Colloquy

FEMINIST SOUNDWORK IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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In today's media-saturated world, sound becomes a site of struggle where power shapes what is heard as reason and what is silenced as noise. In this changing aural context, the role of researchers is also changing: the sounds of struggle are increasingly interconnected, as our homes, histories, and everyday spaces shape our scholarship, blurring the lines between fieldwork and daily life. Feminist scholars and anthropologists account for these blurred boundaries by inviting researchers to carefully consider not only what we study but how we listen. This Colloquy practices feminist homework (Ahmed 2017; Visweswaran 1994)—quite literally, the practice of integrating our "home" into our "work" and fields of study—through cultivating a "feminist ear" (Ahmed 2017; Sundar 2023) in how we listen to and produce sound. By studying through listening and sound production, we engage in what Pavitra Sundar (2023, 9) describes as "soundwork," a method that allows cultural currents to resound as markers of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nation. Together, feminist homework and

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, Vol. 41, Issue 4, pp. 765–775, ISSN 0886-7356, online ISSN 1548-1360. Cultural Anthropology *is the journal of the Society of Cultural Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association.* Cultural Anthropology *journal content published since 2014 is freely available to download, save, reproduce, and transmit for noncommercial, scholarly, and educational purposes under the Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 license. Reproduction and transmission of journal content for the above purposes should credit the author and original source. DOI: 10.14506/ca41.4.01*

soundwork support a practice of care rooted in listening to what is unheard, inconvenient, or institutionally silenced. This practice proves at once critical and utopian, guided by the work of contextual interpretation and by spontaneous bodily reactions to sound that seek and embrace pleasure. Listening intuitively, through the body, embracing differently and culturally situated sensations, has the capacity to produce knowledge against the grain (Kheshti 2015, xviii). The feminist approaches to knowledge production explored in this collection are attuned to the margins: carefully listening to quiet refusals, overlooked complaints, embracing differently situated pleasures and the stories suppressed by dominant narratives. *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology* practices this attunement among scholars listening to, editing, and producing sounds. In so doing, we find resonance among scholarship in intersectional approaches to sound studies, feminism, and anthropology.

This Colloquy comprises a collection of five unique sound projects edited and produced by anthropologists, each of which incorporates recordings, archival sounds, curated sounds, AI-manipulated sounds, and voice notes, among other autoethnographic elements. Each of these anthropologists in different ways draw on intersectional feminist practices in their soundwork. We recommend approaching this Colloquy by first reading this introduction and then listening to each sound piece before turning to the essay that accompanies each project. Listening before reading allows a more immediate, subjective, and personal response to the sound projects. Reading afterward—and possibly listening again—can deepen attunement to the context in which the sounds were created and the ethnographer's intention in editing and producing each piece. As each contributor to this collection is doing the listening, recording, and editing of their respective sound projects, this Colloquy contributes to a multimodal methodology for media production.

FEMINIST AND MULTIMODAL SOUND PRODUCTION

For feminist anthropologists and scholars, leading a feminist life means staying informed and vigilant at home as much as in the field (Ahmed 2017; Bolles 2013; Visweswaran 1994). As these scholars demonstrate, being a critical, embodied researcher is not just about studying and critiquing within our fields and regions of study. A feminist approach in sensory ethnography foregrounds uniquely embodied subjectivities to reconfigure knowledge production from the margins rather than from the center (Guzman and Hong 2022, 186). Bringing these intersectional feminist critiques "home" means "casting a critical eye" into

the offices, meetings, and classrooms of habitual academic practice (Bolles 2013). Such feminist practices hold the potential to disrupt the conventional boundaries between ethnography and knowledge production, both within and beyond academic disciplines. Today, these boundaries between "home" and "the field" have become increasingly fluid. Sound projects in this collection are produced by anthropologists who reflect on personal histories marked by migration, diaspora, refugee experiences, and the continual movement demanded by the precarious academic job market. As the boundaries of ethnographic practice become increasingly fluid, and as sound is at once ephemeral and resonant, themes of movement echo across the projects in this collection. From a Romanian grandmother's song held close during years of refugee flight and migration (Mihai, this issue), to the multiple languages and places evoked in personal voice notes (Stock, this issue), this collection is attuned to diverse embodied experiences of doing ethnography today.

Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology further destabilizes categories of *home* and *the field* (Visweswaran 1994) through a practice of soundwork in each of these sound projects. As Sundar (2023, 9) defines it, soundwork allows one to listen from the complexity of their own position while also naming how cultural currents "resonate as markers of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nation." This collection brings Sundar's conceptualization of soundwork to ethnographic practices of multimodal sound creation. We achieve this by listening to, recording, and editing sounds—and silences—that attune us to the interconnected struggles that are far away and long ago, as well as to those that located nearby—in our neighborhoods, backyards, and kitchens. We do this work collectively—reflecting, listening, and collaborating through sound projects—and through the writing of each essay presented in this Colloquy.

Soundwork also draws us back to the notion of homework as a cornerstone of feminist ethnography. Drawing on Kamala Visweswaran, Lynn Bolles, and Sara Ahmed, this collection understands *homework* as the feminist and decolonial labor of turning the gaze inward. Homework reframes "home" as a site of power and complicity (Visweswaran 1994) while revealing how race, class, gender, and colonial histories shape the space in which we live and work (Bolles 2013). While home can represent the comfort and care of one's familial home, Ahmed (2017) challenges the notion of home as a stable space of comfort and familiarity, instead framing it as a site shaped by discomfort and exclusion. She highlights how being "at home"—whether in an institution, a discipline, or a personal space—often involves confronting the ways in which these spaces reproduce inequality

and marginalization. For Ahmed (2017), "homework" signifies the ongoing labor of making visible how power operates, particularly by exposing and challenging the often-unmarked whiteness embedded in institutions, disciplines, and subjectivities. This collective embraces *homework* as a critical and reflexive practice by listening to and producing sound that analyzes and disrupts power in the everyday. Building on feminist homework, this collection's ethnographic soundworks are produced through practices of "listening with a feminist ear" (Ahmed 2017; Sundar 2023) and intuitive sound editing.

The ethnographic production of sound is indebted to the "soundscape" as a medium and a literature that has created space for experiencing sound as "a way of knowing" (Feld and Brenneis 2004; Schafer 1993). Within this literature, this Colloquy engages most closely with contributions to intersectional feminist sound studies, including scholarship by Roshanak Kheshti (2015), Allie Martin (2025), and Pavitra Sundar (2023). These intersectional approaches theorize listening to sound as nonlinear, sensorial, embodied, and imbued with gendered, classed, and racialized histories—subjective experiences that contour which sounds are "heard," by whom, and in what ways. Important interventions in the field of sound studies have critiqued extractive tendencies in soundscape production. Notably, Mark Wright (2022) calls on scholar-practitioners to position themselves as listening *with*, rather than listening *to*, the communities and contexts of ethnographic sound recordings. Our Colloquy draws most from intersectional feminist scholarship that posits listening, recording, and editing sound as subjective, embodied, and sensorial. We build on this scholarship by utilizing community-based and autoethnographic methods not only in listening to but also in editing and producing sound.

LISTENING, EDITING, AND PRODUCING SOUND WITH A "FEMINIST EAR"

The intersectional feminist sound studies engaged in this *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology* resonate with ethnographic approaches to editing and producing. Specifically, Elena Guzman and Emily Hong (2022) call for a "feminist sensory ethnography" that deliberately departs from observational practices rooted in objectivity, factual authority, and detachment. Their approach acknowledges that media is both produced and received through differently situated and abled bodies, and can be shaped by the traumas of anthropological audio-visual traditions that romanticized, othered, and racialized the ancestors and cultures represented. Conceived as a "politics of necessity," feminist sensory ethnography

(Guzman and Hong 2022), like feminist sound studies, foregrounds embodied, relational practices of care among makers, participants, and audiences through film, and as we argue here, also through sound. Foregrounding the embodied and the relational provides experiential knowledge in feminist soundwork. Drawing knowledge from her own embodied experience, in the soundwork titled *Tuning In*, Laura Menchaca Ruiz (this issue) articulates her intersectional practice as one that holds her experience at the U.S. Southwest border, where she grew up, alongside what she sees when Palestinians are harassed and humiliated at Israeli checkpoints in Bethlehem, where she lives and works. As a consequence, the space between "home" and the "field" can come together by theorizing sensorial experience. Extending Guzman and Hong's (2022) framework of care and relationality, *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology* shifts ethnography's primary register from the visual to the auditory to further unsettle the boundaries between home and field, as listeners will experience.

To be clear, sound and listening are not distinct practices. Sound is not separate as a technology from other audiovisual mediums, just as listening is not a form of attention separated from other senses. While our orientations are grounded in the sensorial in feminist anthropology, sound as a medium and sound production as a practice are not inherently feminist. Rather, it is through employing feminist methods that sound—or any audio-visual multimodal medium—can become a feminist practice. The production of sound (and photos, and films) in anthropology historically purported scientific objectivity, reflecting colonial practices in ethnography through the presentation of findings from the "field" in institutions at "home." Historically, ethnographic media productions were presented in museums, cinemas, theaters, and exhibitions far away and inaccessible to the people and places represented. In many cases, a misrepresentation or a lack of appropriate context presents dangers to those represented (MacDougall 1997; Rony 1996). Ethnographic soundscapes were regarded as direct accounts of cultural practices, carrying "the lure of authenticity" fetishized by anthropology through the technological advances of the moment (Trinh 1983, 59). Sound as an archiving endeavor produced salvage ethnography anxiously driven by notions of "sonic fidelity," or, in other words, the use of new sound-recording technology with the goal of most accurately capturing sounds as heard by ethnographers in the field (Kheshti 2015).

Listening carefully proves all the more important during these times of "AI slop," where more and more podcasts and news recaps are produced as synthetic voices distilling global events and superficial social and political commentary.

It comes with an enormous environmental cost that most heavily impacts poor, marginalized, and Indigenous communities. When we began this collective sound project in 2023, AI and sound occupied a different place than they do today. One sound projection in this collection, *Academic Freedom* (Nesvaderani, this issue), used text-to-voice AI-generated voices to anonymize the stories of activist professors—a process first discussed with participants. Although the names of participants were not input into the software, in today's context, an added caution would center around how that text content will be used to feed future AI training, which was less of a consideration three years ago. Overall, the soundscape of AI slop is characterized by low-fi sounds and apolitical stories that promote passive listening for an uncritical processing of sounds and ideas. Feminist listening encourages the opposite.

Feminist scholars give us in particular a concept of listening as a practice cultivated over time. These scholars analyze what is listened to, as well as how it is heard. Through her sound production (Martin 2019) and through her analyses of how sound is heard (Martin 2025), Allie Martin demonstrates how certain forms of "not-hearing" themselves constitute acts of social and racial erasure. A. M. Kanngieser (2023, 699) analyzes how dominate modes of listening are shaped by "sonic colonialities," or in other words, Anglo-European ways of sensing and interpreting the world. They listen with the sound practices of Black, First Nations, and Indigenous artists and scholars to interrupt Anglo-European modes of listening and instead become attuned to sound "with a spirit of curiosity and repair." In her critical study of non-Western music production, Kheshti (2015) argues that listening practices are embedded in colonial and imperial histories. Analyzing Zora Neale Hurston's field recordings (1933–39), Kheshti reframes Hurston's interventions as the refusal of ethnographic co-optation of sound that aims to produce sonic fidelity. Kheshti theorizes Hurston's interventions as "sonic infidelity," or, in other words, as the rejection of formal training in listening and sound recording to instead embrace intuition and affect in listening and sound production (Kheshti 2015). Each of these scholars discusses in one way or another feminist listening as a method for hearing frequencies, rhythms, stories, and narratives that otherwise remain unheard. In this *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology* collection we take up Sundar's (2023) "soundwork" to emphasize listening as labor: attentive, affective, intuitive, situated, and capable of generating alternative social and sensory relationalities.

Editing—the largely invisible labor that shapes the final sonic artifact—is where feminist approaches to listening and recording converge. Through this

process, sounds that might otherwise remain unheard, or that may register as mere "noise," can evoke instead familiarity, recognition, or solidarity, depending on the listener's own situated experience. In *Tuning In*, Menchaca Ruiz draws on her embodied experience of borders to illustrate how she hears the Israeli refrain "the right to defend itself." In her sound editing of broadcast media, this refrain, typically reported as an immediate and unquestioned fact, becomes recontextualized within a longer Palestinian broadcast history and juxtaposed by the voices of Palestinians' expressing their love of life. Here, feminist editing practices make audible the Israeli colonial fantasies of expansion that are muted by the repetition of Israel's "right to defense." Similarly, in *Academic Freedom*, Nat Nesvaderani makes editing choices that bring sounds from Palestine solidarity protests at different university campuses together in proximity. The editing demonstrates a rough chronology that reflects that these protests happened one after another in the spring of 2024, so we can hear a multivocality that represents how these solidarity movements are empowered and inspired by one another. But there is also a nonlinearity in how these sounds are edited together, reflecting the clustered stories we hear on social media, as the algorithm adapts to the user. There, too, are nonlinear creative choices reflected in presenting environmental sounds of Quebec with the goal of creating a feeling of repetition—a feeling that one is attuned after attending solidarity protests across many years, in spite of this multivocality across time and across multiple geographies. In other contexts, editing might appear non-existant, preferring the uncut extract of a grandmother's voice and its reminiscences (Mihai), juxtaposing street sounds and vocals to personalize the ethnographic (Stock), or centering conversations that blur where homework and fieldwork begin and end (Kumar). Like listening and recording, editing makes for a feminist practice through which a series of choices (sequencing, cutting, layering, repeating) becomes a site to practice our attunement to sounds and stories that have been quieted or silenced.

IN THIS COLLECTION: What We're Hearing

Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology represents collective work at multiple levels. In the five soundworks included in this Colloquy, we see an example of collaborative work as process rather than output. This, however, is not a learning taken in isolation; rather, it builds from the kind of collectivist organizing that has shaped the field of multimodal anthropology, one often organized without budgets or institutional support. These projects range from the Miyarrka Media Collective's (2018) Yolŋu art production and curation, to the historically

women-led Center for Imaginative Ethnography, to the tactile participatory installation curation of the Ethnographic Terminalia Collective and Wakanda University, to prints such as that of Writing with Light Collective and a wide range of self-published zines. Within this terrain of collectivist multimodal anthropology, *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology* arose at the juncture of two multimodal collectives. Nat Nesvaderani and Emiko Stock, the co-curators of this soundwork collection, are among the founding members of the Collective for Multimodal Makers, Publishers, Collaborators, and Teachers (CoMMPCT), while Menchaca Ruiz, Nesvaderani, and Mihai are among the founding members of the Ethnocine Collective.

The soundworks in this collection were produced through diversely situated perspectives at multiple levels. We are anthropologists and feminists collaborating across the United States, Canada, Egypt, Palestine, Romania, Cambodia, and India. Our group included graduate students, early career scholars who are within the tenure track as well as contingent faculty. Some of us have to make our living outside of academia more than within it. These experiences of precarity, impermanence, and transnationality are embedded within this embodied approach to listening. The ways we each inhabit our cities and neighborhoods, through our different race, class, and gender affiliations and abilities also shape a varied experience to soundwork. Each author discusses their positionality differently in this collection, both in their essays and through their autoethnographic soundworks. These discussions are personal and sometimes visceral.

Our soundworks are sequenced along a line of geographic and thematic sounds through which "home" is marked by processes of movement and remaking. In the first and second soundworks (Menchaca Ruiz, *Tuning In*, and Nesvaderani, *Academic Freedom*), that displacement proves historical and political, contextualizing the Nakba (Menchaca Ruiz) alongside the recent global solidarity movement with Palestine (Nesvaderani). This history, past and present, is conveyed through the sounds of archival new reportage, protest footage, and Palestinian journalism. A theme in this soundwork relates to volume—the loudness of certain voices and narratives silences those of others. Sequencing Menchaca Ruiz's *Tuning In* and Nesvaderani's *Academic Freedom* next to Kumar's *The Cacophony of Everyday Life* extends this theme of cacophony and silence through an analysis of how volume is spacialized. Kumar's piece analyzes sound in India as spacialized and classed, with quietness in neighborhoods representing privilege, and the cacophony of density and crowding of neighborhoods represented as marginalization.

In Kumar's work, cacophony constitutes a form of home, and long-term inter-generational intimacies develop within this cacophony. From this perspective, "home" is both the literal home of the author's grandmother in the JJ colony and the metaphorical home of extrafamilial intimacies formed through the cacophony of everyday life. Mihai's *Anatomically* continues an exploration of home through autoethnography with family. The piece describes posing questions as a "budding anthropologist" to her great-grandmother, and across multiple moves and continents, she at last hears her singing voice again, in a tape once lost but recovered. This soundwork, more poetic, presents the voice of an ancestral Romanian home that is heard and curated through the author's diasporic American home. These themes of academic movement are further discussed in Stock's *Failing at Failing*, the sonic autoethnography of the author's career in anthropology across multiple years, locations, and languages. Here, the academic relocation is layered: it is one of creating new homes through non-permanent and often extractive academic labor, whether in new countries, in new languages, or while considering leaving the academy.

In conclusion, feminist soundwork opens up vital possibilities for alternative ways of knowing and sensing the world. Yet these possibilities are not without limitations. *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology*, while generative, cannot by itself halt the structural forces it seeks to expose. It does not interrupt caste and class tensions in India, nor can it stop the genocide in Palestine. A feminist approach to listening proves valuable for creating resonance through sounds often unheard or disregarded as mere noise, though this approach is not resistance in and of itself. *Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology* must be situated within broader political, material, and collective struggles so as to meaningfully intervene in the conditions it seeks to address.

ABSTRACT

In today's media-saturated world, sound becomes a site of struggle where power shapes what is heard as reason and what is silenced as noise. This Colloquy draws from intersectional feminist scholarship, particularly concepts of feminist homework *and* soundwork*, to reflect on a practice of care rooted in listening to what is unheard, inconvenient, or institutionally silenced. This practice is at once critical and utopian, guided by the work of contextual interpretation and by spontaneous bodily reactions to sound that seek and embrace pleasure. This feminist praxis is attuned to the margins: listening to acts of quiet refusal, overlooked personal histories, and news stories suppressed by ahistorical dominant narratives.* Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology *comprises a collection of five unique sound projects edited and*

produced by anthropologists who work with recordings, archival sounds, curated sounds, AI-manipulated sounds, and voice notes, among other (auto)ethnographic elements. Through the listening, recording, and editing of these sound projects, this Colloquy contributes to a multimodal methodology for media production. [intersectional feminism; soundwork; homework; sonic ethnography; autoethnography; multimodal anthropology; media production]

ABSTRAIT

Dans le monde contemporain saturé de médias, le son devient un terrain de rapports de force. Les pouvoirs façonnent ce qui est entendu comme légitime et ce qui est réduit au silence ou recalé au rang de bruit. Ce Colloquy s'appuie sur les travaux de recherches féministes et intersectionnelles, notamment les concepts de homework *et de* soundwork*, pour réfléchir à une pratique du care ancrée dans l'écoute de ce qui est inaudible, dérangeant ou institutionnellement étouffé. Cette praxis féministe se déploie donc dans les marges : elle prête attention aux actes de refus discrets, histoires personnelles négligées, aux récits d'actualité supprimés par des narrations dominantes a-historiques. Cette pratique est à la fois critique et utopique, guidée par un travail d'interprétation contextuelle ainsi que par des réactions corporelles spontanées au son, qui recherchent et accueillent le plaisir.* Feminist Soundwork in Anthropology *réunit six projets sonores produits et édités par des anthropologues, mobilisant enregistrements, archives sonores, sons arrangés, messages vocaux et manipulations par l'IA, parmi d'autres éléments (auto)ethnographiques. Par l'écoute, l'enregistrement et le montage, ce Colloquy contribue à une méthodologie multimodale de production de médias.* [féminisme intersectionnel; travail sonore; homework; ethnographie sonore; autoethnographie; anthropologie multimodale; production médiatique]

NOTES

Acknowledgments This collection would not have been possible without the energies, thoughts, patience, and works of Laura Menchaca Ruiz, Rashmi Kumar, Elise Ferrer, Thurka Sangaramoorthy, and Mariangela Mihai. This work evolved from generous feedback and exchanges shared during an AAA/CASCA roundtable discussion titled "The Soundscape as Feminist Homework" presented in Toronto in November 2023, to which Walid Zarrad and Roshanak Kheshti also contributed. We are grateful to the editorial team at *Cultural Anthropology*, including the sustained engagement of three anonymous reviewers. We especially thank Matilde Córdoba Azcárate for supporting this piece through the final stages of publication, and Kate Ehrenhalt for the work involved in publishing this sound collection.

On accessibility While our introduction to this Colloquy has primarily discussed the production of soundwork, it is important to note that the sound files in this collection are accompanied by text and color through subtitles and written sound descriptions. These additions support the works' accessibility, created with the understanding that sound is not universally experienced by each person in the same way. Subtitles and descriptive texts support access for Deaf and neurodivergent people, as well as audiences for whom sound alone may be inaccessible, less accessible, or overwhelming. In doing so, the project recognizes accessibility as a methodological and aesthetic approach to doing feminist soundwork.

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