

Theme Song ([00:00:16](#)):

[inaudible]

Ilyse ([00:00:17](#)):

This is Keeping It 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast.

Megan ([00:00:22](#)):

What's up nerds.

Ilyse ([00:00:23](#)):

Hi. Hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst a scholar of religion, history and Islam. Raiser of Killjoys, razer of patriarchies and raiser of goblets of rosé. Cause it's summer.

Megan ([00:00:35](#)):

Yay. Hi. Hello. I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of gender, sex, and sexuality and American religions, public scholarship maven, and a fan of a bubbly drink or two.

Ilyse ([00:00:43](#)):

Today we're recording as protests are happening across the country after the truly brutal police murders of--this time--George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. We're going to stick with our program today because we have other episodes happening just this summer about nationalism, white Christian nationalism, and white supremacy. But we want to be clear that we think black lives matter; police should not be militarized and should be defunded; and not naming white Christian nationalism and white supremacy allows it to flourish.

Megan ([00:01:15](#)):

Yeah,

Ilyse ([00:01:16](#)):

That said let's jump in because today we're joined by an extra special, extra-credit guest, Dr. Vicki Brennan, an anthropologist of religion, expert on sound, and one of--at least my--favorite smart grrls. Hi Vicki!

Vicki Brennan ([00:01:32](#)):

Hi.

Megan ([00:01:33](#)):

Hi Vicki!

Ilyse ([00:01:39](#)):

In Smart Grrl Summer, we are riffing on the feminist woman-led punk movements of the seventies, eighties and nineties. We were thinking of Bikini Kill, of course, but with scholarship, uh, as the place of resistance and sustenance and politics and community, and especially today with Vicki at the helm

sound. Good news nerds, we've got a riotous treat for you. I get to work with Vicki at UVM, so I know just how rad this is going to be.

Megan ([00:02:07](#)):

I'm so stoked. It is also however, a semi academic podcast, IRMF. So even in summer, Vicki needs a real proper introduction. Professor Vicki Brennan is associate professor of religion and director of African studies program at Ilyse's homebase, UVM. She's an award winning professor who writes and teaches about questions of sound, materiality, ethics, and religion in Africa and the African diaspora. Vicki is an anthropologist by training. And so her research is often ethnographic. Her first book, Singing Yoruba Christianity, uh, through Indiana University Press in 2018 examines how some church members in Lagos, Nigeria--did I do that right? It's LAH-gos right? LAH-gos-- ,

Vicki ([00:02:44](#)):

LAY-gos!

Megan ([00:02:45](#)):

Lagos! Shit. See, this is why I need you Vicki! LAYgos, Nigeria, go ahead.

Vicki ([00:02:49](#)):

It's okay: LAHgos would be the Portuguese pronunciation of the city.

Megan ([00:02:53](#)):

No, I've been colonized. I colonized my mind.

Vicki ([00:02:57](#)):

They named the city or damn it. So, yeah.

Megan ([00:03:03](#)):

All right. So this is why I need you Legos, Nigeria and how those church members in Legos use music, dance and other material forms as means of producing moral community, reinforcing ethical values and self making. She's also a member of the Sacred Writes 2019 inaugural public scholarship training cohort. Today, we're going to ask her a bunch of questions about why we should care about sound, what it is, how sound and religion go together, how religious sounds work and how communities use and are made by sound. Thank you so much for being with us.

Vicki ([00:03:31](#)):

Thanks for having me. I'm really excited to be part of keeping it 101.

Megan ([00:03:37](#)):

Yeah. So keeping it one on one on today, the segment where we do some professor work.

Ilyse ([00:03:52](#)):

All right. So I will level with the audience. I know what you work on Vicki, and I know how rad your class on sound is, and I'm going to make you say something about that later, but before all that, I think I want

to start with like truly hashtag basic. So when I think about religion and sound, I think about the cacophony of sound at my own field sites, which I think in turn helped me hear my own religious spaces in a new way. Am I rosé basic? Is this what religion and sound is?

Vicki ([00:04:23](#)):

So yes, in a way that is part of what religion in sound is. It's how we can think about religion and sound, um, paying attention to the sounds around us, and how we might categorize them as religious or not religious, and then what that categorization might mean. Where that categorization comes from is central to an approach to studying religion that foreground sound. So one of the ways in which religious people claim space, create community, and do religion is through sound. So this might be singing or musicking for sure--which is probably what comes first to most people's mind when they think about religious sounds. Um, it also includes all the things that religious people do with their voices, praying, chanting, even just speaking, communicating, um, think about a sermon for example, or a sort of invocation at the beginning of a religious service or ritual. Um, and while the meanings of the words that are sung or spoken are important, so too are the sounds of those words being uttered. And that's what a sound scholar might focus on. Um, what conventions, norms, or ideas shape the aspect of practice that guides how we sound religion, how we make religious sounds, um, and what can that tell us about how members of a religious community come to recognize themselves as religious and how they are connected to each other.

Megan ([00:05:50](#)):

I'm going to be obnoxious and jump in here because I'm just so excited about this already. Like all of those questions that you just asked make me want, like redesign one of the assignments I do in my intro classes and just make my students answer those, what do we hear in these spaces? And yeah, like not just content analysis of speeches, which is where I, I tend to default to, but like, how does the sound really shape this religious space in this religious community? That's so, yes, yes. More please, right? Yeah.

Ilyse ([00:06:17](#)):

Can I ask a question?

Vicki ([00:06:18](#)):

Go ahead.

Megan ([00:06:19](#)):

We're the worst.

Ilyse ([00:06:20](#)):

I know where we are terrible! So when you say that it's the sound and maybe not just the words I'm thinking of all the questions I get as an Islam professor, where students are so confused that people can chant in Arabic or hear the call to prayer in Arabic and not necessarily know what it means. And are you suggesting Vicki that, that like, thinking about sound as sound instead of communication as words that we then have to comprehend helps us think about why those Arabic phrases that someone might not understand still have meaning??

Vicki ([00:07:00](#)):

Yes, actually. That's exactly what I'm saying. Um, and yeah, there's a number.

All These Women (00:07:05):

[Talking over one another].

Vicki (00:07:05):

There's so many scholars--I mean, sound is, um, really important for Islam as you probably well know, Ilyse. And so there's so many, there's so much scholarship on that, that you can be sounding words in a language that is the sacred language of your religion, that you might not necessarily be able to do a one to one translation of. And yet the sounding and the sounding of, and listening to the, the invocation of those sounds is religiously significant in and of itself.

Megan (00:07:41):

This is, I just have to share. I used to nanny for, well, a number of Jewish families, but one of the Jewish families, that I used to nanny for the dad, uh, had to get a quickie bar mitzvah. And he, they were not religiously Jewish, but he still had to be a bar mitzvah. And the only people who would train him, um, in, in short form, we're a super Orthodox community. So well, this, this dude that I nanny force from Chicago and has a pretty pronounced Chicago accent, uh, when he does prayers for, for, uh, for like Seder meals, he's got a really thick Bronx accent in Yiddish, but only in Yiddish.

Vicki (00:08:18):

Right. And I mean, until you to think about it in something that might be more familiar to like American listeners, you can think about how well, and this would actually connect back to what Ilyse was saying earlier about this current moment that we're living through and the way that, um, varieties of Christianity, white Christian nationalism, as well as more radical or racialized forms of Christianity interact. But you can think about the difference between listening to a Franklin Graham sermon on the one hand, and, uh, one of you, uh, sort of Martin Luther King's, uh, sermons about racial justice, and the way that the intonation of the voice, the, the sounding practices, the pauses, the space, the silences. All of that is crucial to the way that the message is transmitted and heard and experienced by listeners. Um, so yeah.

Ilyse (00:09:24):

Yeah. That's awesome. Yeah. Okay. We cut you off. That's okay. We did. Sorry. Keep saying your things, say some more,

Megan (00:09:31):

Sorry, I think you're so interesting!

Vicki (00:09:36):

Well, I think that that's actually, I mean, I think Talk about this a little bit later on, but that is something that religious scholars are really good at paying attention to meaning and interpreting texts, because as you guys keep talking about in the podcast for a long time, that's what the study of religion was. Right. Um, and in fact, there's more to that, right? That there is, there are these sounded aspects, but we can even move beyond those sounds that we might understand to be sort of being deliberately made as part of religious practice, the music or the speech. We can also pay attention to what we might call ambient

sounds that are not often explicitly acknowledged or recognized, but that also form some of the texture, um, and experience of religious practice. Um, so one way to think about this is, uh, using a word that's sounds scholars use frequently: the soundscape. Um, so the idea of the soundscape was elaborated by the composer R. Murry Schafer as a way to bring attention to the relationships between sound in space or sound in place. And anthropologists and sound scholars draw on the idea of the soundscape in a variety of ways to talk about how relationships between sound, place, and environment impact cultural beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors, all of those things that are certainly part of religion.

Megan ([00:11:01](#)):

Okay. I'm going to pause again, because again, I'm a newbie here. So can you just go over one more time? If I want to talk about a soundscape, what am I talking about?

Detox ([00:11:13](#)):

It's our secret word is the day!

Vicki ([00:11:17](#)):

Well, so the soundscape, it is, uh, the soundscape is the audio correlate of a landscape, right? So if you're thinking about a landscape painting, for example, right. And R. Murray Schafer is a, is a composer. So he's trying to, he, he's engaging in a creative practice, right, of creating music via bringing together sounds. Um, he's trying to think about like, what is the relationship between landscape painting and soundscape composition? Um, now the R Murray Schafer is he's great to think was, but he's also, there's so many problems and assumptions embedded in his art ideas about the soundscape.

Megan ([00:12:01](#)):

Yeah. He's a dead white guy, right? You Vicki, you're an expert. If you, wasn't going to tell me what you Nikki think. Uh, when I say soundscape, just give me the super 101 version.

Vicki ([00:12:12](#)):

So we're talking about all the sounds that make up people's experiences and ways of knowing in a place.

Megan ([00:12:19](#)):

I love that. Yeah.

Vicki ([00:12:22](#)):

Yeah. And to recognize that these are socially and culturally informed, right. That it's, it's the environment, our knowledge of the environment is certainly shaped by sound. Um, but that we're sort of using our cultural and social frameworks to make sense of those environmental sounds.

Megan ([00:12:40](#)):

Cool.

Vicki ([00:12:41](#)):

Um, yeah. So, uh, the, the soundscape of a religious space or community would include things like, like full I'm thinking explicitly of the churches where I've done my research on Lagos, um, things like the flutter of fans circulating air in a hot building, the hum and feedback that comes from an amplification

system, uh, it could be the sounds of traffic outside in a very different context. It could include things like bird singing or leaves rustling if you're, if you're, uh, if you're an--in an outdoor space. Um, now these sounds, uh, may not be explicitly part of a religious doctrine or, or deliberately cultivated on the part of participants in religious ritual or practice, but they're--they may be felt and experienced as crucial to the shaping of this religious space and the making of, of it as a space for community and for doing the kind of work that a religious community would want to do in that place.

Megan ([00:13:49](#)):

Okay. My mind is totally blown and I'm also feeling like all of my scholarship is now dead because it doesn't have this kind of richness that will work here on my own time, but I must do more. It isn't just like yes. To the bird sounds in the hum of it. Yes to all of that. Crap, what have I been doing with my life too late now? Um, maybe, maybe Vicki can help us think more about this. So can we talk about like senses and ritual or sound and perception?

Vicki ([00:14:16](#)):

Yes, I would. So I always love to talk about this and I think I'm going to get a little too, um, very basic, uh, for you guys. Cause I'm gonna get a little far away from religion when I start to talk about this, but I think it's something that's really important, um, to acknowledge. And I'm, I'm constantly gushing about this to my students and I'm sure they're always like, why is she talking about the hairs in people's ears? But anyway, so, so let me just start with some basic like sound 101, right? The sound sound's a key medium through which we know the world, we as humans come to know the world, um, all of us, whether we are hearing or non-hearing. Um, and I think that's important to knowledge. I'm not going to talk too much today about, um, Deaf culture and Deaf attitudes towards sounds, but to acknowledge that, that nevertheless, because sound is vibration, all humans perceive sound in some kind of way.

Vicki ([00:15:16](#)):

And we use it to orient ourselves towards our surroundings and towards our, towards each other as we live our lives. Um, right. So sound is, sound is basically vibration. It's perceived in our bodies via these felt vibrations. Um, and it's primarily through feeling, you know, you can, you've had the sense of feeling of vibration. The base is, is a sound whose vibrations we--we feel in our bodies, not just in our ears, right? And hearing is the dominant way in which most humans, um, sort of know, perceive sounds, right? Sound becomes perceptible via feeling and hearing. Alright. So for those who are able to hear the sounds then, hearing's a key sensory mode. It's a way that we receive information about the world around us. Um, and it's also how we contribute our, contributed our presence to the world via our sounding practices.

Vicki ([00:16:12](#)):

Right. And you can think about this. Like this is again, you know, not necessarily thinking in religious context, but you can think about, for example, um, people like we do all kinds--we know all kinds of things about what happens in the depths of the ocean because of sound right? You, you, you--we actually send vibrations down to try to find the bottom of the ocean floor. Or ice fisher-people use sound and vibrations to test the thickness of ice, to know whether it's safe to go out on it. Right? So these are all, some of the ways in which we come to know things about our environment, to sense things about our environment using sound and then to actually do things with the knowledge that's produced by a sound. Okay. Right.

Megan ([00:17:00](#)):

This is great. I will also say Vicki ocean equals whales equals Moby. Dick equals it's already about religion.

Vicki ([00:17:07](#)):

I true. This is so true. Yes.

Megan ([00:17:12](#)):

All things are about my thing. Sorry, Vicki, you were saying.

Vicki ([00:17:15](#)):

I that's, that's part of, um, what I love about you, Megan.

Megan ([00:17:22](#)):

I always make it about me.

Vicki ([00:17:26](#)):

I would just start talking, and somehow I'd be able to, um, you'd be able to connect it to your research, which is great. Cause I probably don't know that much about your research.

Megan ([00:17:35](#)):

Well, the good news is we're doing a, another episode on religion in pop culture where we're specifically talking about my book, but I don't know that you should encourage this behavior, Vicki.

Ilyse ([00:17:45](#)):

This is at cross purposes with where I've stood with Megan for at least 12 years.

Megan ([00:17:51](#)):

Good luck.

Vicki ([00:17:52](#)):

Yeah. I don't know Megan, as well as you do Ilyse--

Megan ([00:17:57](#)):

you were saying about your very interesting research. That might not also be my research.

Vicki ([00:18:02](#)):

Right. So this is where I get to talk about your hairs.

Megan ([00:18:05](#)):

Cool.

Vicki ([00:18:06](#)):

So, so the, so I, an important thing to know about hearing, right, is that it is like most human sensory perception entirely subjective, right? We don't, it's not as simple as like there's a sound, there's a vibration that is sound out there in the world that then enters into our brain and then some part of our brain lights up and we're like, Oh, car, you know, Oh, whatever. In fact, um, our ears--right, well, there's there, we're still learning a lot about how humans hear sounds. Um, it used to be, the thought used to be right. And this is probably the, the, the, what a lot of people still think is that the vibrations push against the eardrum, um, which then causes the brain to process, uh, those vibrations as sound, um, and to, to interpret meaning out of it. But it's actually the hairs in her ears, um, that are vibrating and they produce their own sounds, and those are the sounds we hear. So we don't actually hear the sounds out there. We hear the sounds inside of our heads. It's our ear hairs that, are vibrating.

Ilyse ([00:19:18](#)):

Waaaaiitt. Okay? So everything we hear is really like not, it's not the noise, it's like a signified.

Vicki ([00:19:27](#)):

Yes.

Megan ([00:19:29](#)):

Yeah. Whoa. My mind is blown. My mind is blown and we're like, not even halfway through the podcast yet. Holy crap!

Vicki ([00:19:37](#)):

For your showbotes--I know you guys do a really good job with this stuff--I'll give you a link. There's a sound artist who has actually, um, made a recording of the sounds of his ear hairs, vibrating. Um, that is--right?--a sort of really interesting way of thinking about how all of the work that's going on in order for us to process our sensory, the sensory information that our brain receives.

Megan ([00:20:07](#)):

This is so wild. See, this is why we need you smart grrl summer!

Riot Grrls ([00:20:19](#)):

[inaudible].

Vicki ([00:20:19](#)):

This is also where I think for scholars of religion, it gets really interesting. And, you know, for anthropologists like me, um, because you can't make any sense out of those sounds that your ears are actually producing without reference to some sort of mediating system, culture, religion, language, history, institutions, et cetera, right? I mean, you, whether you're going to describe sounds as loud or soft, or you're going to sound--describe them as fuzzy or smooth or any number of ways in which we can describe a sound often, uh, in English (especially in part, because of the way that Western sort of center sensory formations have been shaped) we tend to describe sounds in reference to the thing that we perceive as producing them. We don't have a very developed sound vocabulary, right? We can describe it as, you know, car, wind, bird. Um, but we don't have a very developed vocabulary to describe the qualities of those sounds. Um, and that's definitely a cultural thing.

Megan ([00:21:39](#)):

Wait, so are some languages better than us at describing sound? Is English not the best language?

Vicki ([00:21:47](#)):

No. English is definitely not the best. So I, um, I, I don't want to over simplify or overgeneralize, but generally Western ways of knowing--Western epistemologies--have tended to favor, um, visual modes of knowing. And this has a lot to do with, you know, well, really complicated philosophies and histories of ideas about what is the best way to know. Um, we could, we could, I don't know, to oversimplify something like we could just blame Descartes where he explained that,

Ilyse ([00:22:26](#)):

yeah, let's blame that guy.

Vicki ([00:22:28](#)):

Um, prioritizing rationality and you know, but he's even like if you, if you go back to your day cart, he's really questioning even the visual because our eyes are doing the same thing. Like we don't see the thing out there where our eyes are recreating, um, using refractions of light. The thing it is that we're seeing out there in the world, right? This is the how--This is how the human senses work.

Megan ([00:22:53](#)):

How else can we think about things if we're not prioritizing the visual that Vicki?

Vicki ([00:22:58](#)):

Well, you could think about things you could think about how we know things via sound or via smell or via touch. And then instead of those things being perceived in terms of the things that are, you know, so like--if we think about hardness, for example, right, what is hardness? Like, how would you describe hardness except to say it's hard and tables are hard, right? Um, what is, what is loudness, right? These are, these are some of the limits of our sensory conceptual vocabulary, um, that we have. And so that, I think also tends to limit the ways in which a Western epistemology can understand certain kinds of religious phenomenon. And also how it's tended to favor particular religious phenomenon over others. The phenomenon that we can verify with our senses through our Western epistemology, um, as opposed to the, the things that perhaps aren't verifiable via rationality, like ghosts or spirits or apparitions or whatever.

Ilyse ([00:24:14](#)):

Oh yeah.

Vicki ([00:24:16](#)):

Am I making sense?

Ilyse ([00:24:17](#)):

I know you, are. I just, like, I got kind of excited to just listen because I don't think, right. Like I'm a historian. My training happened in manuscripts. And so I at best would see people's descriptions of sensory perception.

Vicki ([00:24:39](#)):

Right? Yeah.

Ilyse ([00:24:40](#)):

Or descriptions of music co or chanting ceremonies, but even that is, you know, many steps away from what sound is doing, because I'm reading a description of someone else's perception of what it sounded like or was meant to sound like. I'm kind of, I'm kind of shocked that as someone who does this work that I have, I have lost so much of the language of embodiment because I don't imagine, or have not imagined sound as part of an embodied experience.

Vicki ([00:25:23](#)):

Yeah.

Ilyse ([00:25:24](#)):

Like I really think, I really think you broke my brain Vicki because I think I'd been thinking about sound as like things that happened around me and that were not part of me as opposed to sound being a deeply embedded and embodied set of mechanics. And then on top of that set of experiences.

Vicki ([00:25:48](#)):

Right.

Megan ([00:25:48](#)):

And like doing work on your body. Right. Like, I, I, yes, my brain is likewise broken. I'm very much in a Foucaultian, like, there are not one but many silences, but my silence on silence and noise is one of them now. And sound is literally moving parts of my body that I don't even know that are there. And as somebody who like does a fair amount of thinking with Judith Butler and all of her work to insist that writing is a physical medium---right, like it's work done by the body--I have not thought about my ears or the hairs inside them as part of the production of knowledge and how I encounter the world. Even though I sing, I love music. I just, I just, yeah. My brain is broken now. Yeah.

Vicki ([00:26:34](#)):

I mean, I think just to come back to here, the original question you asked me before I started talking about ear hairs and whatnot, as you know, like once you have--once take this into account, it means that ritual, like if you're a scholar of religion who studies ritual, right, it's all broken open because you can't just say, and there was incense and there was music and there was a drum because it means that there's so much more going on with the presence of that drum or that incense or whatever. Right? Because it's having this distinct embodied impact on the people who are participating in that ritual. Um, and that in many ways can be, um, but you know, that's, that's something that's really important to acknowledge--that gets you outside of very functionalist explanations of why people are doing ritual and what they're accomplishing with it.

Ilyse & Megan, at once ([00:27:28](#)):

Yeah.

Vicki ([00:27:30](#)):

So, um, yeah. So, um, so what I'm really talking about here is sound as a way of being in and knowing the world and, um, anthropologists, Steven Feld, who is, uh, sort of one of the key theorists, figures in this kind of sound studies work, um, called this "acoustemology."

Detox ([00:27:53](#)):

It's our secret word of the day!

Vicki ([00:27:56](#)):

Or acoustic knowing. So acoustemology, he's bringing together acoustic--acoustic and epistemology. And he's talking about this acoustic epistemology, the sonic way of knowing, um, by this he's talking specifically about sound, um, right as this phenomenon that exists outside of human bodies, but also the awareness that people have of sound and that how these both are central to how people interpret their experiences. Um, this acoustemology doesn't come from nowhere. It's an awareness of sound and an interpretation of sound that takes place in relationship to our cultural and social norms, to our values, to all of the mediating systems that we have to make sense of all of the kinds of information we receive via our bodies, via our sensory perceptions.

Vicki ([00:28:53](#)):

Um, so what this means is that we have to pay attention. Like, if we want to pay attention to sound, then we have to pay attention to how we listen. And this is actually what I'm really sort of thinking about and working on right now in my own research on, um, listening to Lagos, right? How, what do we listen for? How do we attune our ears and our bodies towards that sound? And then how do we use that sound to make access assessments of ourselves, of our place in the world, our relationships to others, and of our ways of being as religious or nonreligious subjects. Um, so, so yeah, so acoustemology, there's another little word of the day for you.

Megan ([00:29:38](#)):

I am taking notes so hard right now I'm in like Bakhtinian dialogism place of like how we are, like where meaning is being made in and on the body and like, Oh yeah. Yes. More. Give me more!

Ilyse ([00:29:50](#)):

So I want to know thinking about this, um, acoustemolgy, but also like, you know, I'm a little bit of a ringer. I've read your book. I know what you work on. I want to think, I think one of the things that you just said about acoustic ecology that feels really exciting to me is like, we need to think about and pay attention to how we're listening and how we as individuals are, um, orienting our physical bodies our physical ears, but also our interactions with others around sound. But I also know that you think about sound as a way that we build and are part of community. So that's a disgusting oversimplification of how you think about it, but, but it's part of it, right? That this idea that sound, um, binds people together and is used as a medium for binding people together and also is an identifier of communities. That's part of what you do, right? So can you tell me a little bit about that? How does sound work in communities?

Vicki ([00:30:57](#)):

Yeah, so, well, I just want to say that, that it's like, I keep emphasizing that, while we're experiencing sat like sound is this subjective thing that our bodies produce the only way we can use that, that subjective experience is through reference to some sort of cultural and social phenomenon. Right? I think this connects back to what you guys have talked about in earlier podcasts about how Sheilaism isn't a

religion, right? Like you can't just come up with your own vocabulary for sound or interpretations of sound, and then use that to do things in the world. If you want to exist in a world with other people, which as humans, we actually need to do that, right? Right. So there's no, like, you're always, you're always going to have to relate it to some cultural or social frame of reference.

Riot Grrls ([00:31:59](#)):

[inaudible]

Megan ([00:31:59](#)):

Okay. So we were talking about sounds and making meaning of sound and the ways that making meaning of sound requires sociality requires some sort of cultural vocabulary.

Vicki ([00:32:11](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Great. So, so, um, I mean, this is something that's really central to what I write about in my work on Yoruba Christian music, but sounding and listening are key modes of sociality there, um, ways of creating community, connecting people to the values and practices that are central to their communities. Um, right. So just to go back to the body, to start again in the body, um, singing together has physiological effects. Uh, neuroscientists have done research that's shown how people's heartbeats can become coordinated while they sing together in a choir.

Megan ([00:32:52](#)):

WHAT!?

Vicki ([00:32:52](#)):

yeah, that's the one that always blows--like when I teach that in class students, they're like, "Oh my gosh!!!!" But yeah, so you can start, they, they, they just do simple heartbeat monitoring or pulse monitoring. And at the beginning of a song, people singing together, their, their pulses will be all over the place, but as they come to sing together, their heartbeats start to be coordinated. I mean, this can--

Megan ([00:33:16](#)):

I have literal chills. Like I am a choir kid from way back. That is so intimate.

Vicki ([00:33:22](#)):

Yes. You have literal chills. That is happening. Yeah. And I mean, I think we can, it makes some sense, right? Like when you sing together, you breathe together and then your bodily functions start to coordinate with each other. Right. Um, I, my point is like, yeah, that's great. But what's more interesting than that is that, uh, this is an aspect of human embodiment that a variety of religious and cultural traditions and formations have taken advantage of. This is a capacity that our human bodies have, and it gets taken up to do certain kinds of things, um, with groups of people as social beings, right? To accomplish forms of solidarity, to produce togetherness. Um, and I'm going to talk about, uh, I'm going to talk a bit more about power in a moment, but I don't want to assume that that's necessarily a good thing or a bad thing. I mean, this is why soldiers march in formation to create a groupness. Right. But it also, as your experience of singing in choir and the literal chills that you experienced, it can make you feel connected, not just to whoever it is that you're singing with, but to the values and ideals that are part of what brought you together to sing in the first place.

Megan ([00:34:50](#)):

This is so wild, I, yeah. Yes. Please tell me more.

Vicki ([00:34:52](#)):

Well, I'm going to get, uh, pretty nerdy here. Um, my students know, maybe Ilyse knows to her great chagrin that I love to talk about Durkheim--

Ilyse ([00:35:03](#)):

It's not to my chagrin. I love you. And I can manage Durkheim.

Vicki ([00:35:10](#)):

Durkheim is a problem.

Ilyse ([00:35:12](#)):

Okay. You won't go--like spoilers, dear nerds. You also do really interesting thinking with Durkheim, that like quite frankly, I'm not smart enough to do, like, I see Durkheim as a problem, and I'm like, BBBBMMMM next. Whereas like, you're really like chewing on him, and I don't want to say like, repurposing but you're really thinking with some of the conceptual framework that I just, I just kind of ditched.

Vicki ([00:35:38](#)):

Yeah. Well, I mean, there's lots of good reasons to ditch Durkheim. Uh, you know, he's trying to make a kind of Universalist, um, evolutionary argument about people and like, you know, his elementary form, he's like, "Oh, Aboriginal Australians. They are the most primitive, most simple. And therefore we're going to use their religion as the basis for all subsequent religions." Like that's just racist nonsense.

Megan ([00:36:04](#)):

Yeah. Fuck that.

Vicki ([00:36:06](#)):

Yeah. Okay. I didn't know if I could say that that's racist, bullshit.

Megan ([00:36:16](#)):

Um, now you're getting it! Welcome to Keeping it 101.

Vicki ([00:36:20](#)):

I also think, um, there is something to, there's something worth, continuing to think about in terms of if you know, so far, as my students will, hopefully they all can recite it by the end of my classes. Right. If religion is eminently social, as Durkheim says, and I think this is something that the, the, the ladies of keeping it 101 would certainly say--grant, right? If religion is eminently social, um, there's something about--like for Durkheim sound, is cru--is central to the production of that social. Um, it's, uh, he talks about how religion is a feeling, right? That it doesn't work like you have your, your, your beliefs and your practices. Um, but that the connection that individuals have to those beliefs and practices, it doesn't work unless there's a feeling. Um, and this social force of religion that is experienced in moments of

collective effervescence, where the social celebrates itself as a social and experiences itself as a social it's shot through with sound. It's noisy. It's a commotion, but he, as he notes as well, it's also coordinated. Um, and I'm going to, this is the point in class where I would start reading, um, from Durkheim's texts. So I think I can stop there.

Megan ([00:37:50](#)):

Um, wait, I have a follow up question because you said religion is a feeling and like, we definitely had to read Durkheim in our pro-SEM, but when you say religion is a feeling, Am I--Durkheim didn't mean, it was like my special feelings about Jesus. What he meant was feeling it in my body?

Vicki ([00:38:11](#)):

Yes! Yes!

Speaker 3 ([00:38:13](#)):

Wait, but religion isn't feelings about Jesus, like, like emotions, it's--it's also feeling things with your literal body?

Vicki ([00:38:20](#)):

Well, I think if, if we read Durkheim, uh, in a certain kind of way, he would say that the emotions you might have towards Jesus, the love of Jesus.

Megan ([00:38:32](#)):

I mean, we're fine.

Vicki ([00:38:36](#)):

Okay. Not you Megan! but the emotions one might have, if one loves Jesus are actually linked to the feeling in the body that's produced by your participation in religious ritual. So, yeah.

Megan ([00:38:55](#)):

So religion is doing work on the body. It's not starting from a belief. It's like you're being shaped by your environment. Like what?

Vicki ([00:39:07](#)):

Yes. Yeah.

Megan ([00:39:09](#)):

I'm learning so much today.

Vicki ([00:39:11](#)):

And I'm going to just, uh, insert another reading reference here. Um, we can, I, you guys can put it up in the show notes, but there's this great piece. Um, by Jia Tolentino, that was in the New Yorker last year about, I can't remember the name of it, but it's basically, she talks about her experiences growing up in a Pentecostal church in Houston, um, and participating in the kinds of, um, baptismal rituals or revivals in the church. And then she talks about taking ecstasy in college. And then she talks about a whole number

of different kinds of experiences of religious mystics. And she says, huh, if I feel the same way, like, if I have the same kinds of feelings after I take ecstasy, as I did when I was a kid, um, going, you know, participating in the revivals at church, are those the same things? Right. And what does that mean?

Megan ([00:40:05](#)):

Well, this is the BU LSD experiments too. Right. Like interesting. Interesting. Okay.

Vicki ([00:40:11](#)):

Yup. Oh, good!

Megan ([00:40:13](#)):

Uh, yeah, I, I was, I was assigned those in grad school, so yeah, the humanities.

Vicki ([00:40:19](#)):

Yeah. So, so, so that's, um, right where, uh, sound right--sound is this thing, because sound has this embodied physiological response, it's this thing that different kinds of religious communities can use in order to produce themselves as such, right? To make the social, to make people feel their connection to the social, and then to make people feel connected to the values that are central to the reproduction of that social.

Megan ([00:40:51](#)):

I'm totally bugging right now. This is my mind is blown.

Vicki ([00:40:54](#)):

Yes. Um, but then to come back, like it's really important to pay attention to power, right? That this isn't just something that happens innocently. I mean, this is again where, um, what I show when I, when I teach Durkheim and I'm talking about all this stuff, and we watch people do yoga at Woodstock, or, you know, participate in other kinds of music festivals, um, as acts of collective effervescence. Um, and then I often will end with a clip from Triumph of the Will,

Megan ([00:41:26](#)):

Which for our listeners is...?

Vicki ([00:41:29](#)):

Which for our list--your listeners is a sort of, uh, Leni Riefenstahl film about Nazi Germany. Yeah.

Megan ([00:41:36](#)):

And how great it was. Yeah. It's not a condemnation of Nazis.

Ilyse ([00:41:40](#)):

No: Nazi superheros are the best.

Megan ([00:41:44](#)):

And if we could trust that people knew about Nazis would we even need the podcast? Sorry, Vicki. You were saying.

Vicki ([00:41:51](#)):

you guys are great. I, I can't keep up with the jokes. But I mean, I think that you can see, once you start watching these scenes of collective effervescence happening, um, one after the other, you're like, "Oh, crap, like Nazis that's what's, that was what was going on with them." Right. That there's not anything inherently innocent, or it doesn't exist outside of history. Right. Religion isn't inherently a good or a bad, um, I think to quote some, uh, to quote my favorite podcast, religion is people, right. Religion is what people do! And so, uh, the, the, these kinds of things always have to be considered in relationship to the structures of power, to history, to what--what people are trying to do, um, with religion and sound, uh, in particular moments.

Megan ([00:42:47](#)):

Wait, Vicki, does that mean sound is political.

Vicki ([00:42:49](#)):

Yep. Absolutely. Sound is political.

Ilyse ([00:42:54](#)):

We need like a ding, ding, ding, ding, ding.

Vicki ([00:42:59](#)):

Yeah. And I mean, this is how, um, uh, you know, sound becomes linked to, uh, ethical ways of being in the world. Right? Like, for example, the churches that I study in Nigeria, um, they see their participation in, uh, Christian worship as directly countering the contemporary condition of Nigeria, which they see as saturated with corruption, with selfishness, um, with all of these things that are sort of antithetical to their understandings of community and, and the values--like moral--values that they idealize. Um, and as I argue in the book, as I discuss in the book, a key part of ensuring that church members stay connected to those moral values that ensure, um, the production of good lives for church members is by singing together. Because they're disciplining themselves towards those moral, moral orientations to the world.

Megan ([00:44:07](#)):

Hmm. The book being your book written by Vicki Brennan, *_Singing Yourba, Christianity_*, which our listeners should definitely checkout.

Ilyse ([00:44:15](#)):

Homework is coming later! It's coming later.

Megan ([00:44:17](#)):

I just really like Vicki's work!

Vicki ([00:44:19](#)):

Well. Thanks. Thanks a lot. That's really nice. But I mean, you can, this is not, uh, necessarily my original, my theoretical insight. I mean, I think this, this is where I bring my, uh, sort of interpretation, my, my use of Durkheim together with a kind of--with my, with the critical perspective of folks like Asad, who I know is a favorite of the podcast or certain members of the podcast, right. To think about how, like, it's, these are actually at the same time as they are these effervescent feeling-full ritual modes they're also modes of disciplining of making bodies, of making selves, of shaping one's orientations towards the world and the social and the self. Um, and so, uh, that's how you--like, so that's how you have to pay attention to the ways in which these things are being used and to what ends by people as they do religion.

Megan ([00:45:24](#)):

This is so interesting.

Vicki ([00:45:27](#)):

Well, I guess I would just make one last point. Um, and I think this is the another element then of paying attention to sound that is useful for, um, religion scholars, is that it's a way then of seeing how, um--it's a way of seeing how religious communities make themselves in relationship to, in reaction to, other religious communities. Right. Um, so you can see, for example, disagreements, then, about religious sounds in public spaces or the noisiness of religious sounds as being, um, debates about the proper or improper way to construct community and to live live one's life.

Riot Grrls ([00:46:23](#)):

[inaudible]

Megan ([00:46:24](#)):

Oh man. Oh man. We have so much to think about it. I'm so excited. Okay. Help us wrap this up. Vicki, big picture me here. Why is sound so important? How and where do I start to incorporate sound into my work? Which I must now, because I am obsessed. What do I gain by adding attention to sound to my teaching? And what am I missing by not paying attention to sound (everything apparently), but like, yeah. Walk me through it.

Vicki ([00:46:49](#)):

Okay. Well, this I'm thinking about this specifically in relationship to the questions that you guys have asked on the podcast previously. Um, but what I think is really important and why scholars of religion should pay attention to sound is because sound complicates our understanding of the category of religion itself.

Megan ([00:47:09](#)):

Pause, pause, pause. Say that again. Cause it's important.

Vicki ([00:47:14](#)):

Sound complicates the category of religion itself.

Megan ([00:47:18](#)):

Yes. Good.

Vicki ([00:47:19](#)):

You guys have done so much definitional work on this podcast. And I think that that definitional work has to continue and continue to be complicated by paying attention to these sensory dimensions sound itself. Right?

Megan ([00:47:34](#)):

Yes!

Vicki ([00:47:34](#)):

So, so much of modern categories like religion, like modern categories of social life, like religion or politics or whatever have been shaped by the emphasis on visuality as a primary sense for knowing the world. I talked about this a little bit earlier. Um, right. So Western knowledge, our assumptions about mind, body relationships, about the trusting of visuality about the emphasis on rationality--this has impacted how we know whether or not a thing is religious or not. Um, and how we then think about the religious as a category in our society or in the world if we're studying other societies. Right?

Megan ([00:48:21](#)):

Yup. Wait. So, okay. So Descartes tricked me into thinking that what I see is more important than what I hear and you, Vicki Brennan, theorist of religion and sound, are suggesting to me that my definition of religion is incomplete if I am not thinking about sound?

Vicki ([00:48:42](#)):

Well, I would even say, is that Descartes' tricking you even further. Cause he doesn't necessarily even want you to trust what you see. He just says, if you think it right, if you can think it and really know it, right. That rationality is what you're going to know to be true. And that's why in so much, I mean this, like, I feel like I'm oversimplifying really complicated histories--

Megan ([00:49:02](#)):

but that's what, that's what we do, Vicki.

Vicki ([00:49:05](#)):

--OK!--But that's how you get to this assumption that religion equals belief.

Ilyse ([00:49:11](#)):

Yes.

Vicki ([00:49:12](#)):

And that you have to really believe it in order for it to really be religious. Um, and if we're going to pay attention to things like, I mean, you could pay attention to visuality too, um, though we've tended to overpaid against individuality. Right. Um, but if we pay attention to the senses to sound, to smell, to touch, to taste, um, then we come to understand religion more, uh, in terms of these other ways of being in the world and being with each other. And that's actually, perhaps what's more important to religion than belief, right? Especially if we're going to go back to thinking about, um, well, I--I'm thinking here, I don't know if I'm allowed to talk about this because this is Ilyse's story, but I think you have Ilyse's mom and her thinking bacon double cheeseburgers.

Megan ([00:50:04](#)):

No, I love it. I love a call back the appropriation of Ilyse's stories. I do that shit all the time.

Vicki ([00:50:09](#)):

Okay. Okay. Okay. So, so anyway, I think that once we start paying attention to these other central modes of engagement to religion is feeling, um, it gets us beyond the rationality that's embedded in Western thought systems through which religion is often known and assessed. And so for me as a scholar who studies religions in Africa and African diasporic religions, this helps us really think, um, in a different way about things like spirit possession, or about experiences of ghosts or, or, or ancestral spirits, um, because those kinds of modes of religious engagement, um, are shaped by other kinds of sensory modes.

Ilyse ([00:50:58](#)):

Yeah. So I'm what I hear Vicki is that for those of us that aren't paying attention to sound not, not only does sound complicate the category of religion, but frankly paying attention to the sensory experiences might also be a way of frankly like decolonizing religious studies. Yeah.

Megan ([00:51:22](#)):

Can you say that for us?

Vicki ([00:51:24](#)):

Sure. Yes. Paying attention to sound paying attention to the senses and religion is a, is a practice of decolonization because you're not then thinking about how do I have to say that the, the Orisha, uh, in Regla de Ocha, which is, uh, uh, Afro-Cuban elaboration of Yoruba religion, right. Do I have to say that they're real or not? Right. Well, we can talk about the way in which they're sensed and their presence is made real in human bodies via spirit possession. And that that's a completely different, um, approach towards studying the practices or what--what people are doing when they're doing religion in that context.

Megan ([00:52:13](#)):

Although I kind of feel like any religious studies scholar, who's dumb enough to tell the Orishas that they're not real as on their own, but I also like this dec--decolonialize--ooh, I can talk decolonizing approach to, yeah, just understanding human experience.

Vicki ([00:52:28](#)):

Yeah, exactly. Um, I mean, I think this is where for me in my classes, uh, I always--like, I always get--we get about halfway three quarters of if I'm teaching about religions in Africa, for example, or diasporic religions, we get to this point where they're like, you're not talking about religion anymore. Um, because now we're talking about kinship, we're talking about politics, we're talking about, you know, and I'm like, what are you, you know, what did you miss? Like, let's go back again, right? Because the point is that religion, isn't this separate space that can be separated from these other domains. That's the matter of private, um, individual belief. Um, but whether you believe it or not, it's doing something in these contexts and it's impacting all of these other domains.

Riot Grrls ([00:53:30](#)):

[inaudible],

Ilyse ([00:53:31](#)):

You've heard from us, let's hear about us. It's primary sources.

Megan ([00:53:34](#)):

Primary sources!

Ilyse ([00:53:38](#)):

Okay. So a while we, Megan and I kind of like feel our world rocked by Vicki, we're going to share how we relate to religion and sound. And I guess, I guess if I'm being honest, that much of what I loved about India initially--so when I first went to India was the first time I'd ever left the country, uh, as a, as a tiny little undergrad studying abroad. And I think that what I first, like, both loved and hated and felt deeply overwhelmed by was what Vicki has just described as the soundscape. So in Chennai, which is a large city in South India, it's--everything, everything has a sound. So like when cars throw it into reverse, there were (at that time) reverse horns. So like literally instead of a truck going like, beep beep beep if every single car had a reverse song.

Ilyse ([00:54:34](#)):

So like at 4:00 AM, someone would pull out of a parking spot and you'd hear, I'm not kidding. Like an instrumental to "my heart will go on" by Celine Dion and like jingle bells, it was like nearly offensive. And this was the era of like a ring tones on cell phones and so like, this was just like garishly loud. And then you'd hear nagaswaram all the time and nagaswaram's like a double reeded instrument that's enormous and makes like really loud noises. Uh, but like in India, when people get married, you get married at this specific hour of auspiciousness. And so like, if that is 2:30 AM, then like we are walking through the streets with a nagaswaram. So all of, and like zikr at Sufi dargahs bells and chants and traffic and my memory of that first couple of weeks of India was that it just felt loud.

Ilyse ([00:55:26](#)):

And so when I think about like why I loved India so much, I actually think it's sound first. And then the other thing that I'm really thinking about Vicki, as you say, that sound helps us make community is actually one of the ways that I've quote unquote passed as an insider-ish outsider in my years of research in South Asia. And that is that I can like click my tongue and suck my teeth in a disapproving way. And I kept like--which is to say I make all the noises that are associated with disapproving aunties. And so like real talk. I don't think that's because of like secretly Indian or that like I paid attention enough. I really think this is just like the way women of a certain age make noises that are like not an outright condemnation of a youngin's behavior, but are rather like a generic scoff and having grown up with, with Jews that make these noises. I have noticed that doing this kind of like well-placed like sound--usually in a kitchen while helping with some sort of gender task--these are the ways that communities and families in particular have like accepted me as one of their own, who like gets it. And no amount of like really working on my Persian or Hindi or Urdu pronunciation has done as much work as being able to like enact a well-placed teeth suck at some socially agreed upon nonsense. So, so in that I'm thinking about it, that's less about--that is equally about demonstrating that I understand cultural norms as it is about signaling truly like with sound that I am part of this community, like a new level to think about my own--

Megan ([00:57:14](#)):

Can we get an example of this? Like what does, what does a disapproving teeth suck sound like?

Ilyse ([00:57:21](#)):

[Noises] I just made a lot of spit things on the mic and to transition. This is a rough one. Sorry.

Megan ([00:57:40](#)):

No, it's no, it's actually, it's perfect. Because the thing that I was going to say that I didn't, I didn't write down is that, uh, I have, as I have aged and as I have, uh, made friends with neuro-atypical Twitter, I realized that my lifelong sensitivity to sound and noise might be part of a larger BrainScape of, uh, ADHD and or undiagnosed autism. So experiencing soundscapes as hostile is a thing that I've been thinking a lot about recently. I was in Vegas with friend of the pod Kelly J. Baker, uh, last year. And it is not a good place to be if you are sound sensitive and can't pay attention when lots of lights and things are flashing. Um, I also did some thinking about, uh, if you've seen *_Doubt_* Meryl Streep does this like very specific clacking of Rosary beads that like sent me right back to parochial school in very real ways, her hand motions in that film. Fascinating. Uh, but I, I changed my mind in my real primary source for today. Uh, in the spirit of religion is bigger and different than what we think it is. I want to shout out friends in the Catskills who introduced me to sacred harp and shape note singing, which if I'm getting this right, uh, is a way of writing music to help Anglo Christian congregations participate in groups, singing, even if they don't read traditional sheet music. So there are really amazing, vibrant, very welcoming communities in the Catskills who get together and sing these 18th, 19th, and 20th century songs. Some of these folks are Christian. A lot of them are not. I myself am extremely allergic to cultural Christianity. And I was lured into singing about the baby Jesus on 12th night this year, uh, by these choral tricksters, it's, it's truly, it's a lovely way of being in community with people in this lovely way of forming community in very short time.

Megan ([00:59:25](#)):

And the songs are often about class critique, which is definitely how they got me. Um, it's also, when I see this particular group of friends, we begin and end get together with shape notes, singing, which is giving me major quaranfeels right now, Ilyse did a soundscape. So I'm going to do this real quick. I did not warm up. You're welcome listeners. [Megan Sings] ... which does not do it justice, because it's supposed to be like 15 different parts of harmony and everybody's getting the notes wrong. And it doesn't matter because everybody's just singing at the top of their lungs. So yeah. Yeah. That's where I'm at soundscape wise right now. Vicki, you w sorry.

Vicki ([01:00:11](#)):

Good. Can I ask you, Megan, has your shape note group tried to do a zoom sing?

Megan ([01:00:18](#)):

It's really not my group, but they have actually, they did do zoom stuff and there's also a social distance, like porch hangout in Fleischmann's, um, where folks get together and sing from far enough away so that they're not getting germs on each other.

Vicki ([01:00:33](#)):

Yeah. I mean, it's been interesting to see some of these things happening in this COVID moment where, um, uh, musicians performing together. And in some cases it really doesn't work. Um, like I think synch church singing is really hard right now because you lack that physical proximity, but there's other musical moments that seem to be really working. Um, like you're--we're creating new contexts for musical practice out of social distancing, which I think, you know, as someone who's really interested in sound, I think that's really interesting.

Megan ([01:01:08](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Or like that Buddhists, uh, monk video that was going around where they were doing a Bob Marley's Three Little Birds that everything's going to be all right. That rocked my world. So Vicki sorry. Um, yes. Give us one tiny, if you can, one teeny little example of surely the eleventy billion trillion of how you came to do the work that you do.

Vicki ([01:01:28](#)):

So I, this actually was the hardest part of thinking about being on the podcast. I have no idea. I don't know everything? Yes? Um, I mean, I could think of, so when I started thinking about it, I was like, Oh, well, let me take you back to some of the earliest moments of my childhood. Um, but one thing that I thought about was, um, you know, especially because you often talk about being raised Catholic, Megan, I too, I too was raised Catholic. Um, and what's interesting to me now seeing who I am and what I do and where I am--And I like to tell my students this, that I am a professor of religion with zero degrees in religion. You know, I have two degrees in music, a PhD in anthropology. I applied for one religion job. I applied for infinite music jobs and I got the religion job. So, um, yeah.

Megan ([01:02:31](#)):

Lucky us then!

Ilyse ([01:02:31](#)):

Seriously.

Vicki ([01:02:31](#)):

Um, but, but my mom used to go to the seven 30 mass on Sundays because there was no singing. And then I get home soon.

Megan ([01:02:41](#)):

My dad too, my dad's here.

Vicki ([01:02:42](#)):

And, um, when I think about like, maybe that's why I hated it so much. So, so that's, you know, that's maybe one of my primary sources, but I think on the other side too, too, that's sort of a negative example. But I also think about when I was in college and really starting to get disillusioned, um, because I went to college to study music and either to become an orchestra musician, or I really wanted to be an orchestra conductor--and I became so disillusioned with it. Um, and because I really started to value the experience of playing in a chamber ensemble, which is, you know, like three to six musicians playing together without a conductor. Um, and to really like to value the kind of experience one had playing together closely with those musicians, communicating with a lot of, um, nonverbal looks gestures, but

most importantly, with your instrument, um, to me, that seems the closest to the kinds of feeling-full religious experiences that Durkheim, for example, was talking about. And perhaps that's why people who are really into classical music like chamber music so much, because it is a kind of direct performance of certain kinds of values of, of, you know, communication and care and understanding.

Megan ([01:04:17](#)):

That's awesome. Yeah.

Ilyse ([01:04:19](#)):

All right. Well that was primary sources.

Megan ([01:04:23](#)):

Vicki, do you want to do the primary sources song with me?

Vicki ([01:04:26](#)):

Um, I actually, I'm going to say that I didn't realize you're sang it every time--

Ilyse ([01:04:30](#)):

Every single time.

Vicki ([01:04:32](#)):

I thought it was a recording of you singing it!

Ilyse ([01:04:33](#)):

She does it just to bother me.

Megan ([01:04:38](#)):

I do. I 100% do.

Ilyse ([01:04:38](#)):

Now it's just canon, but it's every time.

Megan ([01:04:43](#)):

It's nom--it's, it's, it's generating Grammy buzz. I heard it on the Twitter.

Vicki ([01:04:49](#)):

I--really?--

Ilyse ([01:04:50](#)):

You don't really need to sing it, Vicki.

Vicki ([01:04:55](#)):

I think I'll allow you you're solo. It's a valuable part of the podcast.

Megan ([01:04:56](#)):

I think that's really what I need is, is more of a solo role. So primary sources,

Megan ([01:05:07](#)):

Are you okay?!

Ilyse ([01:05:07](#)):

Yeah I'm OK. I dropped a thing. I'm good. I'm good. Primary sources just knocked me off my feet.

Megan ([01:05:11](#)):

and that's all right. Don't pack up yet, nerds. You've got homework.

Bikini Kill ([01:05:23](#)):

[inaudible]

Megan ([01:05:23](#)):

We know, we know it's SUMMER but just because we're chilling in socially distant pools with curbside picked up cocktails. I'm not actually going in the pool at all. That's a lie, but I might get to go to the ocean anyway. Cocktails. Yeah. So we also have books at the ready. So first and foremost, don't forget all of this and more will be in the show notes. Hey Vicki, what should our listeners pick up if they want to know more about religion and sound or more about, uh, more about Nigeria specifically?

Vicki ([01:05:47](#)):

Well, before you pick up any books, I want to tell you to start by listening. Um, how we hear, how we don't hear is shaped by who we are and how we've learned to listen. So we need to bring that to awareness. So if you're really interested in thinking more about sound and the way that sound impacts religion or any other aspects of your--your--he lives you live then listen. Listening carefully can help us recognize how we are always actively filtering sounds according to the context in which we're in, in--according to the, the conventions, the things that we've learned in terms of how to listen. So pay attention to listening, um, how you categorize sounds, what sounds you hear in the foreground, in the background, and what enables that categorization? Um, so my first homework would be to just take a notebook, um, don't take a recorder. That's often a mistake that a lot of people who think they want to study sound make is like, "Oh, I'm going to record the sounds," but actually listen to the sounds because a microphone is not an ear.

Megan ([01:06:59](#)):

No hairs!

Vicki ([01:06:59](#)):

Um, but yeah, exactly though, there's a microphone. Well, a microphone filters, according to the ways in which a technician, sorry, I'm going to get all nerdy again. It filters according to the way in which the technician program, the mic to listen, but that's not how ears work. And so pay attention to your ears and think about what your ears are doing. Go sit somewhere and listen and write down all the sounds you hear, and then write down the sounds that you thought were important. And then think about why you thought they were important, right? And that can be in a religious context, or you could, you know,

since we're all, well, most of us are socially distancing in our homes you can do that outside. Or if you're participating in any of the protests that have been going on, protests are great sites to do some, some listening exercises and to think about the role that sounds playing in those contexts really important.

Vicki ([01:07:53](#)):

Do you, should I recommend some books or some readings too?

Megan ([01:07:58](#)):

You want, but also I am more than happy to let you be the expert on this podcast. You can recommend that, or I think it would be a baller move and actually a good exercise for you, Vicki, to claim your expertise, just be like, I just told you to listen to stuff. And then at least it's like read Vicki's book and I'm going to be like also listen to her podcast, the end.

Vicki ([01:08:16](#)):

Cool. Well then I'm just going to say: listen. Listen hard.

Megan ([01:08:20](#)):

Yes.

Ilyse ([01:08:24](#)):

Well, I guess for my homework, I'm just going to assign you Vicki's book. It is really fantastic. It's called Singing Yoruba Christianity: Music, Media, and Morality, and I will link to it. Megan, what do you have?

Megan ([01:08:39](#)):

I am going to recommend that you listen to Dr. Brennan's recent interview on the Classical Ideas Podcast, and also check out the American Religious Sounds project. Vicki Brennan is on the board. You can find them online at religious sounds all one word.osu.edu. You can find Megan that's me on Twitter @MPGPhD and Ilyse @ ProfIRMF or the show at @KeepingIt_101. You can and should find professor Vicki Brennan at @VickiBrennan. And find a website at keepingit101.com.

Ilyse ([01:09:16](#)):

till next time, get those rosés out and piece out nerds!

Megan ([01:09:20](#)):

do your homework. It's on the syllabus, but you can take it outside.

Vicki ([01:09:26](#)):

And listen hard.

Speaker 1 ([01:09:44](#)):

[inaudible]

Ilyse ([01:09:45](#)):

You're out there.