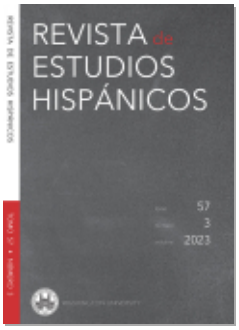
Introduction: Sounding Out the Text: Approaches to Latin American Literary Aurality



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Revista de Estudios Hispánicos, Tomo 57, Número 3, Octubre 2023, pp. 365-377 (Article)

Published by Washington University in St. Louis
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/rvs.2023.a924204*

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Introduction

Sounding Out the Text: Approaches to Latin American Literary Aurality

A key contribution of the field of literary sound studies has been to amplify the sonorous qualities of texts rendered mute by colonial hierarchies of knowledge production and dissemination. This corrective gesture works against the colonial processes that have inflated the value of writing at the expense of other ways of knowing in Latin America, and—given the rich history of decolonial thought coming from the region—it should come as no surprise that sound has long permeated Latin American aesthetics, including literary aesthetics. To mention one well-studied example, in the *neoindigenista* novel *Los ríos profundos* (1958) by the Peruvian author José María Arguedas, the daily activities of the child narrator, Ernesto, and his classmates at a Catholic school in Abancay, Peru, are guided and shaped by the recurring peal of a church bell.[1] The unceasing toll of the anthropomorphized "voz de la campana" (154) structures the children's prayers, meals, play time, and studies, even encroaching on their sleep. The bell is omnipresent, aurally bringing the children, parishioners, and *colonos*—the oppressed Indigenous workers upon whose labor mid-century Peru's economic system depended—to order and reinforcing Catholic temporality and comportment. However, as Ernesto begins to question the Catholic value system that the bell represents, other sounds—birds and bugs; the rushing water of the Pachachaca River; the hard, syncopated beats of *huayno* (a popular Andean musical genre); and the rebellious chants of *las chicheras*—emerge to drown out the thundering dominion of the bell. When a plague arrives and state and religious authorities obstruct a bridge in order to keep the *colonos* separate from the townspeople, the *colonos*, "con sus imprecaciones y sus cantos" (461), cross the river

by force to receive last rites in the face of impending death. Preceding this moment of sonic defiance, Ernesto observes that "el sonido feo de las campanas de Abancay" compels, not order or awe, but dissonance, "porque sus voces eran confusas y broncas" (457). In contrast, the prayer and song of the marching *colonos*, a mixture of both Quechua and Spanish—"¡Fuera peste! ¡*Way jiebre*! ¡*Waaay*...!"—pulsate through the valley, sonically tying the landscape to Indigenous resistance and solidarity (458).

This brief sketch of literary sounds in Arguedas provides just one example of how exploring the sonic qualities of text can amplify the sensorial and ethical dimensions of reading and writing. In the case of *Los ríos profundos*, not only sound, but also a certain way of attuning to it, are mobilized to attest to the continued presence of what the Mapuche scholar Luis Cárcamo-Huechante calls "acoustic colonialism" in twentieth-century Peru (51).[2] But sound and listening also challenge hegemonic epistemologies and underscore the survival of other ways of thinking, acting, and resisting, even in the face of ongoing forms of coloniality. In the text, the cathedral bell, emblematic of Catholicism, loses its tonal force as Ernesto increasingly attends to Indigenous voices and natural sounds. Moreover, sound provides an ethical compass (¿compás?) in the text,[3] given that the chimes of the bell turn "confusas y broncas" (457) when authorities decide to block the *colonos*' passage across the river, essentially leaving them to die without administering health care or last rites. Thus, sound in Arguedas's masterpiece urges an anti-colonial listening in the face of hypocritical Catholic dogma and a biopolitics of abandonment (de la Cadena).

We open this issue on the sounds of Latin American literature with a reading of Arguedas's novel to call attention to how sound can shape literary interpretation. What we call literary aurality names the generative role played by listening practices inscribed in and provoked by texts. *Los ríos profundos* persistently engages the readerly ear as a means of subverting what Aníbal Quijano calls "the coloniality of power."[4] Beyond the reading we propose above, and similar to Arguedas's Andean contemporaries, the author turns to music and oral culture—in the form of *huaynos* and other Andean songs, storytelling, and protest cries—to elevate listening and orality as competencies on par with reading and literacy. The importance of sound in *(neo)indigenista* texts has garnered significant recognition in Latin American cultural stud-

ies, with foundational works by scholars like Antonio Cornejo Polar, Martín Lienhard, and Carlos Pacheco addressing the disruptive and generative potential of sound and listening in literary texts. The contributions in this issue make clear that these debates can be further enriched through the application of a rigorous sound studies framework.

Literary sound studies shares with both Arguedas and the broader interdisciplinary field of sound studies the contention that "sound, hearing, and listening are central to the cultural life of modernity, . . . sound, hearing, and listening are foundational to modern modes of knowledge, culture, and social organization" (Sterne 2–3). Heeding how sound reverberates through human and more-than-human experiences reengages senses dulled by ocularcentric ways of filtering lived reality. Sound studies reframes the unheard as, simply, not-heard—a matter of an untrained ear rather than an absence of sound. Additionally, literary sound studies insists that our consumption of knowledge and texts involves more than a disconnected encounter between eye and page, but also a deeply immersive act in which the echoes of sonic vibrations can penetrate our bodies. The objective of this form of inquiry is not to restructure the hierarchy so that sound becomes privileged over the visual, but rather to recognize the many ways that hearing and sounding contribute to knowing and understanding, along with written texts. As Steven Feld indicates with regards to knowing places, "sounding" is "a condition of and for knowing," and "sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth" (97). Indeed, the auditory constitutes one of many "intersensory perceptual processes," that form part of "a complex interplay of the auditory and the visual" (98). When we explore how a literary work might sound or reconstruct the acoustic ecology that informed its composition, we acknowledge the multisensory archive that exists beyond the page. A sonic approach to literature causes meaning and polyphony to proliferate, diversifying the voices and sounds involved in textual production and analysis.

This special issue was inspired by a veritable sonic boom in recent scholarship in Latin American humanistic sound studies. In the past five years, thematic review essays have testified to the wealth of monographs being published on the topic (Buch; Minks and Ochoa Gautier; Mitchell), and reference works have accounted for a "sonic turn" in Latin American literary and cultural studies (Birkenmaier; McEnaney, "The Sonic Turn"). This scholarship opens the senses to

alternative epistemologies that transmit knowledge via orality and other expressive culture (Arias, Librandi) and unsettles R. Murray Schafer's foundational notion of the "soundscape" by centering marginalized perspectives (Estévez Trujillo, "Mis 'manos sonoras'"; Hill).[5] Moreover, important new work by thinkers like Ren Ellis Neyra and Luz María Sánchez Cardona challenges the nature-culture divide by turning an ear to more-than-human sonorities. Pairing ecocriticism with sound studies, these scholars—along with several from this issue (Abreu Mendoza; Birkenmaier; Calí, Palacios, and Worley; Hernández and Wager)—perceive speculative futures and alternative forms of relationality in Latin American and Caribbean literature that represents disparate acoustic ecologies (e.g., desert, ocean) and more-than-human sound.

As this surge in sonic thinking makes clear, many of the debates that have long propelled Latin American cultural studies—such as the writing/orality binary discussed above or *testimonio*'s inquiry into the ethics of speaking (or writing) for the Other—coincide with key issues at stake in sound studies. This theoretical harmony explains two recent trends. First, in recent years, scholarship like the 2019 anthology *Remapping Sound Studies* seeks to establish a dialogue between sound studies and the so-called Global South. *Remapping* points to the ways in which this invented space is often the object of sound studies research, while listening practices and sound technologies emerging from 'the Global South' are disregarded in the discipline. In the conclusion to that important volume, Ana María Ochoa Gautier makes this critique explicit:

> [*Remapping Sound Studies*] problematizes the politics of sound studies by calling attention to the logic that simultaneously links sound and South as inextricable to the history of the colonial modern, as well as to a contemporary elision of sound practices and sound theories from the South brought about by the normativization of the field provoked by its disciplinization. The paradox is that sound studies has enacted these epistemic relations while pretending not to do so.

In a similar vein, Ochoa Gautier's *Aurality* and Tom McEnaney's "Rigoberta's Listener" lay the groundwork for scholars to return to well-worn texts in order to recover undetected sounds and silences in the archive.

Whereas the first trend involves bringing Latin American theories of coloniality to bear on sound studies, a second trend exemplified

by the work of Mayra Estévez Trujillo argues for bringing a sonic lens to important debates in Latin American cultural studies, such as enduring binaries like the nature-culture divide and civilization and barbarism, as well as epochal designations like modernity and coloniality. A key figure in Latin American sound studies, Estévez Trujillo insists that "el sonido es un lugar de conocimiento, una construcción cultural desde la cual se tejen múltiples formas de opresión manifiestas en la colonialidad del poder, del saber y del hacer" ("Estudios Sonoros Latinoamericanos" 13). Beyond repression, however, she perceives in textual inscriptions of sound the possibility of "mundos nuevos de sonoridades y escuchas que . . . interceptaron los relatos coloniales e inauguraron un curso paralelo de pervivencias" ("Estudios Sonoros Latinoamericanos" 16). Estévez Trujillo's interdisciplinary methodology attests to the fact that in Latin America, where writing and coloniality are deeply entrenched, sonic perspectives promise to upend the lettered city in new, surprising ways.

In many cases, Latin American literary sound studies seeks to meaningfully reconsider, and often hear for the first time, marginalized sonorities and practices of listening. Ochoa Gautier's *Aurality*, a touchstone in many of the articles that follow, is exemplary of this effort. There, she returns to Colombia's nineteenth-century archive to uncover the sounds recorded by the settler ear, but the resulting aural tapestry goes far beyond what was sensed by the original writer-who-heard, particularly in regard to Indigenous and Black expression. In line with this expanded field of hearing, recent monographs such as Mary Caton Lingold's *African Musicians in the Atlantic World: Legacies of Sound and Slavery*, Sarah Finley's *Amplifications of Black Sound from Colonial Mexico: Vocality and Beyond*, and Charlie Hankin's *Break and Flow: Hip Hop Poetics in the Americas* respond to calls to "listen deeply to the long history of black agency, resistance, and activism in the face of such silencing" (Stoever 6). In the present dossier, several contributors take up this call to question and critique the racialization of sound and listening (Abreu Mendoza, Calle, Graff Zivin).

The increased attention to sound in Latin American cultural studies has taken many forms, opening the possibility of considering sonic works like radio, sound installations, recordings, and other forms of aural culture as part of an ever-expanding corpus of knowledge production in the region. We celebrate and welcome these interventions; however, with this special issue, we invited authors to reconsider written

texts—sometimes in intermedial relationship to other sonic and audiovisual works—in order to animate how seemingly mute words might resound. Our call for papers referenced Carlos Monsiváis's provocation to "escuchar con los ojos" when reading.[6] The Mexican intellectual was referring to "hearing" the victims of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez by reading comprehensive reports about their murders, which in the face of such horrific "hate crimes" becomes the only way to approximate their stories (332). Thus, listening with the eyes encourages an attunement to silences: sounds violently suppressed or ignored in the process of literary production, whose resonances might nonetheless echo in the eye of an attentive reader. One of the many legacies of the lettered city involves muffling how knowledge can vibrate and reverberate through the body, and a central aim of this issue is to identify—in conversation with the thinkers cited above—yet another of lettered culture's contradictions by clarifying how the textual archive has always "sounded."

"Latin American Literary Aurality" takes up this challenge in exciting ways, across several centuries of Latin American literature—from a new consideration of the meaning of the preconquest *Popol Wuj* illuminated by awareness of embodied sound in the text (Calí, Palacios, and Worley) to an examination of Valeria Luiselli's mediated textual style in *Desierto sonoro* (2019) as an archival fiction that warrants a hemispheric reading (Birkenmaier). The dossier also addresses a broad geography of sonic landscapes, from Argentina (Graff Zivin) to the US-Mexico borderlands (Birkenmaier, Hernández-Ramírez), including the Caribbean (Calle, Hernández and Wager) and postwar Central America (Zamora Quesada). Whether returning to canonical nation-forming texts from the nineteenth century to amplify their sonorous implications (Abreu Mendoza) or listening for the dissonances created by wind farm technology in Wayuu poetry from Colombia's Guajira peninsula (Hernández and Wager), the essays that follow invite us to perceive harmonies and cacophonies quivering within the static lines of Latin American texts.

Contents of This Issue

The essays in this collection take up the call to examine what Latin American literary studies has to offer sound studies scholarship, and what a sound studies framework can bring to Latin American literary studies, all the while exploring productive resonances and discord-

ances across these two fields. In lieu of a summary of each individual article, we offer a thematic overview of the issue, noting threads that run through the body of work and those that we also hope will be taken up by future researchers.

Two essays in the collection interrogate the sonic dimensions of texts widely read in Latin American literature but rarely considered sonorous. Luis Calí, Rita Palacios, and Paul Worley's reconsideration of the *Popol Wuj* as a musical text builds on previous considerations of the role of performance in the Maya *Book of Counsel*, famously theorized by the anthropologist Dennis Tedlock. Their reading deepens our understanding of the work's performativity through an Indigenous studies framework informed by the Maya Kaqchikel musician and musicologist Luis Calí. Working through the presence of the Maya musical concept *q'ojom*—a term that might be imperfectly translated as 'music and other agreeable sounds'—the authors illuminate how music informs, gives meaning to, and enlivens the *Popol Wuj*. Making audible the sonic features of the text allows readers to apprehend what for Calí is "obvio," namely, that q'ojom was an integral part of the experience of the *Popol Wuj* (387). In a similar vein, Carlos Abreu Mendoza considers the role that sound played in nineteenth-century texts: the poetry of Simón Bolívar, the Argentine author Esteban Echeverría's 1837 poem "La cautiva," and the Colombian author Jorge Isaacs's 1867 novel *María*. Proposing the concept of the "audible sublime," Abreu Mendoza traces the ideological contradictions at the heart of nation-building projects in Latin America (403). Examining intellectuals' attempts to navigate and distill the "shocking and unspeakable sounds" that characterized the ecology of the New World through the discourse of the sublime (424), he insists that the reception of such sounds as barbarous and unintelligible reveals more about Europeans' and other lettered elites' incapacity to hear than it does about the sonic environment that so confounded their discriminatory ears.

The themes of technologies of sound and the sounds of technology also permeate this issue. Ana Cecilia Calle interprets the dearth of the sounds and rhythms of *cumbia* in Gabriel García Márquez's oeuvre and determines that his descriptions—written from a *letrado* listening positionality—render regional sounds unintelligible to the project of Colombian national modernity. She argues that only when cumbia is mediated through technologies of sound reproduction, such as vinyl or documentary film is the Nobel laureate able to hear cumbia differently

and finally embrace refashioning it for a global audience. Anke Birkenmaier's consideration of Valeria Luiselli's 2019 novel, *Desierto sonoro (Lost Children Archive* in the original English) questions the concept of the archive—especially enigmatic and weighty in Latin American cultural studies—by reconfiguring it as a verb: a process involving the incorporation of mixed media including text, recorded speech, and images. In Birkenmaier's consideration, technologies new and old—tape recorders, microphones, and cell phones—become constitutive of the mixed media archive that Luiselli elaborates. Azucena Hernández-Ramírez's essay on the Mexican intellectual Justo Sierra Méndez's *En tierra yankee (Notas a todo vapor)* (1895) also addresses sounds that cross the US-Mexico border. Her essay proposes that a soundscape altered by modern communications and transportation technologies like the railroad and the telegraph raises important questions about what constituted music and what constituted noise in a modernizing landscape. At a time when Sierra yearned for US forms of modernity in Mexico, their sounds nonetheless left him sleepless and with his ears anxiously buzzing.

Hernández-Ramírez's consideration of sonic ontology—a hierarchical distinction between melodious sound and dissonant noise—arises across the dossier. In Pamela Zamora Quesada's reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya's 1996 novel *Baile con serpientes*, this ontological question becomes the fulcrum upon which subjectivity is asserted and power dynamics are challenged in postwar Central America. Zamora Quesada analyzes how strident sound technologies like security alarms and the commotion of formal and informal consumer spaces create an ear-piercing neoliberal soundscape, closely associated with the violence of what Sayak Valencia calls "gore capitalism" (478). The essay traces how violent and erotic sounds allow the disempowered protagonist to—partially and temporarily—affirm his masculinity and construct a neoliberal subjectivity. In a similar vein of technologies that alter relationships between meaning and sound, Daniel Hernández and Joe Wager offer an urgent consideration of how wind farm technology in Colombia's Guajira peninsula damages continuities between wind and Wayuu dreams. This collective examination of how technologies create new sounds, reconfigure soundscapes, and inflect written texts underscores the corporeal experience of sonic vibrations in which bodies are regulated (Calí, Palacios, and Worley) and deregulated (Calle; Hernández and Wager; Zamora Quesada) by soundwaves.

This materiality of sound—how its vibrational quality is physically experienced and perceived—emerges across the dossier. Such resonance is at the heart of Abreu Mendoza's discussion of the audible sublime, an experience that depends on an embodied, affective experience of sound that generates horror or awe. On Abreu Mendoza's reading, the insistence of the unfamiliarity of New World sounds becomes a mechanism for perpetuating the civilization-barbarism binary. Intriguingly, a similar disconnect is at play in Calle's reading of García Márquez's refusal to hear embodied cumbia as an intelligible sound in Colombia's modern state project. This denied resonance constitutes a refusal to interpellate as subjects the Indigenous and Black Colombians whose bodies are deemed merely sensuous (and not sense-making) in Gabo's journalistic account. Analogous thinking drives Graff Zivin's reading of Aira, who dwells on the sensual "stupefaction" engendered in audiences present at Cecil Taylor's early atonal jazz performances (506). In addition to illuminating an affective response evoking listeners' failed assimilation of Taylor's experimental style, Graff Zivin also points to the ways in which the Argentine author's ekphrastic meditations on Taylor pulsate with sound's materiality. Transmedial ekphrasis—in this case, the incorporation of Taylor's jazz into Aira's narrative—, allows Aira to compose an *atmosphere* in prose, to erect, not a representation of Taylor's music, but an ekphrastic presence. In dialogue with W.J.T. Mitchell, Graff Zivin reads this gesture as the construction of a 'black hole' in the narrative, which exposes the limits of genre and medium.

Indigenous and Black studies methodologies give critical complexity to much of the inquiry in this issue. Calle—in part drawing on the Indigenous sound theory of the Stó:lō/Skwah scholar Dylan Robinson—emphasizes García Márquez's racial prejudices in derisively writing about an Afro-Colombian woman who seemed to listen "con los cinco sentidos" (460). Echoing concerns of civilized listening in the nineteenth century outlined by Abreu Mendoza, Calle shows how the Colombian journalist preferred distant, detached listening over what he depicts as corporeal excess in response to coastal music. While Calle reveals the efforts by which García Márquez tried to isolate the body from what is heard, analyses by Hernández and Wager; Birkenmaier; Calí, Palacios, and Worley; and Graff Zivin examine a diversity of ways in which literary sounds evoke a multisensorial experience, much more akin to the five-sense listening of Gabo's Black compatriot. These

perspectives unveil how the multisensorial archive of sound experience has the potential to animate the human body in order to synchronize its connections with more-than-humans. Through considerations of noise pollution and its effects on the role of wind in Wayuu cosmopolitics, Hernández and Wager lay bare that what is at stake in the new soundscape of wind farming in La Guajira is the disruption in communication between Wayuu people and their nonhuman ancestors. Meanwhile, the ambient noises of desert critters are the only beings able to give testimony to the memory of murdered and displaced Apaches in Birkenmaier's consideration of *Desierto sonoro*. And in Graff Zivin's imaginative theorization of the meaning of music in the work of Aira, she creatively identifies the interconnections among writing, music, and the cosmos. Together these interventions make clear that the tissue joining sound, body, ecology, and text has been pried apart by the processes of conquest and colonization and their ongoing legacies. Through the insights of Indigenous and Black thinkers, listening to textual soundings becomes part of a project to decolonize the body from its impassivity in the presence of sensory stimulation.

The essays that follow call for reimagining traditional reading practices in order to tune in to sonic *text*ures, which in turn, may help us discern unfathomed modes of receiving and perceiving vibrational resonances, which form part of the complex, multisensorial *tejido* that structures social and cultural worlds. Contributors evince how considerations of literary aurality can challenge lettered exceptionalism, destabilize genre norms, elevate more-than-human knowing, dispute neoliberal regimes of order, and attune to a silenced archive, among many other possibilities. We hope that their sonic critiques inspire others to sound out Latin American literature, to consider how writing might always be a form of aural ekphrasis—to evoke Graff Zivin's contribution—an imperfect effort to distill irreducible embodied and multisensorial ways of knowing to a two-dimensional cultural object that can be reproduced and circulated broadly. Turning the ear toward—rather than away from—sonic confusions and contradictions, as Ernesto does in *Los ríos profundos*, promises to diversify not only the sonic dimensions of Latin American texts, but also the forms of attention that we bring to them.

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NOTES

[1] On the sonic qualities of Arguedas's poignant novel, see Sandra Vanessa Bernal Heredia, Humberto Collado Román, and Chalena Vásquez.

[2] Cárcamo-Huechante develops the concept of "acoustic colonialism" in his examination of how the Argentine and Chilean nation-states have wielded radio as an acoustic tool in their drive to westernize and annihilate the culture, traditions, and language of the Mapuche people. He shows how state authorities colonize radio airwaves to consolidate a "national soundscape" against Mapuche sonorities (56). In the closing article of this dossier, Daniel Hernández and Joseph Wager engage with Cárcamo-Huechante's figuration of "acoustic colonialism" in their reading of the ways in which the Colombian state's clean energy initiatives disregard the role of wind in Wayuu cosmology.

[3] We invite the reader to productively (mis)hear 'compass' in Spanish as its false cognate 'compás.' This purposeful catachresis underscores the role of rhythm and beat, tempo and musicality in Arguedas's novel.

[4] In Quijano's well-known formulation, "the coloniality of power" encompasses the enduring legacy of European colonialism in social structures and practices, ideologies and culture, and knowledge systems. Quijano emphasizes that social hierarchies based on race have persisted long after European occupation of the region.

[5] Critiques of Schafer's prescriptivist and ideological-charged soundscape abound. Estévez Trujillo problematizes Schafer's lack of attention to power hierarchies ("Manos sonoras" 57–58), while Ari Kelman observes that his theory is "lined with ideological and ecological messages about which sounds 'matter' and which do not" (214). Hill critiques the imperialist and patriarchal bent of the soundscape due to the ways in which Schafer advocates for "intelligent recommendations for its improvement" (Schafer 4, cited in Hill 12), particularly regarding the industrialized and urban sounds of modern life (Hill 12–13). These scholars, among others, seek to bring attention to the classist and even racist undertones of Schafer's theory, given that his persistent critique of urban settings depends on moralizing terms like "'noise pollution,' 'sound sewers,' 'overpopulation'" (Kelman 216) in contrast to the harmonious sounds of nature.

[6] "Escuchar con los ojos a las muertas" is the subtitle of an essay in which Monsiváis praises the critical rigor of his compatriot Sergio González's Rodríguez's *Huesos en el desierto*, a collection of gut-wrenching reports on feminicides in Ciudad Juárez from 1993–2002. Though Monsiváis never explicitly returns to this word choice in the essay, what becomes implicitly clear is that González Rodríguez's words speak for those victims at the intersections of race, class, and gender violence, whose voices are silenced by "la misoginia jactanciosa y violenta" that murders them (327). We hear echoes of Monsiváis's phrasing in Ana Forcinito's *Óyeme con los ojos: Cine, mujeres, visiones y voces*, which locates a distance-reducing potentiality in "la intrusión de la voz en la mirada

cinematográfica" (10). Forcinito, in turn, is inspired by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whose poem, "Sentimientos de ausente," invites the addressee to collapse distance by "listening with the eyes:" "Óyeme con los ojos / ya que están tan distantes los oídos" (9 cited in Forcinito). Forcinito finds that the synesthetic listening eye "pone en escena el espacio y en particular la lejanía: una distancia que si bien parece irremediable puede aminorarse con la mirada: los ojos leen pero no deben mirar solamente, sino además, y sobre todo, oír" (9). In contexts of absence brought about by systemic violence such as feminicide, forced disappearance, and repressive gender norms, training the readerly ear to listen to absent sonorities has the potential to counteract silencing.

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