

THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

Ṭarab: Sonic Affect

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It is so difficult to truly translate from one language into another, from one culture into another; almost impossible really. Take that concept “tarab,” for example; a paragraph of explanation for something as simple as a breath, a lifting of the heart, tarab, mutrib, shabb tereb, tarabat-tatta tarabattatee, Tarooob, Jamal wa Tarooob: etmanni mniyyah / I’ve wished / w’estanni ‘alayyah / I’ve waited / ‘iddili l’miyyah / I’ve counted. . . . (Soueif 515)

طرب (*ṭarab*) is a classical Arabic concept for an often-intense affect related to music, singing, and poetry. It comprises aesthetic emotions ranging from sorrow to joy and may result in states of rapture, ecstasy, and trance. While it was, in the premodern era, a genuine part of refined *joie de vivre*, it also transgressed the boundaries between sacred and profane spaces and instigated controversial debates on its moral-juridical legitimacy and somatic-mystical knowledge. *Ṭarab* is the flip side of the rationalist aesthetics of Arabic literature (see Lara Harb’s essay on تعجب [*ta ‘ajjub*] in this issue) and reveals the contours of an affective aesthetics that foregrounds sound and musicality, thus highlighting the experience of sense perception as opposed to the intellect. In the field of Arabic music, it informs ethnomusicology, which emphasizes not the subject-oriented experience of art but rather its intersubjective dimension, where musicians and listeners affectively interact with each other to produce and experience *ṭarab* together.

This essay maps classical concepts and modern practices of *ṭarab* by discussing their aesthetic, somatic, interactive, and political dimensions. It draws from musicological, lexicographical, theological, and literary texts by a wide range of writers, including Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235), Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311/12),

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Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Firūzābādī (d. 1415), Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (d. 1887), and Maḥmūd Darwīsh (d. 2008). The essay reads *ṭarab* together with recent concepts of aesthetic emotion (Menninghaus et al.), somaesthetics (Shusterman), attachment (Ahmed), affective arrangement (Slaby), micropolitics (Massumi), and Midān moments (Ayata and Harders) in order to “occupy the canon” (El-Ariss, “Theory” 8) of Western-dominated affect theory. At the same time, it seeks to instigate “the traffic between Arabic literature and literary and cultural theory” by transcending the problematic divide between premodern and modern literature and theory in the Arabic context (Omri 731). As a result of this interplay, the essay activates *ṭarab* as a theoretical concept and pushes it out of its comfort zone.

While *ṭarab* has mostly been discussed as a musical emotion, this essay relates it to literary texts and cultural fields usually not associated with *ṭarab*, such as Arabic prose and language, and the so-called Arab Spring. “Located in the centre of a conceptual net with multiple connections,” Jean Lambert writes in a seminal article, “*ṭarab* makes it possible to sketch the contours of an aesthetic.” Mapping and extending this conceptual net, this essay argues that *ṭarab* is a versatile aesthetic concept of sonic affect related to music, literature, language, and culture. It revolves around sound and musicality in its widest sense and deconstructs assumed hierarchies of bodily senses, artistic media, and creative practices. As sonic affect, *ṭarab* offers an aesthetic beyond ocularcentrism—that is, the dominance of the visual sense and what is commonly associated with it, such as reason and the written word (Jay).

Aesthetic Dimensions

Ṭarab is a dazzling term with a shifting history. In the pre-Islamic period, it referred to the effect of sound on animals and humans, such as the songs used by camel riders to spur on their camels (Ibn Manẓūr 2: 46). In later centuries, it came to signify a fully fledged aesthetic affect related to music,

singing, and poetry. A singer is called مطرب (*muṭrib*, or “someone who evokes *ṭarab*”), and the typical repetitions of Arabic music are called تطريب (*taṭrib*, or “the intensification of *ṭarab*”; Racy, *Making Music* 35). In its modern definition, in addition, it also refers to the genre of so-called classical Arab music in contrast to Western genres of music (5–6).

According to the classical concept as defined in Arabic dictionaries and thesauri, *ṭarab* is an aesthetic emotion ranging between joy and sadness and is elicited by instrumental music and sung verse. It is characterized by its affective

خفة تعترني عند شدة الفرح أو الحزن والهم

(Ibn Manẓūr 2: 45)

lightness that occurs with intense joy or sorrow and grief

and involves bodily الحركة والشوق (“movement and passion”; al-Firūzābādī 109), such as clapping the hands, moving the body, weeping, and dancing (al-Ghazālī 518–33; MacDonald [1902] 1–13;). In Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī’s famous anthology, كتاب الأغاني (*Kitāb al-aghānī*; *Book of Songs*), the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, when listening to the singer Ismā‘il ibn al-Hirbidh,

كاد . . . يرقص واستخفه الطرب حتى ضرب ببديه ورجليه ثم أمر له بعشرة آلاف درهم

(102)

nearly danced, because he was rapt with *ṭarab* so that his hands and legs bounced. Then he ordered ten thousand dirhams to be given to him.

The musical affect of *ṭarab* is part of a classical joie de vivre (Shuraydi 91–134), a refined way of living that cultivated bodily and sensual لذات الدنيا (“pleasures of the world”; al-Tha‘ālibī 93), including eating, drinking, sex, and listening to music. It sometimes reaches such an intensity that Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī’s (d. 1906) thesaurus provides idiomatic expressions such as

أخذت منه هزة الطرب وغلبت عليه نشوة الطرب ولم يملك نفسه من الطرب

(198)

he was overtaken by the excitement of *ṭarab*, he was overpowered by the ecstasy of *ṭarab*, [and] he lost control of himself out of *ṭarab*.

Ṭarab is conventionally an overwhelming aesthetic experience of music and singing, but it may also be elicited, as this essay argues, by the Arabic language and prose literature. Equipped with the morphological-phonetical structure of the classical Arabic language that allows for many sonic similarities, including جناس (*jinās*; “paranomasia”) and حكاية صوت (*ḥikāyat sawt*; “onomatopoeia”), and inspired by the strong emphasis of Arabic poetry on sound expressed through rhyme and meter (Gelder), Arabic texts even beyond the classical poem show a high awareness of sound and musicality. This is best seen with سجع (*saj*), often translated as “rhymed prose,” although Devin Stewart understands it as a third form of speech between poetry and prose (138). It is used by pre-Islamic soothsayers, the Qur’an, classical epistolary art, and the مقامة (*maqāmah*), an important narrative genre of classical Arabic literature. The term is also associated with the cooing of the dove, which Ibn Manẓūr describes as follows:

سجعت الحمامة إذا دعت وطربت في صوتها
(10: 13)

the dove coos when she calls and repeats [*tarrabat*] its sound.

Writing in *saj* is a way of producing textual *ṭarab*.

Ṭarab involves either joy or its opposite: sadness. For this reason, al-Firūzābādī considers the word *ṭarab* from among the أضداد (*addād*; “words with contradictory meanings”; 109). Arab lexicographers were eager to collect such contronyms as a way of taking pride in the Arabic language (Baalbaki 188–98), while for Thomas Bauer they also show a “culture of ambiguity” (159–64), the ability and even fascination of classical Islamic culture to deal with forms of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty. Identifying *ṭarab*’s opposite meanings as a fascinating ambiguity, the intellectual al-Shidyāq elaborates:

أما الغناء العربي: فكله تشويق وغرامي، وأجدر به أن يكون جامعاً لمعنيي الطرب، وهو خفة تصيب الإنسان من فرح أو حزن، فإذا سمع أحد منا صوتاً أو آلة شغف قلبه الغرام فبدت صبابته وحنث نفسه كما يحن الإلف إلى إلفه حتى يصير عنده آخر الفرح تركها، ولا غرو إن سعد منه الزفرات وأذرف العبرات . . . وعلى ذلك ورد قولهم: طربه وشجاه من الأضداد.

(*al-Wāsiṭah* 57)

As for Arab singing, it is concerned entirely with tenderness and love. Truly appropriate to it are the two meanings of the word *tarab*, which is a lightness affecting man as a result of either joy or sorrow. When one of us hears vocal or instrumental music, love penetrates his heart so that his passion becomes apparent and his soul yearns as a friend yearns for his intimate, until in the end joy turns to sadness; it is no wonder then that he sighs and tears up. . . . This is why the verbs *tarraba* and *shajā* [both used for “to stir” either to joy or to sadness] are considered among the contronyms (*addād*).

(Cachia 45; trans. slightly modified)

For al-Shidyāq, *ṭarab* means to feel joy and sorrow simultaneously. Importantly, this ambiguous feeling goes along with the aesthetic appreciation of the singing. This inherent evaluation links *ṭarab* to aesthetic emotions as defined by Winfried Menninghaus and his coauthors as “full-blown concrete emotions . . . that always include an aesthetic evaluation/appreciation of the objects or events under consideration” (171). To put it differently, al-Shidyāq does not describe the conventional emotion of love as triggered by singing, but rather the aesthetic emotion of being moved by singing. *Ṭarab* as aesthetical emotion appreciates mixed feelings such as joy and sorrow, since the expected aesthetic experience is to be affectively moved, which is at the same time an evaluative criterion of artistic quality. Feeling ambiguous *ṭarab* is evidence of high art.

Somatic Dimensions

Because of the sensual pleasure of *ṭarab*, religious scholars debated the moral legitimacy of music, singing, and poetry (Shehadi). One of its most influential proponents was the Muslim theologian al-Ghazālī, whose magisterial work إحياء علوم الدين

(*Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn; The Revival of the Religious Sciences*) dedicates an entire book to the etiquette of سماع (*samā'*; "listening") and the mystical وجد (*wajd*; "ecstasy") elicited through singing and music. It does not directly discuss the aesthetic concept of *ṭarab* but elaborates on corporeal and affective effects on the سامع (*samī'*; "listener") from an Islamic perspective (Weinrich, "Sensing Sound"). While al-Ghazālī condemns some musical instruments and social constellations, which he believes encourage illegitimate desire or behavior, he fervently defends the positive effects of music and singing on the pious listener.

فالسَّماع للقلب محك صادق، ومعيار ناطق، فلا يصل نفس السَّماع إليه، إلا وقد تحرك فيه ما هو الغالب عليه، وإذا كانت القلوب بالطبائع مطيعة للأسماع حتى أبدت بوارداتها مكامناتها، وكشفت بها عن مساوئها وأظهرت محاسنها.

(410)

[L]istening to music and singing is for the heart a true touchstone and eloquent measure; whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which in it preponderates, since the heart is naturally subservient to the ears, to the degree that its secret things plainly show themselves through them and its defects are uncovered by them and its beauties made evident.

(MacDonald [1901] 199; trans. slightly modified)

In other words, music is a moral catalyst exposing the virtues and vices of the human heart. Unveiling inner truth, the sonic affect has therefore an important cognitive dimension. For the pious lover of God, music and singing allow for a spiritual experience of *wajd*. These revelations can be achieved only by what Ines Weinrich calls "sensing sound" through the affective body (al-Ghazālī 447–52; MacDonald [1901] 229–35). In this regard, the famous Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ describes in a poem entitled نظم السلوك ("Naẓm al-sulūk"; "Poem of the Way") his mystical epistemology:

لأسمع أفعالي بسمع بصيرة وأشهد أقوالي بعين سماعة
(113)

That I might hear my acts with seeing ears

and look upon my words with listening eyes

(Arberry 72)

This synesthesia deconstructs the often-assumed primacy of the visual and equates it with the sonic. For Islamic Sufism in all its different varieties, the activities of singing, playing music, and reciting poetry play important roles in turning the body into a conscious site of religious experience (Frishkop; Shannon 106–29; Turner); likewise, the recitation of the Qur'an may evoke *ṭarab* as a somatic-spiritual experience (Nelson 76–77).

In addition, the classical Arabic language has sometimes been the object of secular mysticism and eroticism that emphasize its sonic dimension. In his avant-garde literary-lexicographical work, *الساق على الساق* (*al-Sāq 'alā l-sāq; Leg over Leg*), al-Shidyāq describes and performs the aesthetic experience of words as part of an "affective philology" in order to unveil the beauty and wisdom of the Arabic language (Junge, "Exposing" 99). In a chapter dedicated to an apology for music against the critiques of religion, the text evokes the sound of the Roman Catholic Church organ by enumerating onomatopoetic terms such as طنطنة وندندنة وخنخنة ودمدمة (*ṭantana wa-dandana wa-khankhana wa-damdama*; al-Shidyāq, *Leg* 88), which Humphrey Davies renders into English as "strumming and humming, mumbling and rumbling" (89). This "writing aloud" (Peled 129) prompts readers to hear and feel the beauty and wisdom of the Arabic language with their own senses and bodies (Junge, "Food" 156–59).

In all these examples, the enrapturing sound of music, singing, poetry, language, and Qur'an affects the soma of the listeners. It does not only elicit pleasure or passion but also conveys knowledge through the lived physical experience. In this regard, Richard Shusterman emphasizes the somatic dimension of aesthetic experience. In his philosophy of somaesthetics, he brings together "the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aesthesis*) and creative self-fashioning" (27). From this perspective, *ṭarab* offers bodily pleasure and somatic knowledge that enable, for instance, spiritual experience and social performance for mystics. The symbolic capital of this somatic experience seemed so high that

al-Ghazālī sharply rejects in his book all those hypocritical listeners who burst into tears, dance, and tear their clothes only because they pretend to be in ecstasy (al-Ghazālī 519; MacDonald [1902] 2). *Tarab* provides forms of embodied knowledge.

Interactive Dimensions

For recent affect theory, arguably the most important feature of *tarab* is its interactive and intersubjective dimension, since it situates sonic affect as a social product of equally affected and affecting bodies. In the lexicographical, musicological, and religious texts quoted above, this aspect is not explicitly discussed; rather, it is ethnomusicology that emphasizes the affective interaction between musicians and audience. A. J. Racy develops an “ecstatic feed-back model of creativity” where “[m]usic is seen as a participatory phenomenon that involves direct emotional exchange between performers and listeners” (“Creativity” 22). In the process of music making, *tarab* becomes possible when musicians affect the audience with their music, for example through improvised repetitions and retentions, and when the listeners express their affectedness, for example through spontaneous shouting or moving, thus affecting the musicians even more who in turn affect the audience even more. *Tarab* involves an “overpowering-empowering complex” for both the musicians and listeners (*Making Music* 122). Importantly, this interactive dimension is characteristic of secular concerts (120–46), religious chanting (Weinrich, “Strategies”), and mystical invocations (Shannon 106–29).

Such constellations of interaction are “affective arrangements,” to use a term by Jan Slaby. This term comprises a unique constellation of persons, but also things, artifacts, or spaces “that coalesce into a coordinated formation of mutual *affecting and being-affected*” (109). This also involves “a notion of distributed *agency* in the sense of a performative sequence jointly enacted by contributing elements” (110). The Arab practices of making music and listening to music are highly aware of affective arrangements and use them to create *tarab* together.

The affective arrangements of *tarab* are to be found, as I argue, not only in music and singing but also in the performance of literature in salons and other gatherings (see Ali 38–57). For instance, in regard to the traditional folk epic *Sirat Banī Hilāl*, Dwight Reynolds has analyzed situated forms of emotional performance and audience reaction in rural Egypt (137–206). Darwīsh, the national poet of Palestine, was famous for his readings, which elicited intense emotional responses from the audience. In an undated audio recording on *YouTube*, for example, he can be heard reciting one of his most popular early poems, بطاقة هوية (“*Biṭāqat huwiyya*”; “Identity Card”), which repeats the politically assertive verse addressed to an Israeli soldier:

سجل
أنا عربي

(“*Sajjil anā ‘arabi*”)

Write down
I am an Arab

With the echoing sound of a large hall or a stadium, Darwīsh seems to refer to the intense atmosphere of the audience when he introduces his poem with an emphatic calm by saying:

الآن . . . الآن فقط . . . أستطيع . . . أن أقول . . . سجل أنا عربي
(00:06–16)

Now . . . only now . . . I am able . . . to say . . . “write down, I am an Arab”

And the audience responds with rapturous enthusiasm to repetitions of the verse, “I am an Arab” (00:00–27, 01:54–02:02, 03:15–19). Nearly everyone who has commented on the recording repeats or modifies this verse, using it as an emotional template of position taking, sometimes by adding further verses of Darwīsh’s poetry or expressing aesthetic appreciation:

كم أعشق محمود درويش وأعشق قصيدة سجل أنا عربي

How I adore Maḥmūd Darwīsh and how I adore the poem “Write down, I am an Arab,”

and

درسناها في كتاب اللغة العربية كم أحببتها كنت صغيرة واثرت فيا

We studied it in the Arabic textbook. How I loved it when I was young and it affected me.

By expanding the concept of *ṭarab* to include digital practices, social media offers room for extended affective arrangements of *ṭarab*, where affects circulate through likes, comments, and also fan videos reciting Darwish's poem with instrumental music and emotive images. In the "affective economy" of poetry, using Sara Ahmed's term, a single verse may offer a "passionate attachment" that connects various readers, listeners, and viewers beyond time and place to Palestine and to Arab nationhood (118). *Ṭarab* is the socially engineered experience of being overpowered and empowered.

Political Dimensions

The classical concept of *ṭarab* is often based on an elitist understanding of aesthetics. Skilled *ṭarab* singers must follow musical and moral etiquette just as skilled *ṭarab* listeners must express *ṭarab* sensations in a socially appropriate way. This often excludes, for instance, singing aloud with the *muṭrib* and being drunk (Racy, *Making Music* 18–42). The elitist art of *ṭarab* was probably never just *l'art pour l'art*, but often seems to be entangled with social dynamics, power hierarchies, and political negotiations (Figueroa; Fulton-Melanson). In the anecdote about Hārūn al-Rashīd discussed above, only the caliph himself—not his court—is described as expressing *ṭarab*, foregrounding *ṭarab* as a prerogative of the powerful. In contrast, the famous Egyptian singer Umm Kulthūm (d. 1975) enraptured the masses with her affective interpretations of Arabic poetry (Fakhreddine). She became the "voice of Egypt" while also being an instrument of Nasserist ideology (Danielson). Vernacular practices of *ṭarab* are also important, sometimes acting as bottom-up political interventions. This is the case for the revolutionary soundscape of the demonstrations during the Arab uprisings around 2011,

which involved affective creativity, somatic experience, and social interaction. Theorizing the role of emotion and affect in Egyptian and Turkish protests in the public square (*midān*), Bilgin Ayata and Cilja Harders develop the concept of "Midān moments." They are characterized by

intense affective relationalities engendered through the bodily co-presence of protesters as well as practices relating to these spaces. We define Midān moments as moments of rupture in which pre-existing emotional repertoires of fear, hate, repression, or respect for the political order are destabilized. They can potentiate new ways of being and relating to each other, but can also raise new conflicts and tensions. Midān moments are imbued with a sense of possibility for social change as well as ambivalence, as they may contain—and make vivid—the limits of these possibilities. (279)

It is not a political ideology or social movement that connects different protestors on the *midān* to "affective communities," but rather "a shared sensuality eliciting an implicit sense of commonality and immediateness" (Zink 289). In order to understand the shared sensuality and its inherent moments of rupture in Taḥrīr Square, it is important to also include the analysis of soundscapes and sonic practices, since they are important constituents of communities in general, as case studies on the soundscapes of modernization (Fahmy), sermons (Hirschkind), and wartime (Daughtry) have demonstrated.

Vernacular musical practices in Taḥrīr Square included the collective chanting of slogans such as الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام ("The people demand the downfall of the regime"), chants with improvised messages using popular rhythms of children's songs (Keraitim and Mehrez 54), collective singing of classical songs such as Umm Kulthūm's أنا الشعب ("I Am the People"; Sanders and Visonà 231), songs using slogans such as Rāmī 'Iṣām's عيش حرية عدالة اجتماعية ("Bread, Freedom, Social Justice"), and songs that became themselves slogans, like صوت الحرية ("The Sound or Voice of Freedom"). The performance of music and singing in the square produced highly interactive and affective moments, in which musicians and listeners were both aesthetically

overpowered and politically empowered by music and often transgressed the etiquette of classical elitist *ṭarab* events by screaming, collective singing, climbing on the stage, and using Bengal fireworks.

Sahar Keraitim and Samia Mehrez have described the carnivalesque atmosphere in the square as a *mulid*, a popular religious festivity, which involves ritual celebration as much as social chaos (35–37). The *mulid*-like soundscape in Cairo’s central square instilled in a protester, for instance, the “constant desire to scream loudly” (qtd. in Galeev 70), while another linked the chants and sounds with “a dream that just became a reality” (71), and a third confessed that she “would cry from joy and feel the urge to ‘join the revolutionaries’ when hearing the crowd from her home” (71). Oscar Galeev argues that the “musicality of Tahrir lies at the core of its political aesthetics and of the sense of ‘vivid presence’ in the days of the revolution” (59). *Ṭarab* as revolutionary joy and ecstasy is a collectively produced sonic affect attached to the *Miḍān*. By countering regime-dominated soundscapes such as circling helicopters or forced silence (Malmström 57–69), the festive ambience and its sonic affect create acoustic resistance. This countersound makes possible what Brian Massumi calls a disruptive “microprecision” that unfolds ethico-aesthetic “micropolitics” (58). *Ṭarab* is an aesthetic experience of social and political power and at the same time a political negotiation of it.

How Arab Is *Ṭarab*?

The aesthetic phenomenon of *ṭarab*, as studies show, has sometimes been considered a genuine constituent of Arab kinship or an expression of cultural authenticity and emotional sincerity that opposes a westernized modernity often assumed to be “cold” (Lambert; Shannon). The intellectual al-Shidyāq, however, deconstructs such cultural essentialism in his description of Arab and European music. For him, the experience of *ṭarab* is rather an interplay between musical differences and cultural habituation. He argues that Egyptians are, in general, not moved by Syrian music and vice versa, while some Europeans are moved by

Egyptian music after living for a long time in Egypt, observing,

ولا يخفى أن للعادة تأثيرًا في جميع الأحوال وخصوصًا في المنطق والألحان

(*al-Wāsiṭah* 61)

It is no secret that habit affects all things, pronunciation and melody above all. (Cachia 49)

Bringing together Plato, the musician Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 804), and the philologist al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363), al-Shidyāq shows that it is part of human nature to be moved by music (*al-Wāsiṭah* 59; Cachia 47).

The linguistic term and cultural concept of *ṭarab* has in some cases similar or nearly equivalent concepts and terms in North Africa and the Middle East, including the Amazigh term *amarg* (Lambert) and the “melancholic modalities” (Gill) of classical Turkish music. In Arab culture, *ṭarab* is a transgressive concept that constantly oscillates, as this essay has shown, between assumed dichotomies of the secular and the religious, the premodern and the modern, the artist and the audience, music and literature, and art and politics. In this regard, “the concept of *ṭarab* offers an essential clue to the understanding of Arabo-Islamic civilisation” (Lambert). In her novel *The Map of Love*, the anglophone Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif (b. 1950) takes *ṭarab* as a touchstone for cultural untranslatability, “a paragraph of explanation for something as simple as a breath, a lifting of the heart” (515). In contrast, Anna Ziajka Stanton emphasizes the possible translatability of Arabic language and literature, referring, for instance, to Humphrey Davies’s sound-focused English translation of al-Shidyāq’s *Leg over Leg* that provides a worlding of the Arabic language and its “strumming and humming, mumbling and rumbling” (Stanton 27–55).

By mapping the aesthetic, somatic, interactive, and political dimensions of *ṭarab*, this essay has opened the classical musical understanding toward a larger aesthetic concept that includes written literature, performed language, and cultural practices. In my reading, *ṭarab* is a sonic experience of music, literature, language, and culture; it celebrates musicality in its widest sense and appreciates ambiguity as

high art; it comes into being through a participative interaction with other persons and things; it involves somatic intensities and provides an embodied knowledge; it is the socially engineered aesthetic feeling of being overpowered and empowered; and thus it is the aesthetic experience of sociopolitical power and at the same time a negotiation of it. Bringing it into dialogue with concepts of aesthetic emotions, somaesthetics, attachment, affective arrangements, micropolitics, and Midān moments, this essay has shown the relevance of a classical term to recent theory on the one hand and the importance of the sonic to affect theory on the other.

While ocularcentrism has been attributed predominantly to the “West” (Jay), this essay does not attribute sound exclusively to the “East.” Refraining from cultural-essentialist dichotomies, this essay rather aims to draw attention to a heightened conceptual awareness, fascination, and sensibility for sound in Arab culture that goes along with other sensual experiences (Lange) and bodily intensities (El-Ariss, *Trials*). Therefore, *ṭarab* should neither be seen as completely disconnected from other concepts and discussions of aesthetic sound (Eisenlohr 109–28; Groth et al.) nor be disregarded as an exotic or outdated aesthetic sensuality. Instead, *ṭarab* as sonic affect is a living negotiation between bodies and sounds. It shows that musicality matters.

NOTE

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

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