Politics of Listening: Soundscapes from Ramallah, Palestine



Ramallah. 2020.



Jericho Dessert. 2020.

INTRODUCTION

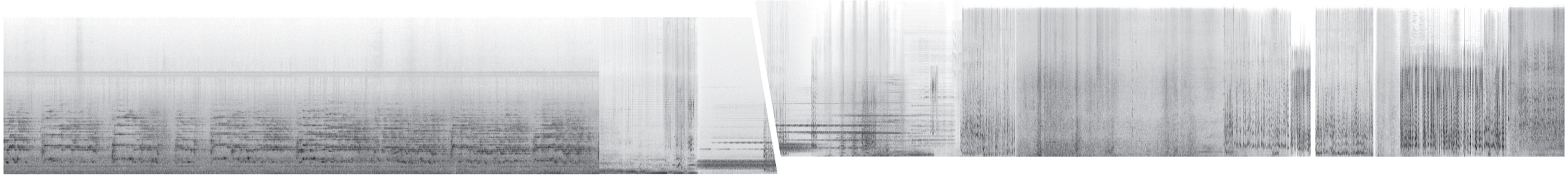
“Soundscapes from Ramallah, Palestine” is a 51 minutes hybrid audio piece between a radio feature and soundscape composition. It contains raw and processed field recordings that are being combined with interviews by people who are living or once lived in the area of Ramallah to narrate and question the soundscape of the city and its changes due to the political situation and the continuously changing reality. It is a research on the topics of listening, soundscapes and politics, specifically on the Politics of Listening: Soundscapes from Ramallah, Palestine. An understanding of the politics of listening of any place and time will assist the listener of a soundscape to perceive it not just as a sonic environment but as the dynamic imprint and an evidence of the social and political daily changes of our world and the way we listen to it; it is the way that we (re)define our views on the power structures.



Ramallah. 2019.

ANALYSIS

SPECTROGRAM



ISRAELI
CHECKING
POINT

SOUNDSCAPES

BORDER RESONANCES
26:47:311-32:05:593

* composed sound

CROSSING THE BORDER
24:39:772-26:47:311

CAFE
49:15:359-50:45:601

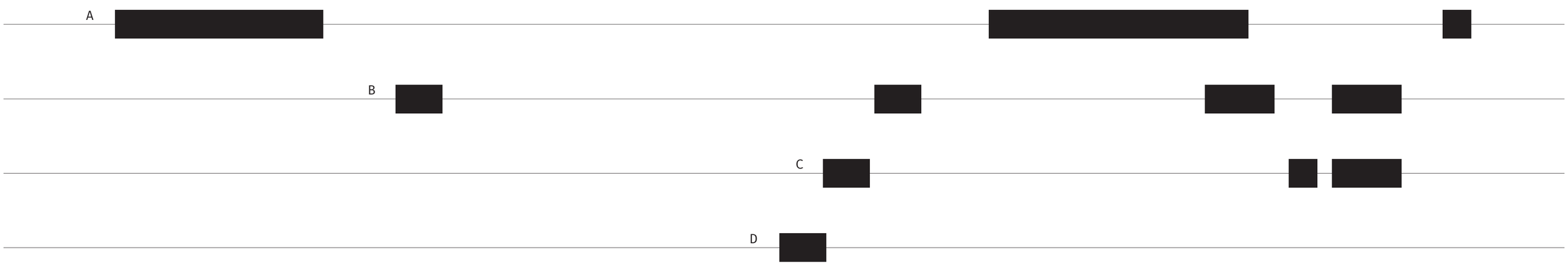
MARKET
48:42:560-49:10:359

NIGHT SOUNDSCAPE
02:26:711-08:02:933

15:21:424-24:43:352

DAY SOUNDSCAPE
38:42:500-46:32:325

INTERVIEWS



TRANSCRIPTS

A **[00:01:47.12]** There is a big, and a strong relation between sound and the surrounding and structure. So whenever I hear a sound, I try to imagine or find out where does that come from? Is an open area. Is there a modern place? Is it in in a hole? In a school? And, you know, I try. Always imagined I put an image to draw an image in my brain, in mind, in my head. Where that sound comes from. What's the structure of that place? This is what I'm trying to think always. You hear a sound. You immediately start to build an image, in your understanding in your brain.

[00:06:02.32] You can not believe in something, but you still like it, like, you know, I like very much.

[00:06:08.35] For example, what they called, you know, in the tradition of Islam, what they call the tajwid. Did you do. No, the word tajwid. Tajwid is the origin is a kind of singing that comes from the Byzantine on chant from the Byzantine The church actually. Later on the Islamic tradition took this and they implemented on the way that they read the Quran, you know, and it becomes the tajwid.

[00:06:46.05] You see it. Seventh century, century or 6th century. This develop, actually. And we have very important and be Byzantine tradition.

[00:06:58.39] And I think in Greek is the same Greek language, Greek music, for example, and Arabic music is all you know. So, you know, when I hear the Buzuq and the Oud certain phrases is just a really. Of course. I mean, for me, Greek music. When I say Greek music, I cannot not think about Theodorakis because Theodorakis is not only musician for me is a symbol of..., because the things that he did of course. And his position, as you know, a great person, you know. And and we knew Theodorakis very early. You know that. By the way, Theodorakis like today, the national the Palestinian national anthem is the music by Theodorakis. Yeah. [I didn't know that]. Of course. Of course. Later on they put words on it. But it was a melody that he wrote, Fida'i It's called, you know.

[00:07:59.13] [singing the melody]

[00:08:02.82] This is a melody by Theodorakis orginally. He dedicated this melody to the Palestinians in the 80s. I think at beginning of eight 80s. End of 70s.

[00:08:14.64] And, you know, they took it and they put words for it and becomes the Palestinian national anthem. At that at that period, you know, they were of the left and the Communist Party and the word and there were lots of support to the Palestinian cause was the scene was. Of course. Of course. Of course. And still, the left at that period was very important, had an important role in Libya and, for example, have many coalitions with with many comrades, everywhere in the world in Greek(Greece). And Ireland and, you know, it's it's it was it was an international movement, actually. And the Palestinian cause was seen as an international leftist movement. Absolutely. So there were lots of solidarity accepted. So later on, we became terrorists. [Laughing] And so. But yeah.

[00:09:08.71] But I guess was was. Yeah. But. But but for me, the so. So the Adhan this experience of the Quran.

[00:09:16.20] You know, I it's it's funny because this, this is something that we used to hear all the time.

[00:09:26.78] And we didn't have any connection or in our conscious we did not connected this to any kind of political Islam. You know, it's funny how later on this start, connotation we start to do a connotation we started to [to to] relate this actually to the political Islam, you know. And for me, it is not fair, you know, for me, you know, it. So it doesn't matter.

[00:10:01.02] I mean, the tajwid is like for me today, for example, I love the Gregorian chant. Yes. You know, I really find it fascinating, not because I believe in this or I have the faith of, you know, but aesthetically, musically. Absolutely. Absolutely.

[00:10:19.20] For me, tajwid is the same. You know, I can listen to tajwid for hours and hours is amazing. For me, it's it's that is the power.

[00:10:29.73] And that is that is that is you know, I like the language is just, you know, very sensitive and very touching and very, you cannot just you don't listen to Quran. You know, it doesn't matter who you are, believe it or not. Believe it. But you cannot. Let's listen to Koran and you just pass. It is not possible. You know, especially if you know the language. So when this text is sung between bracket by the people who do the tajwid, it becomes a really sublime. Exactly. Exactly. You know, so for me, this is this is important experience.

[00:11:15.99] You know, listening to the you know, Adhan in Ramallah at that period. And I found it problematic later on how we connect this to the political Islam.

[00:11:31.56] Because because because for me, I mean, political Islam is I can't I can't imagine, you know, that that one day the political Islam will control politically and I will do my best to not allow this to happen.

[00:11:57.46] Actually, it's. No. So but at the same time. And this is and this is. And I now realize later on that it's unfair. And we have to try to to to classify this sound experience and to separate it in our conscious. From this, you know, because we are affected as well with things happening around us. On the TV, on the media, on social media, in our daily discussions and our readings of the political Islam literature, because we do read them as well. You know. And I refused. You know and I do my best, like when I listen to this Adhan not to connect it directly to political Islam. And I find it troubling that somehow they managed to make me do this connection. And I'm struggling. When I listen to Quran to separate these experiences, you know. And it is funny how I like to see this sound experience. What does it provokes?

B **[00:17:59.33]** Actually, because this kind of sound is a common sound. So it's not easy to describe or to figure out that this sound comes from Ramallah itself. You know, because for a moment, you have a feeling that this is not only in Ramallah maybe it is Jerusalem, in Al-Aqsa mosque or in any other place surrounded with these minarets where that sound comes. I mean, the play of sound, when they call that they are calling for sound for the prayers.

[00:18:35.04] It's a spiritual feeling, to be honest. Especially for us and for me, because I am a Muslim and because I understand the language, it's much more closer to me because, you know, everyone has something his in his own knowledge. So I refer all that to my understanding, to the way that I raised up and to the way that I educated. And in the atmosphere that I am living in. So for me, it's a warm feeling as a person. It's it gives me a warm feeling, feeling and makes me very close to the atmosphere.

D **[00:28:13.55]** Was she wearing military or. I think this is what does create the tension. Like I thought of it when I'm listening to the airport before you went in and I was thinking of, like, why it's tension. And I remember whenever I go to from Damascus to Lebanon, from Damascus to Jordan, it's always like military checkpoints. Even from like both sides, from this side or that side.

C **[00:29:13.59]** If they were taking control over a checkpoint and they were fully dressed up with weapons and so on, they're definitely the Israelis.

B **[00:30:21.11]** You've brought me back for a long time. And what I explained to you. I'm trying to imagine the image of that time because I'm in my mind now while I'm talking to I tried to combine between the things that I'm telling you and the feeling itself that I felt at that time and the image and everything that I saw at that time.

A **[00:32:33.40]** I was a teenager in the beginning of the first intifada, you know. So I lived. The first intifada I lived.

[00:32:42.29] I, um, I think I am lucky to be in the generation. Were not always I don't feel always this, that's problematic. But to live the two periods like during the first intifada or the first intifada in 1987. And the second phase, which is after the Oslo agreement, 1993, is a major historical date for the modern or the contemporary history of the Palestinians actually, after Oslo. Yeah. So before Oslo and After Oslo. Now, in 1987. That's really interesting because for me, I mean, first of all, visually, everything was different, you know, not only on a sound level. You know, you don't have all these tours and all these fancy Cafes. Now, look, we are here. And yeah. I know it's like anywhere in Europe, actually, we are part of this modernity or globalized.

[00:33:44.79] And and this goes back to sounds, you know, and during that period, like, you know, like, for example, the sound of, you know, and this is this this might be interesting to do it. I mean, with my friends in the neighbourhood where it used to be, you know, which is not very far from here, by the way, we heard always like every day there is shooting and there is.

[00:34:11.29] Yes. And there is you know, we used to throw stones, all of us, to have the generation of stone. So we used to go to Manara and put wheels and burn wheels, whatever and start. And the Israelis will come at the first as first stage of the demonstration. I was 14, 15 and everyone start throwing stones on the soldiers at the beginning. They start with tear gas. Now, this is the interesting part now from the sound we used to know as kids, 14, 15, 16 through the sound. Which kind of bullet is this? You know, like I could tell you when I was 15 or 16, if this is a gass bomb or a plastic bullet. Now, what happened is that the Israelis at the beginning, the soldiers I mean, they throw bombs, gas bombs. You're not okay. Disturbing little bit. But everyone now, I don't know. Find out way. You're not you had an onion or something. It helps you put the water on it. You know, there are different techniques, and then start with rubber bullets or whatever. But I mean, half an hour or an hour later, they start with live bullets. And they when they start with live bullets, that means they are started to get pissed off, you know, and then we know that it becomes serious through the sound, only like we could tell how is the sound of real bullets, you know, and then we start to go back, you know, and all this goes go through the sounds. You know, later on I thought about it how, you know, like we were just kids who were kids. Fourteen, fifteen, fourteen, fifteen.

[00:35:59.89] Now, for me, the most horrible sound that I ever heard in my life, this was, you know, was when Ramallah was bombed. This was after Oslo. You know, When Arafat was this famous period when when they had to invade or recolonized Ramallah again. You know, in March and April 2002, When Araffat was on his compound and army everywhere the it was, a CNN live everywhere. I don't know if you remember that period, but I do remember that period very well because it was a very heavy period. Now, at that period, for the first time, for the first time, I do witness my parents, witness bombarding from the planes before in 67, you know, in 67, my mother from Bethlehem was living in that land. They she had experienced it but for my generation. It was the first time I experienced the sound of bombing by by an F-16. This was like this. I mean, I like for me, it is difficult to experience, like by words this experience. It is just shocking.

[00:37:28.48] It was just it was just like a fantasy. It was like just a dream. It was just like it was just, you know.

[00:37:38.02] And they they they I remember very well.

[00:37:40.45] I mean, many times at that period, they were also like bombarding by the Apache helicopters.

[00:37:49.55] [I've seen the video.] Of course, the Apache I saw I saw the Apache will go. I know. And they did do this sound like you hear that the missile is going and you wait after. You hear the explosion. You know, this was done, but the F-16. I mean, the flight, it's it's another experience. It's just do an unbelievable sound. It is just.

[00:38:21.79] Wow, you know, impressive. The sound. So I imagine. So I always like to tell myself at that period. How, how, how. I mean, imagine, like, once very few, few times happened this. Imagine people in Iraq.

[00:42:12.42] For me in in the first intifada until 1993 is, for example, what that experience Curfews. I mean, the sounds of ambulances was something, you know, like you hear an ambulance, you know, that this demonstration or someone has been shot.

[00:43:19.59] And yeah, it was very horrific let's say because anyone was expecting that the Israeli army would invade his home and will mess and and destroy everything because they happened that they went to many places. And let's say play with things without any reason.

[00:43:44.24] I remember this very well, like, you know, for example, at seven thirty in the morning or eight. We are ready to go to school and up. Suddenly we hear the jeep and all shouting with a loudspeaker. It's a curfew. And I remember, like, it was, like, horrible. He had an audible Arabic accent. And like. He used to say midnight, the Joel had that shot, and it's forbidden to move until the second announcement or something like this.

[00:44:26.07] And who breaks this law will be punished. And this phrase was like for years and years and years and years. And our is really I mean, you know, for me, this is until today, it's like major for me. This represents part of the sounds of the first and Intifada.

B **[00:45:11.36]** I remember that day at that time. It's like a ghost city because we were very close to each other. Even if you want to go to your neighbour, you can't go in there evening and you have to jump or go between tiny wholes or close to the wall, because the wheels were [inaudible] tanks and their jeeps. Well, in the dark, they turn off the engines and the lights, so they sudden attack, anyone they saw in the street. So it was not easy to go outside and, you know, for us. And at that time, I was also a young guy.

[00:45:47.69] I am still, of course. [laughing]

[00:45:53.36] So it was not easy to go outside. And anytime if you want to go, you you are attacked and for us because we were teenagers. We can help things at home between four walls. We have to go outside. See friends. You know how you like to do so.

[00:46:15.24] It wasn't easy, especially at night. In the day. We didn't see anything. Sometimes we see tanks or jeeps making, patrolling in the neighborhood because my house, my family house was very close to the main street. So we can see them from the balcony.

C **[00:46:48.44]** Everyone is running just only two hours or three hours in maximum, and everyone wants to go to buy food, gasoline, if he needs anything for the house.

B C **[00:49:31.31]** Two hours and after that everything is escaped, everyone is disappeared. Everything strange. In one moment, you see that everything is full. And in the next moment and you see that totally empty and everything is vanished.

A **[00:50:08.09]** This experience is for me, the sound was, you know, yeah, it just completely political. Politics here and this is very important.

[00:50:17.65] I think politics here is something like in terms of that, that's why the definitions is [are] important.

[00:50:23.33] You know, politics, it means this. This is not something that's happening on an official level, it is happening on the ground, like passing the checkpoint. For me, it is a political experience. All this sound experiences, it really defines many things in our consciousness and understanding of life here. And, you know, it's like we begin like, you know, like animals in that in that in the forests, you know, they sound is important science for them.