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# The Desert Strikes Back: Sound Colonisation and Desert Agency in Óliver Laxe’s *Sirāt*

**Keywords:**
desert landscape;
desert soundscape;
sound ecology;
New Galician Cinema;
road film;
Óliver Laxe

**Abstract**
This article analyses *Sirāt* (2025), Óliver Laxe’s hybrid Sufi road film set in the Moroccan desert, through the lens of soundscape theory and sound ecology, as well as posthuman theoretical frameworks. Focusing on the film’s immersive sound design, it examines how amplified trance-rave music functions as a form of sonic inscription that attempts to appropriate and dominate desert space. Drawing on theories of sound ecology and more-than-human agency, the author highlights how *Sirāt* presents the desert as an active, responsive entity resisting sonic colonisation. Through the interaction between electronic music, religious and environmental sound, and silence the desert emerges as a palimpsestic soundscape shaped by competing forces. The article demonstrates how *Sirāt* frames sound as a key medium through which ecological conflict, postcolonial tension, and spiritual transformation are articulated, positioning the desert not as a passive backdrop but as a living, agentive presence.

**Słowa kluczowe:**
krajobraz pustynny;
pustynny krajobraz dźwiękowy;
ekologia akustyczna;
Nowe Kino Galicyjskie;
film drogi;
Óliver Laxe

**Abstrakt**

**Pustynia kontratakuje. Dźwiękowa kolonizacja i sprawczość pustyni w *Sirāt* Ólivera Laxe'a**

Autor analizuje *Sirāt* (2025), hybrydowy suficki film drogi Ólivera Laxe'a osadzony na marokańskiej pustyni, przez pryzmat teorii pejzażu dźwiękowego i ekologii akustycznej oraz w perspektywie posthumanizmu. Koncentrując się na immersyjnym designie dźwiękowym filmu, autor bada, w jaki sposób muzyka trance-rave funkcjonuje jako forma sonicznej inskrypcji, dążącej do zawłaszczenia i zdominowania przestrzeni pustyni. Odwołując się do ekologii akustycznej oraz koncepcji więcej-niż-ludzkiej sprawczości, autor ukazuje pustynię jako aktywny, reagujący byt opierający się sonicznej kolonizacji. Interakcje między muzyką elektroniczną, dźwiękiem religijnym i środowiskowym oraz ciszą sprawiają, że pustynia jawi się jako palimpsestowy pejzaż dźwiękowy kształtowany przez konkurujące siły. Autor dowodzi, że dźwięk jest w *Sirāt* kluczowym medium artykulacji konfliktu ekologicznego, napięć postkolonialnych i transformacji duchowej, pozycjonującym pustynię nie jako bierne tło, lecz jako żywą, sprawczą obecność.

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*Meet you at Sirāt*
(A Persian Curse)

## Introduction

Cinema has repeatedly represented the desert as an exotic, visually striking, and symbolically charged landscape. Its apparent openness, stark beauty, and evocative spatial qualities have attracted filmmakers from around the world, enabling the desert to function as a recurring setting across a wide range of genres. Adventure, drama, western, science fiction, and post-apocalyptic narratives have all unfolded within desert environments, as exemplified by *Lawrence of Arabia* (dir. David Lean, 1962), *The Sheltering Sky* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1990), *El Topo* (dir. Alejandro Jodorowsky, 1970), *Paris, Texas* (dir. Wim Wenders, 1984), *Dune* and *Dune: Part Two* (dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2021 and 2024), as well as the *Mad Max* franchise (dir. George Miller, 1979-2024).

Within this broad cinematic tradition, the desert's vastness and emptiness have made it an especially conducive terrain for narratives structured around movement, thereby creating a natural point of convergence with the road film as a distinct cinematic form. Typically, we understand road films as a subgenre of travel film with fictional narratives structured primarily around mobility, most often facilitated by a vehicle, serving as the film's central organising principle.[1] Originating in the United States of America in the second half of the 20th century, the genre soon travelled beyond its national context, extending to Europe in the 1960s and in the 1970s to Australia, demonstrating the genre's global mobility and adaptability across diverse cultural landscapes.[2]

Within this transnational trajectory Óliver Laxe situates *Sirāt* (2025), a road film about a group of European ravers travelling through the Moroccan desert. While desert road film has historically privileged visual spectacle, *Sirāt* marks a decisive shift away from ocularcentrism by placing listening and auditory perception at the centre of the cinematic experience. By prioritising embodied listening and auditory immersion, *Sirāt* invites the spectator to apprehend the desert through non-visual sensory registers, expanding cinematic perception toward a multisensory and acoustic mode of attention. This study intervenes precisely at this juncture.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on desert landscapes and their visual aesthetics in cinema, researchers have paid significantly less attention to the role of sound in shaping desert space. Questions of how sound operates as a spatial, sensory, and ecological force within desert environments remain largely underexplored. This article addresses this critical gap by examining the soundscape of *Sirāt*, focusing on how sound and music function both as drivers of narrative and agents that mediate the film's engagement with desert ecology. *Sirāt* constitutes a particularly productive case study due to its central preoccupation with rave music in the desert and its dense, multi-layered sonic construction, which brings into tension Western imaginaries of the desert as a site of secular trance and spectacle with Eastern and Islamic traditions that privilege voice, listening, and acoustic restraint.

This study investigates how *Sirāt* employs soundscape as an aesthetic and conceptual strategy to reflect, reinforce, and interrogate anthropocentric perspectives. I adopted a qualitative methodology grounded in soundscape analysis and based it on close readings of the film with particular attention to sound, music, and noise as they operate within the desert environment. What informed my analysies were theoretical frameworks by R. Murray Schafer, Bernie Krause, and Bryan Pijanowski, whose concepts of sound ecology guide the interpretation of sound, environment, and anthropocentrism. The central research question guiding the inquiry was: how does *Sirāt* represent and include different soundscapes in its desert setting, and in what ways does the desert respond to the human-generated sound?

To address this question, I organised the article into four sections. The first section introduces key debates in soundscape theory and considers their relevance to cinematic analysis. The second section examines the road film genre, with particular attention to its condition of inbetweenness and spatial transition. The third section turns to the film's desert setting, analysing the sonic occupation of the landscape through rave culture and amplified sound. The final section situates the Moroccan desert within an environmental justice framework, reading it as a sacrifice zone shaped by historical and military violence. Drawing on theories of relational agency, this section challenges anthropocentric interpretations of the desert by foregrounding the entanglement of sound, matter, and ecological history.

## Soundscape Theory

A plethora of disciplines adopts the term 'soundscape' – analogous to landscape – to describe the relational interplay between a given environment and the ensemble of sounds that constitute its acoustic presence. Etymologically, the suffix '-scape' derives from the Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning 'to shape,'[3] indicating that a soundscape refers, quite literally, to 'a shaped sound' or the shaping of space through sound.

Moreover, numerous disciplines adopt the concept of 'soundscape' to articulate the relationship between a landscape and its sonic composition.[4] Schafer positions sound as a fundamental dimension of the environment, not simply as ambient noise or human-generated sound. He argues that sound is as constitutive of a landscape as its vegetation, climate, or topography. Emphasising the place's acoustic identity, Schafer proposes that unique sonic configurations disclose the dynamics through which particular environments operate.[5] After all, Schafer's main interest is not only ecological analysis; he is especially interested in identifying natural sounds that one could listen to, preserve, and even transform into music or use as compositional material.

Krause examines how diverse biological and non-biological sounds overlap and interact within a given site and categorises them into two primary groups. 'Biophony' refers to the collective sounds produced by living organisms, such as animals, insects, and birds, which together form the biological acoustic signature of a place. By contrast, 'geophony' denotes natural, non-biological sounds generated by physical processes, including wind, rain, thunder, flowing water, and

*El Topo*, dir. Alejandro Jodorowsky (1970) seismic activity.[6] By distinguishing between biophony and geophony, Krause offers an analytical framework that treats soundscapes not as undifferentiated noise but as structured ecological systems through which we can understand the functioning of an environment.

Pijanowski et al. further elaborate this conceptualisation. They add a third environmental acoustics category, namely ‘anthrophony.’ Anthrophony encompasses human-generated sounds defined as a prevalent threat to ecological balance. These sounds frequently overwhelm or mask biophonic activity, thereby disrupting the acoustic niches upon which many species depend. This tripartite model underscores how environmental sound is not merely ambient but structured, relational, and increasingly vulnerable to anthropogenic intrusion.[7]

Emphasising the soundscape’s relationality to its surroundings, the authors of the 2009 NANR 200 environmental report argue that soundscape refers not only to the aggregate of sounds within a specific environment, but also to the dynamic relationship between sonic phenomena and human perception, interpretation, and social interaction.[8] Building on this relational understanding of sound and space, Almo Farina posits that we could more precisely define soundscape as the spatial arrangement of sounds across a landscape understood as a purely geographic entity.[9] In his book *Soundscape Ecology*, Farina further elaborates on this concept and employs the term ‘soundscape’ in its broader and widely accepted usage, referring to the geographic distribution of multiple sound sources as they are perceived within a given environment.[10] While these perspectives collectively illuminate the ecological and relational dimensions of environmental sound, this article primarily adopts Schafer’s understanding for the analysis of the soundscape in *Sirāt*.

## Rave Trance Soundscape

*Sirāt* follows Luis (Sergi López) and his young son Esteban (Bruno Núñez Arjona) as they canvass a large techno-rave in the remote desert of Morocco in search of Luis’s missing daughter and Esteban’s sister, Mar, who vanished months earlier at a similar gathering. Upon arriving at a large gathering of predominantly European ravers, the father and son distribute photographs of Mar, but their efforts are in vain. The next day, a small group of ravers – Stef, Jade, Tonin, Bigui, and Josh – suggests that Mar could be at another party in the middle of the desert beyond the mountains. As the ravers dance to the loud music, military vehicles stop the party and order the evacuation of the area, forcing the rave community to disperse. As everyone depart, the group of ravers deviates from the main route, and Luis and Esteban hastily decide to follow them. On the dangerous mountain road, tragedy strikes when Esteban dies in a fatal accident. Overcome by grief, Luis continues the journey with the ravers across the empty desert, seeking help. Exhausted and disoriented, the group eventually halts in the open desert, where they erect loudspeakers and begin to dance to psychedelic techno music. While in trance, Jade triggers a buried landmine and explodes instantly. Tonin meets the same fate. As the group fails to escape the minefield by sending forward unmanned vehicles, Luis stands up and crosses the short path safely by foot.

Surprisingly, Bigui dies when following in his footsteps. Esteban then urges Stef and Josh to cross without thinking, and they do so. The film ends with the surviving characters travelling alongside Africans aboard an open-roof freight train moving toward the desert horizon.

The film opens with a montage of hands and bodies working in concert to assemble a monumental outdoor sound system in the heart of the desert. After a series of shots, a close-up follows: a hand tightening a heavy connector into the socket of a power distribution unit. Next, a tattooed arm reaches into an exposed fuse box, flipping a breaker to initiate current; a faded 'RAVE' sticker marks the apparatus as part of improvised, subcultural infrastructure. The nearby red emergency-stop button lends the image an industrial, faintly hazardous air. The sequence culminates in a wide shot of towering black and brown speaker stacks – subwoofers, cabinets, and horn-loaded enclosures – installed symmetrically in front of a massive ochre rock formation. The acoustic architecture rises from the desert floor like a newly erected Sphinx, an engineered monument asserting its presence within an ancient landscape. With the first pulse of music, sound waves sweep across the desert floor, making the fragile groundcover quiver and setting fine soil in motion, registering the terrain's subtle responsiveness to the intrusion of man-made sound. Then, the camera zooms toward the rocky mountains, visually tracing the imagined trajectory of the vibrations as they propagate outward, as if the rock faces were receiving the sonic impact themselves. Almost immediately, the diegetic music asserts itself as the dominant acoustic presence, projecting beyond the ridgelines and flooding the expanse of the desert. With this overwhelming sonic claim, the party begins.

Unmistakably, *Sirāt* is a music-driven film that bears traces of the director's own experiences. *It was during the preparation of "Mimosas." I witnessed an illegal rave in El Palmeral*[11] – an encounter that shaped his sonic imagination. The ravers in *Sirāt* are portrayed by amateur actors and actresses, who are playing themselves. In fact, Laxe selected them from an actual rave gathering and cast them alongside the veteran Spanish actor Sergi López in the lead role. Two of these non-professional actors, Richard Bellamy and the French performer Tonin Janvier, have physical disabilities. Their amputations and bodily deficiencies function as visual and thematic markers of absence, resonating with the narrative motif of Luis's missing daughter.

The rave squad consists of social outcasts, "the Other," displaced drug consumers who wander across the desert spaces. The visual and thematic presence of amputees, dwarfs, and individuals with physical disabilities in the film brings to mind the work of Alejandro Jodorowsky, particularly in *El Topo* (1970). In the third part of this spiritually inflected, genre-bending "acid Western," the protagonist descends into a subterranean world inhabited by a community of marginalised figures, closely resembling the misfit collective portrayed in Tod Browning's cult classic *Freaks* (1932). *Sirāt* comparably references the latter with Bigui wearing a T-shirt with a *Freaks* movie poster, depicting Elvira and Jenny Lee Snow.

Emerging in the late 1980s alongside the rise of house and techno, rave culture quickly distinguished itself through its inventive use of place and space. From its earliest formulations, the rave's definition encompassed not only sound but also setting, meaning an "Otherworld" carved out of ordinary geography that allows collective intensity and sensory immersion to flourish. Early raves unfolded in typical warehouse spaces, repurposing industrial sites into nocturnal playgrounds for underground communities. As the scene expanded in the 1990s, a parallel "above-ground" infrastructure developed: commercial raves moved into concert halls, arenas, stadiums, and convention centers, spaces whose scale mirrored the growing mass appeal of electronic music. However, another trajectory carried raving outward, into the natural world. Outdoor raves emerged as a distinct subculture, staging events in remote or elemental landscapes that heightened the sensory experience: on beaches such as the Wicked Crew's raves in the Bay Area, in the mountains like Seattle's Starseed full-moon parties, in forests like Vancouver's Tribal Harmonix events in British Columbia, and in deserts such as Moontribe's gatherings in the Mojave Desert, raves in the Negev Desert in Israel, or Burning Man in Nevada's Black Rock Desert. Despite their varied locations, raves consistently cultivate a *utopian sensibility and a strong feeling of community*, generating a temporary transcendental zone shaped by wild dancing, psychoactive substances, and the immersive force of psychedelic trance music.[12]

## Sonic Transcendence

At the core of this transcendent experience lies music – specifically electronic music – with rhythmic structures and immersive acoustic design that enable such heightened states. Raves always deliver music at exceptionally high volume through a high-fidelity sound system, ideally one equipped with surround capabilities and subwoofers that render the bass physically palpable.[13] Concerning the significance of music within rave culture, Jimi Fritz, author of *Rave Culture: An Insider's View*, remarks that *with conventional music, we listen to the form and follow the lyrics, but with rave music there is no beginning or end. The music is cyclical and continuous and acts more as a catalyst for our own personal inner journey, more a transportation system than an end in itself. Rave music is specifically designed to make you move your body*.[14] As Robin Sylvan demonstrates in his extensive ethnographic research on raves and raver testimonies, the psychedelic trance music produces *an altered state of consciousness in and of itself*[15] – one that can ultimately lead to what he identifies as *religious conversion*, an experience strikingly similar to classic accounts of spiritual awakening, albeit varying from individual to individual.[16]

This convergence of sound, ecstatic experience, and spiritual transformation also underlies Laxe's reflections on his own artistic practice. As he explains, *I like electronic music, I like techno, and the Qur'an intoxicates me. The Qur'an heals me. I have the impression that this film has one foot in tradition, in classicism, and, on the other hand, its soul is connected to the contemporary world*.[17]

Against this backdrop, the film situates the rave, treating its amplified music as a contemporary analogue to older forms of desert spirituality. When the group informs Louis that his daughter might have joined another rave party on the other side of the desert, the camera cuts to a blond woman standing directly in front of a loudspeaker to hear the music as loudly as possible. Next, a divider –

*Mad Max: Fury Road*, dir. George Miller (2015) a metallic structural element that splits the loudspeaker cavity into four chambers, an acoustic partition for shaping airflow and sound pressure – appears in extreme close-up in the form of a cross. Then, the divider is slowly superimposed on a group of bare-chested male ravers just before a stack of loudspeakers. Semiotically, the divider recalls the form of the Christian cross – an emblem historically associated with sanctity, sacrifice, and transcendence. However, in this context, the symbol appears to have undergone a cultural and semiotic transformation. Once a sacred icon of religious devotion, the cross is re-materialised within the apparatus of rave culture: not carved in stone or wood, but embedded in a machine engineered for producing amplified sound. Thus, the loudspeaker becomes a modern shrine, and the cross within it – an emblem of a new form of ritual. For the ravers, who traverse the desert in search of ecstatic musical gatherings, this technological cross may function, as Laxe shows, as a signifier of a different "sacred," namely the collective, immersive experience of music itself. In this way, the film stages a displacement of spiritual symbolism. It reconfigures the holy cross, long associated with divine revelation and suffering, as the "cross of music," an emblem of sonic transcendence.

Moreover, the image carries not only ritualistic connotations but also a subtle erotic charge. Building on Schafer's proposition that the ear functions as a sensual gateway, a site of sensory intimacy – an 'erotic orifice' – that parallels other forms of corporeal contact,[18] the film visualises sonic reception as an embodied and, at times, eroticised encounter. In the scene with the bare-chested ravers, this dynamic becomes especially evident in the central figure's interaction with the loudspeaker: he presses his torso firmly against its surface and grips it with an intensity that exceeds mere functional engagement. His posture – eyes closed, muscles tensed, body leaning inward – evokes the act of physical intimacy, suggesting that he is not simply listening but surrendering himself to the vibration. By staging listening as an act of corporeal closeness, the film foregrounds the tactile dimensions of sound, emphasising how the body – rather than ear alone – mediates auditory experience. Thus, rave music emerges not only as a quasi-religious ritual but also as an arena where erotic energy and sonic intensity converge, rendering the auditory experience inseparable from the embodied desire it animates.

## Islamic Soundscape and the Desert

While *Sirāt* reconfigures Christian iconography and rave sonicity into a new form of embodied ritual, it also expands this spiritual soundscape by introducing Islamic auditory traditions. Islamic sound appears at a makeshift desert outpost as the group stops to buy gas. The camera shows Stef reaching a small, impoverished cinder-block building surrounded by a scattered assortment of equipment and materials: large plastic barrels, metal drums, pieces of wood, pipes, and containers. She steps in and sees an old, box-style CRT television sitting on a rough wooden shelf. The TV broadcasts a live transmission from the Kaaba in Mecca, surrounded by a dense crowd of pilgrims performing tawaf[19] as Qur'an verses are recited: *Indeed, We have made this Quran easy in your own language O Prophet so with it you may give good news to the righteous and warn those who are contentious. Imagine* *how many peoples We have destroyed before them! Do you still see any of them, or even hear from them the slightest sound*?[20]

Chosen from the Maryam chapter in the Qur'an, the verses state that the Qur'an has been made *easy in your language* and, in a solemn warning tone, issue an explicit admonition to *contentious* peoples, those who are unreceptive to divine guidance and reject truth out of pride and arrogance. The rhetorical question that follows, whether one can perceive or hear even the faintest trace of them, hauntingly emphasises the finality of their disappearance into complete silence, in contrast with the overall raucous tone of the film. The Qur'an continues with verses from Surah As-Saffat: *Glorified is your Lord – the Lord of Honour and Power – above what they claim! Peace be upon the messengers. And praise be to Allah – Lord of all worlds.*[21] Meanwhile, the camera cuts to a close-up shot of Tonin walking bare-footed with a metal crutch on sunlit ground, a premonitory shot which will reappear near the end of the film. The camera then shows an extreme close-up of a single continuous white line on the asphalt roadway in accelerated motion, evoking David Lynch's highly kinetic opening and closing shots of a broken yellow line filmed from the front of a rapidly moving vehicle in *Lost Highway* (1997). Devin Orgeron notes that the endlessly streaming yellow line in *Lost Highway* destabilises the classical ideology of the road as a coherent, linear pathway, a trope epitomised by yellow brick road in *The Wizard of Oz* (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939), and instead registers Fred's fractured subjectivity and his descent into disorientation.[22]

The use of Islamic soundscape is not exclusive to *Sirāt*. Laxe had previously employed the Talbiyah, meaning the sacred chant recited during Islamic pilgrimage (Hajj and ʿUmrah), in the closing sequence of *Mimosas* (2016). As three old Mercedes-Benz vehicles traverse the open desert at dusk, the chant emerges as non-diegetic sound: *Here I am at Your service, O God, here I am. Here I am; You have no partner, here I am. Truly, all praise and blessing are Yours, and all sovereignty. You have no partner, here I am*. The invocation overlays the image with a spiritual register, transforming the desert crossing into a gesture of submission, devotion, and existential awakening rather than mere physical movement. *Sirāt* mobilises a similar visual effect, but situates it within a religious cosmological framework. In this framing, the road shot becomes a visual counterpoint to the rave's overpowering loudness: a reminder that beyond the amplified, pulsating sound world of the ravers lies the possibility of absolute silence, the silence associated with divine refusal and eschatological finality.

Laxe's film settings alternate between northern Spain and North Africa, challenging the presumed locality and spatial constraints often associated with Galician cinema. While *Fire Will Come* (*O que arde*, 2019) is set in the Serra dos Ancares in Galicia, Laxe filmed his debut feature *You All Are Captains* (*Todos vós sodes capitáns*, 2010), along with *Mimosas* and *Sirāt*, in Morocco. By extending his practice beyond regional borders to such distant locations, Laxe positions himself as a distinctly transnational filmmaker and his films as "border cinema." As he explicitly remarks: *Our cinema is a bastard, exiled, migrant, border cinema. To be an artist already implies being a foreigner, a misfit.*[23] This attitude finds concrete expression in one of the most salient characteristics of his films, the desert landscapes and soundscapes that exceed clear national or cultural boundaries.

*Mimosas*, dir. Óliver Laxe (2016)

By juxtaposing electronically produced trance music with human-produced, religiously oriented sound, the desert acquires a palimpsestic dimension. Generally, one understands a palimpsest as a manuscript consisting of two or more successive texts, with earlier inscriptions partially erased to make way for later ones, yet still leaving legible traces.[24] Cultural landscape theorists have borrowed this term to describe a landscape in which multiple historical and cultural layers coexist. By necessity, every landscape is written over a former site – be it primal, secondary, or tertiary – being shaped by the accumulated physical and symbolic inscriptions of the place.[25] In *Sirāt*, this idea extends from the visual environment to the acoustic domain, generating what we may understand as a "palimpsest soundscape": a sonic field in which diverse auditory traditions, spiritual resonances, and contemporary sonic practices overlap and interact. This layered sound ecology allows older religious sonorities to reverberate within and against modern electronic forms, producing a complex auditory environment where the past and the present intermingle.

This ecological understanding of desert sound dovetails with the spiritual sonorities historically associated with desert settings. Major religious traditions repeatedly imagine the desert as a landscape in which auditory perception becomes primary. Ecologically, deserts constitute hi-fi soundscapes: environments of extreme quiet in which even the smallest sonic event acquires exceptional clarity. This heightened acoustic sensitivity renders the ear, rather than the eye, the principal organ of orientation and revelation. Within such sonic conditions, Moses hears the voice of God from the burning bush and later receives the commandments amid thunderous, disembodied sound on Mount Sinai. Likewise, Jesus's forty days in the desert foreground the struggle of divine and demonic voices that test and affirm his mission. In Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad receives the first Qur'anic revelation through the voice of Gabriel in the solitude of the desert night. Therefore, across Abrahamic monotheism, the desert operates as a vast acoustic chamber whose ecological silence enables spiritual audition: a space where the ear becomes the instrument of attunement to voices emerging from beyond the visible world.

Against this deep history of desert listening, *Sirāt* deploys a contemporary auditory apparatus: the colossal loudspeakers erected by the ravers. While R. Murray Schafer defines the soundmark in analogy to the landmark, as an acoustically distinctive yet spatially fixed feature of a community's soundscape,[26] *Sirāt* complicates this model by presenting what one might describe as a "mobile soundmark." I use this term to extend Schafer's framework: rather than remaining geographically anchored, the culturally distinctive sound travels through space, carrying its territorial and symbolic force with it. In the context of rave culture, it is not the loudspeaker itself but the amplified, bass-driven electronic pulse – the repetitive four-on-the-floor beat – that functions as the soundmark. The community can immediately recognise this sound charged with collective meaning. The loudspeaker operates as the technological apparatus that projects and spatially enforces that soundmark within the desert environment.

Although Schafer is sharply critical of loudspeakers as instruments of 'schizophonia' – the technological separation of sound from its originating source –

I focus here not on that ontological disjunction but on the way amplified electronic sound operates as a culturally specific acoustic marker within cinematic space. Through massive speaker stacks as sources of *vibes, power and ambience*,[27] the ravers effectively overwrite the desert's natural keynotes. Generated by geographical and climatic conditions, these keynotes include wind, water, rustling vegetation, birdsong, and other animal vocalisations.[28] They do not demand deliberate attention. Rather, they are *overheard but cannot be overlooked*.[29] In *Sirāt*, such sounds surface only intermittently. For example, we can hear a birdsong during the river crossing or rainfall on the night before Esteban's death, which thereby emphasises how the amplified rave pulse suppresses the desert's ecological register.

A comparable dynamic structures the sonic world of the *Mad Max* franchise. Set within a post-apocalyptic desert wasteland, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (dir. George Miller, 2015) and *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* (dir. George Miller, 2024) foreground the struggle for scarce resources – water, energy, and fuel – yet they also stage a battle over acoustic space. The figure of the Coma-Doof Warrior, who performs atop the Doof Wagon with his flame-throwing electric guitar, exemplifies a fully realised mobile soundmark. His amplified performance does not emanate from a fixed point in the landscape. Rather, it moves with the convoy, transforming sound into a weaponised, territorial force. Significantly, his name derives from Australian slang for techno-rave gatherings – "doof parties" – named after their insistent rhythmic pulse. In both *Sirāt* and *Mad Max*, technologically mediated sound does more than accompany action: it reconfigures the desert as an acoustically contested terrain, where amplified cultural signatures displace or dominate the fragile keynotes of the natural world.

This displacement of the desert's natural keynotes by the sound of the loudspeakers opens a broader theoretical question: how does sound, as a sensory modality, reorganise our relation to space itself? Jonathan Sterne's formulation of the 'audiovisual litany' provides a framework for answering this. In his seminal work *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Sterne articulates a series of distinctions between the visual and auditory senses. In what he calls the 'audiovisual litany,' Sterne identifies a recurring set of oppositions that contrast hearing and vision as fundamentally different modes of engaging with the world. However, Sterne introduces this 'litany' to critique its reductive and ideological character, showing how such sensory binaries are historically constructed rather than ontologically given. This approach characterises hearing as spherical and immersive, surrounding the subject and drawing them into events.[30] To describe hearing as *spherical* is to emphasise that sound does not arrive from a single, fixed direction but envelops the listener from all sides. Unlike vision, which organises the world in linear trajectories and delimited fields of view, hearing takes place within a 360-degree acoustic horizon. This means that the listener – in this case both the ravers and the audiences – is never positioned outside of sound but always within it. Moreover, sound wraps around the very materials of the desert landscape – the air, soil, and vegetation – thereby transforming and, in a sense, colonising the desert's sonic environment.

In this light, we may interpret *Sirāt* as depicting how the desert's acoustic environment becomes subject to sonic colonisation. In the past, according to Schafer, people considered the church bells ‘sacred noise’ expressing divine power, which colonisers used in occupied territories to exert power.[31] In the post-electronic-revolution secular world, a parallel structure emerges as European ravers disseminate their music across North Africa, imposing a new acoustic regime that echoes earlier forms of sonic domination.

As Bernie Krause argues in his critique of the *power of noise*, sonic domination operates not only through volume but through what loudness symbolically compensates for. Krause observes that *the louder the sounds we can produce, the more virile we are supposed to feel, absent anything else of consequence that provides us with a sense of self- or spiritual-worth*.[32] Thus, Krause identifies noise as a performative assertion of power and presence. Within this logic, amplified sound functions as an instrument of territorial and cultural domination that occupies space and silences alternative acoustic relations. However, this same gesture simultaneously reveals its inverse condition: the reliance on volume exposes a lack of spiritual depth and ethical grounding. Loudness becomes a substitute for meaning rather than its expression, masking an absence of inner or communal value with technological amplification.

## Sufi Road Film

Scholars widely recognise the road film as an American genre[33] which emphasises themes of rebellion, escape, discovery, and transformation.[34] Emerging most visibly in the post-war period, alongside economic growth and the rise of automobile culture, the genre foregrounds mobility across the vast US landscape, framing travel as both a physical journey and an expression of American identity.[35] From the 1960s onward, filmmakers worldwide took up the road film and adapted and reworked the genre across different geographies and political contexts, particularly in Europe and Australia. Following the pivotal events of 1968, the genre experienced a significant revitalisation in the USA during the 1970s, a period described by Peter Biskind in his study *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* as part of the “New Hollywood” movement shaped by cultural, industrial, and aesthetic transformations.[36] By the 1990s, the road film had gained prominence beyond Europe and the United States, extending into Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, where the genre’s transnational character and its sustained engagement with themes of in-betweenness were further affirmed.[37] Echoing this transnational expansion, *Sirāt* emerges from a similar cinematic tradition, drawing on the road-film tradition to articulate similar conditions of mobility, displacement, and in-betweenness.

Laxe’s title closely resonates with the transnational logic that structures the road film as a genre. As the name suggests, *Sirāt* is structured around the motif of the road. The opening epigraph explains the title: *There is a bridge called Sirāt that connects Hell and Paradise. Those who cross it are warned that its passage is narrower than a strand of hair, sharper than a sword*. In Arabic, *sirāt* literally means ‘path,’ ‘road,’ or ‘way’ which denotes a clear, straight route that leads toward a destination. In the Qur’an, the term functions metaphorically, most famously in the phrase *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (‘the straight path’),[38] signifying the path of truth, justice, and virtue. It is the path that avoids extremes, errors, and deviations, leading to success both in this life and the Hereafter. However, within Hadīth literature, but not in Qur'an, Sirāt is a bridge set up above and across hell from one end to the other, which Muhammad describes as *finer than a hair and sharper than a sword*.[39] As Mary Boyce argues, this bridge of judgment is rooted in pre-Islamic tradition, traceable to Iranian (Zoroastrian/Mazdayasnian) religious thought. In Zoroastrian eschatology, the soul of the deceased must traverse the Činvat Bridge – the bridge of judgment – to reach the other world.[40] A virtuous soul crosses safely into heaven, whereas the wicked fail to pass and fall into hell. Even without familiarity with its origin, the epigraph signals to the viewer both the path to be taken and the impending trials and tribulations.

Following this Eastern-Islamic cultural reference, Laxe populates the filmic space with European characters, thereby producing a hybrid cultural space. The story of the Spanish father who sets off for a journey across the Moroccan desert in search of his daughter narratively evokes *The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956). However, unlike Ford's film, the daughter's disappearance is voluntary and does not result from abduction. Her absence constitutes a self-directed act of estrangement. Along his journey, Luis encounters a group of European nomads. While the father is driven by loss and the imperative to search, these nomads are motivated by the pursuit of rave parties, paradisal spaces that promise psychedelic music, drug-induced trance, and a sense of radical freedom. Paradoxical as they may appear, these fleeting utopias emerge from Morocco, a former colonised territory shaped by Spain and France. The film inscribes itself within the conventions of the road film genre, structured around motifs of quest, rebellion, escape, and discovery.[41]

While waiting in a military-controlled queue to leave the desert, Luis witnesses two vehicles rebel by leaving the designated route. After a brief moment of hesitation and encouragement from his son, Esteban, Luis decides to follow the ravers, despite not knowing their destination, guided only by the hope that they may be heading toward a rave where his daughter could be. As we can infer, the desert is never merely an empty void but rather a battleground of spatial policies. The convoy of nomadic ravers encounters military forces, evoking Gilles Deleuze's argument concerning the tension between the 'state apparatus' and the 'nomads.'[42] Deleuzian spatial theory distinguishes between striated space and smooth space. Striated space is structured, regulated, and hierarchical, whereas smooth space is open, indeterminate, and resistant to fixed orientation. To the state, the desert is an "interior" that it must map, grid, and render legible, but to the nomads, the desert is a smooth space – a land of possibility, mobility, and unconfined movement. The abrupt break from the queue and subsequent veering into unknown terrain constitute an act of refusal: mobility transforms into rebellion and the characters into nomads. In doing so, they embody what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the true nomad's capacity to continue populating and defending smooth space without becoming ensnared in processes of striation.[43] Initially, Luis hesitates, which reflects the internal conflict between adherence to authority and the psychological need to find his missing daughter. Uncertain whether this path would lead him to hell or to heaven, Luis chooses to follow the separating group, a decision that inadvertently turns him into a rebel akin to his daughter. Now, he drives toward the heart of the desert, a land in which he will face trials.

*Sirāt*, dir. Óliver Laxe (2025)

During his journey, Luis encounters physical, logistical, and interpersonal challenges. Unlike the ravers' vehicles, Luis' Citroën's lower ground clearance causes it to become stuck on a dirt road, requiring Tonin to remove its front bumper to allow further movement. Subsequently, a river obstructs the route, preventing the vehicle from crossing. Although the group initially continues without him, they later return and tow his car across the river. Another challenge they face is the lack of food and provisions, as they have only an orange and a piece of chocolate. While Luis initially resists sharing food with the group, he later decides to share in an effort to build a bond and to express appreciation for their earlier assistance. Moreover, the pair's dog, Pipa, falls ill after she eats human faeces with traces of LSD in it, hinting at the ravers' polluting the environment with drugs.

## Mountain Path

To avoid detection by the military convoy, the group chooses an alternative route along the mountain path. Once again, the military forces them to change course. The sequence begins with a long shot of a vehicle navigating the serpentine mountain path, along a narrow ledge carved into a rocky cliff, which alludes to the thrilling sequence from *The Wages of Fear* (*Le salaire de la peur*, dir. Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1953) of Mario transporting explosive nitroglycerine over a mountain path. The road overlooking the expansive desert plain down below barely accommodates the trucks. In close-up, we see a wheel grinding over loose, sharp rocks, suggesting the constant threat of plummeting downward. As night falls, torrential rain begins, leaving one of the trucks immobilised in the mud and forcing the group to halt their journey. While the road promises escape from the military, it leads instead to greater entrapment. Environmental forces, including terrain, rock, and weather, replace human antagonists, turning the landscape itself into the primary agent of conflict. The following morning, the group collectively manages to get the vehicle out of the hole. While they celebrate their success, all of a sudden, Esteban finds himself in another car, driving backwards off the road and crashing into the valley below. Devastated and incredulous in the face of losing another child, Luis bursts into tears, while the others try to console him.

The mountain path in *Sirāt* relates closely to the mountain landscape of Laxe's earlier film *Mimosas*, an epic journey in three chapters, which bear the titles of the different positions in Islamic prayer: *Bow* (*Ruku*), *Stand* (*Qiyam*), and *Prostration* (*Sujud*). Set in the Moroccan Atlas Mountains, the film follows a small caravan tasked with transporting the body of a revered Sufi sheikh to his burial site. Two hired guides lead the journey through the treacherous mountain terrain, but the pilgrimage repeatedly tests travellers' faith, commitment, and trust. As they face physical danger, the film gradually shifts from a literal journey into a metaphysical one.

The mountain in *Mimosas*, like in *Sirāt*, functions as a liminal space, a threshold between the material and the metaphysical. In the film, one of the characters (again portrayed by non-professional actors) shouts while descending with a mule down the impossibly terraced slope of the mountain: *We're in the mouth of a sleeping giant*. The perilous terrain imposes extreme physical exertion and exposes the travellers to constant danger. However, this material struggle unfolds alongside acts of devotion and surrender, as the characters' endurance becomes inseparable from their spiritual disposition. In this way, the mountain stages a convergence between external hardship and interior submission, articulating an esoteric transformation deeply rooted in Sufi cosmology.

Regarding the mountain terrain, Laxe remarks: *I was attracted to the wounded landscape of the Moroccan mountains. My family belongs to mountains in Spain … but the mountains in Morocco are more wounded. The erosion, the time – all the way back to the creation of the planet. You see all the layers, the strata, and you feel small. At my home, you feel small too, but the nature is more sweet. In Morocco it's harsh, and I like this. I feel anguish, but also, through this anguish, I feel serene. Through anguish, through pain, we connect more with life.*[44] In a similar vein, the mountain transforms for Luis into the site of physical adversity, spiritual trial, and transformation. The difficulty of traversing the mountain mirrors the inward journey associated with spiritual exploration. The tragic accident deprives Luis not only of his son but also of his car, severing both familial and material points of attachment. As his search for his daughter continues, this layered experience of loss initiates a process of spiritual divestment, aligning with the Sufi concept of *tajrīd*, the inner process of detachment through which the seeker, overcome by spiritual intensity, purges the heart of everything except God.[45] Thus, his dispossession functions not merely as a narrative tragedy but as a condition of spiritual reconfiguration, through which detachment from the material world becomes both imposed and transformative.

## Descending to Hell

After Esteban's tragic death, the film's cinematography undergoes a decisive aesthetic transformation that externalises grief through image and sound. An extremely long shot frames a vast mountainous desert landscape at dusk. On the winding road, two barely visible vehicles, reduced to tiny points of light against the overwhelming mass of the mountain, descend into the underworld. Next, darkness consumes the frame almost entirely, leaving only the vehicle's lights as a temporary shield against total annihilation. As the descent continues, the desert ceases to appear as a monumental landscape and becomes an invisible force instead. Spatial reference collapses: ground, horizon, and destination dissolve into blackness. Movement unfolds in long, contemplative shots, creating a sense of endless ride in a timeless territory. A radical sonic reconfiguration accompanies this visual shift. The earlier high-intensity, pulsating musical beats totally vanish, giving way to sparse, subdued, or near-silent soundscapes. Music no longer drives momentum or collective energy. Instead, its reduction reinforces the sense of mourning, loss, and spiritual wasteland. Through the interplay of emptied frames, subdued lighting, slowed rhythm, and sonic withdrawal, the film transforms grief into a visual aesthetic experience.

After driving through the night, the group reaches an abandoned site and passes through a narrow corridor formed by two crumbling stone walls. Tonin and Jade are framed in a medium shot. Both appear tense and alert, as if responding to an unseen threat or imminent danger. In the absolute silence of the deserted outpost, scattered tyres and debris surround two parked trucks, one of which is equipped with a mounted heavy weapon in its open bed, immediately signalling militarisation. Marked by desperation and exhaustion, Stef and Josh attempt to make contact through the vehicle's intercom system inside the military truck, while Tonin places a rubber hose in his mouth to siphon fuel directly from the tank. Suddenly, a young boy appears with his herd of goats, but he remains silent and turns away, despite the group's pleas for help in Spanish, French, and Arabic. The movie seems to build a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Separated from the group, Luis wanders alone into the sun-scorched desert, a landscape rendered as an almost surreal apocalyptic end-of-the-world space. Overcome by exhaustion and engulfed by a sandstorm, he collapses onto the hostile ground as the environment dissolves into a bluish haze, the horizon barely discernible from the sky. Suspended between reality and dream, the scene unfolds in a liminal register. The group eventually finds him, offers water, and resumes the journey, disappearing once more into the encroaching darkness of the desert.

## The Desert Strikes Back

Exhausted and overwhelmed by despair, the group erects two large loudspeakers beneath the scorching sun and begins to dance in an attempt to lift their spirits. This time, Luis joins them after ingesting an herbal potion offered by Josh – suggested to be a psychoactive substance. The earlier premonitory sequence returns, and the ravers slowly attune their bodies to the emerging beat. Immersed in a trance-like state, the euphoric atmosphere shatters abruptly: barely has Jade exclaimed *let's explode* – a familiar phrase within rave culture – when she steps on a landmine that literally blows her apart. Tonin dies moments later as he rushes toward her. Paralysed by shock, the group witnesses their utopian desert moment collapse, mutating instantaneously into a dystopian landscape of survival.

As discussed above, the desert landscape in the film is a hybrid space. The violent acoustic rupture of the explosion resonates with longstanding theological imaginaries in which sound is the medium of ultimate destruction. In both Judaic and Islamic prophetic traditions, the end of the world unveils not through a visual spectacle but through sound, an overwhelming, apocalyptic blast. Often described as a 'mighty din,' this sonic event exceeds ordinary human experience and imagination, signalling the collapse of the cosmic order and the transition into the final judgment.[46] Judaism associates this with the shofar's final, piercing call, while in Islam it corresponds to the Trumpet (*al-Ṣūr*) blown by the angel Isrāfīl, whose reverberation annihilates all life before heralding resurrection.

From a human-centred perspective, the desert is imagined as a controlled and domesticated expanse, open to human bodily movement and sonic inscription, enabling the ravers to project an anthropocentric utopian fantasy onto the landscape. The landmines' detonation, resonating with the film's broader apocalyptic imagery, violently shatters this fantasy, reconfiguring the desert into an inescapable, infernal terrain. Crucially, this moment transforms apocalyptic metaphor into historical reference, anchoring the narrative in the political and cultural realities of the Moroccan desert.

The minefield constitutes not merely a fictional-metaphorical space, but a real territory in the Western Desert that carries a history of political conflict. Moroccan forces constructed the Western Sahara Wall, also referred to as the Sand Wall or Berm, within a specific international and regional geopolitical context shaped by Cold War rivalries over strategic territories, including the Maghreb.[47] Stretching approximately 2,700 kilometres, over sixteen times the length of the Berlin Wall, the Berm is a fortified sand structure roughly ten feet high, reinforced with barbed wire, electric fencing, surveillance systems, and a permanent military presence of thousands of armed soldiers. Lining its length is an estimated seven million landmines, rendering it the longest continuous minefield in the world.[48] Although internationally often perceived as marking the southern border of Morocco, the wall in fact bisects the disputed territory of Western Sahara, a largely ungoverned desert region situated between Morocco and Mauritania. Territorially, Morocco administers the land west of the wall, including the Atlantic coastline, while the eastern zone remains under the control of the Polisario Front,[49] which represents the Sahrawi struggle for self-determination. This conflict intensified following the withdrawal of Spain in 1976, after more than ninety years of colonial rule. Spain's departure created a power vacuum that led Morocco to assume control of the western coastal areas, while Mauritania briefly occupied the eastern sector before being forced to withdraw under pressure from Sahrawi forces.

The Moroccan desert is not a tabula rasa but a landscape marked by a long history of violence, scarred by human intervention through the implantation of landmines. Within the framework of environmental justice, we understand such spaces as sacrifice zones, a concept that emerged in the 1980s from civil rights activism opposing the disproportionate exposure of poor and racially marginalised communities to environmental harm. As Robert Bullard defines them, sacrifice zones are *communities that disproportionately endure pollution, toxic waste, and environmental harm*.[50] Later, scholars such as Steve Lerner argued to expand the concept to encompass marginalised populations subject to persistent racial and economic discrimination, frequently situated near polluting industries or military bases. The landmine-contaminated territories, including the Moroccan desert, and their inhabitants are deliberately exposed to long-term environmental and humanitarian harm in the service of political and military objectives.[51]

In defining the agency of the sacrifice zone, Ryan Juskus posits that there always exists an agent that, in some way, intervenes to designate a particular portion of land for sacrifice, thus viewing it as a product of human agency.[52] The inscription of human agency within the minefield is indisputable. However, when approached through the lens of the ecological turn, we may reinterpret agency as neither singular nor sovereign. Rather than functioning solely as a passive container for human action, the desert landscape emerges as a site of complex material entanglements in which sound, geology, military debris, and human bodies intra-act. Karen Barad's concept of intra-action constitutes a foundational element of her philosophical framework known as agential realism. Introduced

*Sorcerer*, dir. William Friedkin (1977) most comprehensively in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, intra-action fundamentally challenges traditional assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and agency that dominate Western philosophy. Introducing the term intra-action in deliberate contrast to interaction, Barad argues that whereas interaction presupposes the existence of individual entities that come together and affect one another, intra-action refuses this metaphysical individualism. She writes: *The notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.*[53] Agency is not an attribute possessed solely by humans or objects. Instead, it is an enactment that occurs within intra-action itself. This definition dissolves the distinction between active subjects and passive objects and expands the scope of agency to include nonhuman beings and materials. Therefore, it is distributed and relational rather than individual and contained.

Read through this framework, we can no longer understand the desert scene as a neutral stage upon which human intentions unfold, nor can agency be attributed exclusively to human actors. Instead, the desert emerges as a materially active field in which heterogeneous forces, i.e., militarism, human bodies, and sound, co-constitute the event. Thus, we cannot reduce the catastrophic moment in the minefield to human error or tragic coincidence. It is the outcome of a dense network of material-discursive intra-actions. The fatal explosion marks a violent agential cut, one that exposes the instability of the boundary between an active human and a passive environment. The landmine is not a passive object awaiting activation but an agential participant whose historical and material forces become operative within this specific configuration.

Trapped in the middle of the desert, the group spends the night in the vehicle. The next morning, Josh wakes up in surprise, seeing that Luis buried the two ravers' bodies in the very same dangerous zone. On Luis's advice, the remaining members of the group attempt to chart a safe passage through the minefield by sending two unmanned trucks into the danger zone. Each vehicle explodes after only a few metres, clearing a minimal stretch of ground. Eventually, they reach a rocky outcrop that seems to mark the desert's boundary and the threshold of safety, yet the precise way forward remains uncertain. The film's title invokes this passage precisely: a path that one must undertake to cross through the surrounding infernal space. As the group sits together in total silence, finishing their last drops of water, Luis suddenly stands up and begins to walk forward, proceeding across the minefield until he reaches the safe side, while the others watch in anxious disbelief. A sweep of sand drifts across the frame, and the accompanying music lends the moment an almost mystical quality. Perceiving what appears to be a clear route, Bigui attempts to follow in Luis's footsteps but is killed halfway through when he triggers a mine. Confronted with his death, Josh lashes out, demanding to know how Luis managed to cross. Luis's only explanation is: *I crossed without thinking.*

Through the idea of 'crossing without thinking,' the film resonates closely with themes found in Arab and Persian Sufi traditions – an influence that Laxe himself explicitly acknowledges. Reflecting on his time in Morocco after *You All Are Captains*, Laxe explains: *I wanted to do another film in Morocco. I have lived for three years in a palm grove, near the desert. I walked along the region and I wanted my* *film project to have a pretext for walking*.[54] He further notes that the story draws upon tales rooted in Sufi tradition, evoking figures such as Ibn Arabi, Shahab al-Din Sohrawardi or Rûzbehân.[55] Within this mystical paradigm, spiritual growth and transformation emerge from attunement to an inner resonance, a practice akin to contemplative inner listening. In Sufi thought, particularly in the Persian tradition of Rumi, the rational mind (*ʿaql*) is considered limited – bound by fear, hesitation, and the ego's need for control. The seeker must instead act from the heart (*qalb*), guided by intuitive knowledge and inner trust to abandon overthinking and move with a deeper certainty. Luis's act of crossing the minefield 'without thinking' echoes this mystical logic: he succeeds only when he relinquishes fear and calculation. Taking on this perspective, the thin bridge between damnation and salvation accounts for an allegory of the spiritual path that one can traverse only through surrender and courage. Thus, Luis's instinctive movement parallels the Sufi traveller who steps into the unknown guided not by reason but by an inner trust, aligning his passage with the mystical tradition's emphasis on intuition, faith, and relinquishing control.

In interviews, Laxe repeatedly acknowledges that the film's depiction of a perilous, life-or-death crossing through the wilderness draws inspiration from *The Wages of Fear* and its later adaptation *Sorcerer* (dir. William Friedkin, 1977), both based on Georges Arnaud's 1949 novel *Le Salaire de la Peur*. Whereas Clouzot situates his narrative in a mountainous region and thus emphasises treacherous, uneven roads, narrow switchbacks, and the tense passage over an oil-soaked pit, Friedkin relocates the ordeal to a tropical jungle marked by torrential rain, unstable mud tracks, and the iconic traversal of a collapsing rope bridge. *Sirāt* echoes these structural challenges: the mountain-pass ordeal appears in the nighttime sequence in which the rain strands the group and again the following morning when a vehicle becomes mired in soft soil; the film metaphorically reimagines the hazardous bridge crossing in the climax, when the characters must navigate an invisible "safe" corridor through a minefield. However, while these earlier films foreground existential dread and physical danger, Laxe overlays such suspense with Sufi sensibilities, transforming the ordeal into both an inward spiritual and outward physical journey.

## Conclusion

As a road film, *Sirāt* operates as a genre-twisting work that mobilises the desert as a heterogeneous and contested cinematic space. The film alternately figures the desert as an occasional utopian refuge for nomadic rave communities, a site of cultural resistance and temporary autonomy, and as a terrain subject to new forms of colonial inscription, most notably through soundscapes imported from the former European colonial powers in Morocco. Moreover, the desert emerges as a palimpsestic and hybrid space, drawing simultaneously on Western imaginaries of mobility, adventure, and radical freedom, as well as on Eastern traditions of detachment and Sufi spirituality.

Beyond its function as a landscape of trial and eschatological anticipation, the desert in *Sirāt* also bears the material traces of postcolonial violence: militarisation, landmine contamination, and its condition as an environmental sacrifice zone. Thus, the film is explicitly environmentally engaged, not by sentimentalising nature but by reconfiguring the relationship between humans and their surroundings. In rejecting an anthropocentric framework, *Sirāt* foregrounds a relational conception of agency in which the desert does not constitute a passive backdrop but has relational agency. Through this lens, the imposed soundscape does not simply occupy the terrain; it is met with resistance, interruption, and silencing, drawing attention to the desert's own sound ecology. Ultimately, the film proposes the desert as a space where historical trauma, ecological entanglement, and sensory experience converge, thus challenge dominant modes of representation and inviting a rethink of agency, environment, and coexistence beyond human-centred paradigms.

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Doktorant w dziedzinie filmoznawstwa (Nauki o sztuce) w Szkole Doktorskiej Nauk Humanistycznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie. Jego badania koncentrują się na relacjach między krajobrazem a filmem, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem krajobrazów pustynnych i wyspiarskich w kinie irańskim. Jego szersze zainteresowania naukowe obejmują kino Bliskiego Wschodu, a także badania nad przestrzenią i miejscem w filmie.

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