. His writing from the time is replete with sound-rich moments, including the sounds of camels, people praying, cannon-fire, and so on. In a letter written 13 January 1912 to Maria Sarre, a female friend in Germany, he writes:

> An extraordinary cheerfulness rules in the camp tonight, and one hears monophonic Arab songs from every side, accompanied by clapping of hands. A Bedouin poet sings

[111] On poetry and song composed by Italians in response to the war, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia: Tripoli bel suol d'amore 1860–1922* (Rome: Laterza, 1986): 144–56, with this song text on 152.

[112] Muhammad Abo Sahal, 'Folksongs of Eastern Libya', trans. A. J. Thomas, *Indian Literature* 56/3 (2012): 227–44.

[113] Abbott, *Holy War*, 161.

[114] Enver Pasha ascended the ranks of Ottoman leadership, becoming War Minister in 1913. He is perhaps most infamous for his role in the Armenian Genocide (1914–1916). See Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, trans. Paul Bessemer (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006): throughout, but especially 143–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> a poem praising Arab bravery and he of course recounts the cowardice of the Italians, to whom the soil of this homeland will never be conceded.
>
> Across the way, young girls sing of the courage of a martyr, fallen on the field of honour during the last battle. And then one hears gunshots, fired by Arabs moved deeply by the war songs.[115]

In the midst of this lively clamour, he adds: 'For my part, I am sitting thinking about my accounts', and then proceeds to enumerate troops, supplies and costs for the past three months.[116]

In Enver Bey's telling, sound creates a space of listening, of thought, of counting, of performing poetry, of celebration, and so on. Notably, language and cultural distinctions *within* the Ottoman/Arab/tribal coalition are made visible. So too is gender, although perhaps in a counterintuitive way: women are present and are able to sing praises for the wartime heroes, highlighting nascent, oral forms of narrating the history of this conflict that were already taking hold in real time. The layering of these sonic techniques generates a particular sonic atmosphere that seems to explode, with gunshots layered over various recitations/songs scattered around the camp, interspersed with clapping, and so on. These traditional sonic techniques simultaneously have histories that predate this particular war and, again, begin to articulate this war's history through celebratory song composed to memorialize it.

Enver Bey shows self-awareness about his place in hearing, processing and transmitting these sonic experiences of war. Writing six weeks earlier while travelling to the front, he finds 'a moment of repose' to describe his travels. After struggling to do justice to the intense sensory experience, including having 'Arab women com[ing] out to shout a greeting to us' (perhaps ululating), he writes, as quoted in the epigraph to this article, 'I wished I could have been a gramophone and a photograph to capture the "Stimmung" [atmosphere] of this evening and send it to you'.[117] In mid-February 1912, he recounts another victorious moment marked by a sudden beating of drums, women exclaiming cries of joy, and the poets of the local tribes composing and singing war songs about Enver himself.[118]

However idiosyncratic or self-serving Enver Bey's narratives of these sonic experiences may be, he offers a particularly self-conscious reflection on what it means to listen in this context, and what it means to try to convey that listening to others. In the first narrative I shared above, he as a listener sits apart from the music and poetry, thinking about other things; in the next, he wishes to embrace his auditory experience entirely, becoming a gramophone; and in the final instance, he himself is subsumed sonically into those first, real-time poetic accounts of the war. We might say that his narratives underscore how the sonic techniques of colonial resistance in Libya (and of war more generally) might extend to the techniques of documenting and retelling those sonic experiences – that is, how those techniques readily extend from auditory *history* to auditory *historiography* – whether in the ears and voices of Enver Bey, foreign journalists, young women singing, Libyan praise poets, or a historian like al-Zāwī.

---

[115] Enver Paşa, *Kendi mektuplarında Enver Paşa*, ed. M. Şükrü Hanioğlu (Istanbul: Der Yayınları, 1989): 109. For an earlier publication of these letters, translated from French into German, see Enver Pascha [Pasha], *Um Tripolis*, trans. Friedrich Perzyński (Munich: Hugo Bruckmann, 1918): 34–5.

[116] Enver Paşa, *Kendi mektuplarında Enver Paşa*, 109; Enver Pascha [Pasha], *Um Tripolis*, 34–5.

[117] Enver Paşa, *Kendi mektuplarında*, 96.

[118] Enver Paşa, *Kendi mektuplarında*, 116.

Cite this article: McMurray Peter, 'Sonic Techniques of Colonization and Resistance: Libya 1911–12', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 22/3 (December 2025): 412–440. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409825000072 Published online by Cambridge University Press