



The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics (Cultures of History)

Charles Hirschkind

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Charles Hirschkind's unique study explores how a popular Islamic media form—the cassette sermon—has profoundly transformed the political geography of the Middle East over the last three decades.

An essential aspect of what is now called the Islamic Revival, the cassette sermon has become omnipresent in most Middle Eastern cities, punctuating the daily routines of many men and women. Hirschkind shows how sermon tapes have provided one of the means by which Islamic ethical traditions have been recalibrated to a modern political and technological order—to its noise and forms of pleasure and boredom, but also to its political incitements and call for citizen participation. Contrary to the belief that Islamic cassette sermons are a tool of militant indoctrination, Hirschkind argues that sermon tapes serve as an instrument of ethical self-improvement and as a vehicle for honing the sensibilities and affects of pious living.

Focusing on Cairo's popular neighborhoods, Hirschkind highlights the pivotal role these tapes now play in an expanding arena of Islamic argumentation and debate—what he calls an "Islamic counterpublic." This emerging arena connects Islamic traditions of ethical discipline to practices of deliberation about the common good, the duties of Muslims as national citizens, and the challenges faced by diverse Muslim communities around the globe. *The Ethical Soundscape* is a brilliant analysis linking modern media practices of moral self-fashioning to the creation of increasingly powerful religious publics.

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