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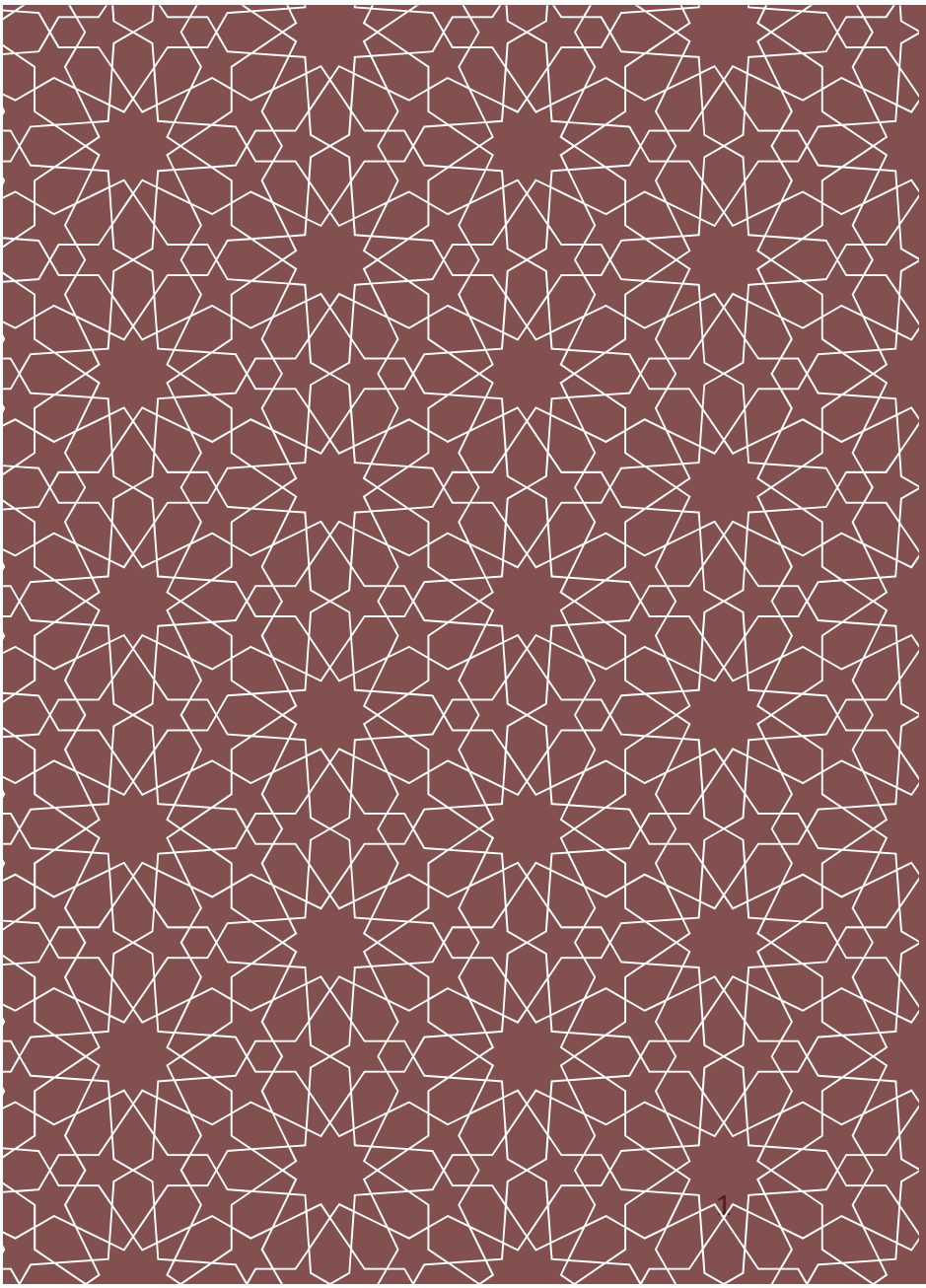
Touching Sound: Passion and Global Politics Workshop Report

Maria Frederika Malmström and Mark LeVine



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Abstract:

How does sound shape and/or constrain the actions of individuals and groups? In what ways does “touching sound” constitute important stimuli within everyday experiences and how/why does sound induce strong affective states? How does listening to noise as well as to silences, screeches and songs, clicks and pops, affect us? By focusing on the under-studied realm of sound we will increase our understanding of the politics of the sonic, helping scholars move beyond conventional approaches to studying spaces in motion as well as spaces where motion has been forcibly stilled – by curfew, war, disease, etc.; opening up space to investigate the non-conscious forces that have a profound influence on our thinking and decisions in moments of intensity. From the perspective of research, this text opens an interdisciplinary conduit that should enable cross-fertilizations between the disciplines of anthropology, ethnomusicology, history, cultural studies, religious studies and political sociology, bringing together studies of aesthetic production, the environment, sub- and counter-cultures and technologies and affective dimensions of state as well as societal power and contestation.

Keywords: sound, politics, power, passion, touch, body

Acknowledgements:

With grateful thanks to Karim Shallwanee, who took the photographs of the workshop included in this paper.

Introduction[1]

Imagine trying to write about Cairo, Lahore, Damascus, or Marrakesh without sound. Most scholars who do not deal directly with aural culture do not include in their work the soundscapes in which the events they relate have taken place. But they are almost certainly in our minds as we remember, think about, and write about the events we have experienced or are studying. One key reason for this is the European history of ideas, where textually oriented scholarship is still perceived as of primary academic significance. Another reason is that it has been quite difficult until recently to foreground sound as it remains the most difficult aspect of the senses to preserve. One can capture sight through drawings or paintings and ultimately photographs and film. One can even capture taste approximately, given the ability to reproduce a given recipe as long as the ingredients are available. Touch and feeling are more universal; regardless of where you are in the world, there are a more or less delimited number of touch sensations that are relevant to any scholarly discussion. Even smell has certain foundational touchstones that remain more or less constant in similar kinds of locations. The butchers' quarter in the Old City of Damascus will smell quite similar to its counterparts in Jerusalem or Casablanca. Spice markets might differ depending on the predominant spice, but cumin, saffron and anise smell the same whether they are in Delhi or Doha.

But sound depends on vibrations. As Steve Goodman (2012) perceptively writes: “From vibes to vibrations, this is a definition that traverses mind and body, subject and object, the living and the non-living. One way or another, it is vibration, after all, that connects every separate entity in the cosmos, organic and nonorganic” (2012: xiv). Sound doesn’t just affect our ears; its vibrations affect our bodies – we “feel” and “touch” sound as much as hear it. Its affective power reaches all our senses. There are many categories of the phenomenology of sound that are relevant to the study of the Middle East, or of any region for that matter. On the one hand there is quite literally the sound of everyday life, the streets and rooms and buses and cars and cinemas and cafes through which we move and live. A combination of the natural and the fabricated world, these sounds are almost impenetrably complex, yet subtle shifts in individual elements can immediately and profoundly alter our mood, our sense of safety and well-being, and our alertness to possible danger.

On the other hand, there is purposeful sound production, by which we mean the sound produced directly by and through human activity with the goal of being heard by others as

[1] In 2019 a workshop entitled *Touching Sound: Passion and Global Politics* was organised at the Aga Khan Centre by Professor Jonas Otterbeck of the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations and Associate Professor Maria Frederika Malmström of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University. This was an initial collaboration in the field of Sound Studies between these two institutions. The participants were specially invited academic scholars, composers, musicians and sound artists, who met for two and half days to create networks and to develop academic as well as artistic ideas related to the topic. They included Sama Alshaibi, Cristina Moreno Almeida, Lara Baladi, Ziad Fahmy, Anja Franck, Michael Frishkopf, Torsten Janson, Deborah Kapchan, Anne-Mette Kirkegaard, Michael Muhammad Knight, Mark LeVine, Torbjörn Ebbot Lundberg, Steve Lyon, Marc Michael, Gabriella Calchi Novati, Tom Rice, Robert Saunders, Martin Sköld, Shayna Silverstein, Darci Sprengel, Ted Swedenburg and Stefan Williamson Fa.

something distinct and communicative. From a car horn to a stun grenade, from a sermon blasting through a distorted PA to a song drifting out of a tuk-tuk, these sounds inevitably overlap with the fabricated and natural sounds of everyday life to produce the overall soundscape of our immediate experience. The totality of elements is far greater than that of sight, smell, touch or taste, and yet they must be fully analysed in order comprehensively to make sense of the world around us, in which we are immersed and in which we live through our days and nights.

Thus we can divide sound studies into two broad kinds of research: research based on the ambient sound of daily life in all its variety, from the mundane to the terrifying and sublime, and purposefully created sound, epitomized by (but not restricted to) music, where sounds are put together to have a specific impact on listeners. Finally, in either case, sound is inherently both temporal and spatial: it moves through space along the waves of air that it generates and in so doing moves through time. This quality of duration makes it different from smell or touch or taste or even sight, which are immediate sensations.

As Andrew Simon describes it, "In the last several decades scholars have started to question the conspicuous 'silence' pervading many academic works that privilege one sense – sight – to the detriment of all others" (quoted in Silverstein 2020). In a Gramscian sense, we could say that scholars are finally "coming to their senses" – or at least our "good sense" (cf. Fahmy 2013), meaning our ability to use the many expressions and experiences of physical sound the better to understand and critique the basic ideological, epistemological and phenomenological foundations of the societies in which such sound is produced. Sound studies, in the words of Steingo and Sykes (2019), have "unearthed repressed histories of sound and listening, while situating the ear as a major instrument in the production of social, cultural, and scientific knowledge." In this regard, we point out here that while the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations is renowned for its support for architecture world-wide, and especially Islamic heritage, it is inarguable that the sound of Islam is even more primal and originary than its visual and built aspect. After all, traditionally, the first word revealed to Muhamad was *iqra'* "recite" and the Qur'an (which means 'the recitation'), even more than being seen, is meant to be heard.

We believe that the incredible aural heritage of Islam as a set of practices and texts, as well as Islamic societies in all their incredible diversity over time and space, constitutes perhaps the single most important reservoir of historical information about the religion that there is, and certainly the one that is still, despite all the research that has been done, comparatively the least explored. And here we speak not of ethnomusicological research on religiously inspired or devotional sound performances, or of music in Islam more broadly. Rather, we speak of the way that sound, not just music but all kinds of sounds that people hear throughout their lives – random and environmental, purposeful and natural, voluntary and forced – creates the full sensory experience of living and moving through Islamic spaces, whether as a Muslim or a non-Muslim, indigenous or foreigner, and both produced and experienced by

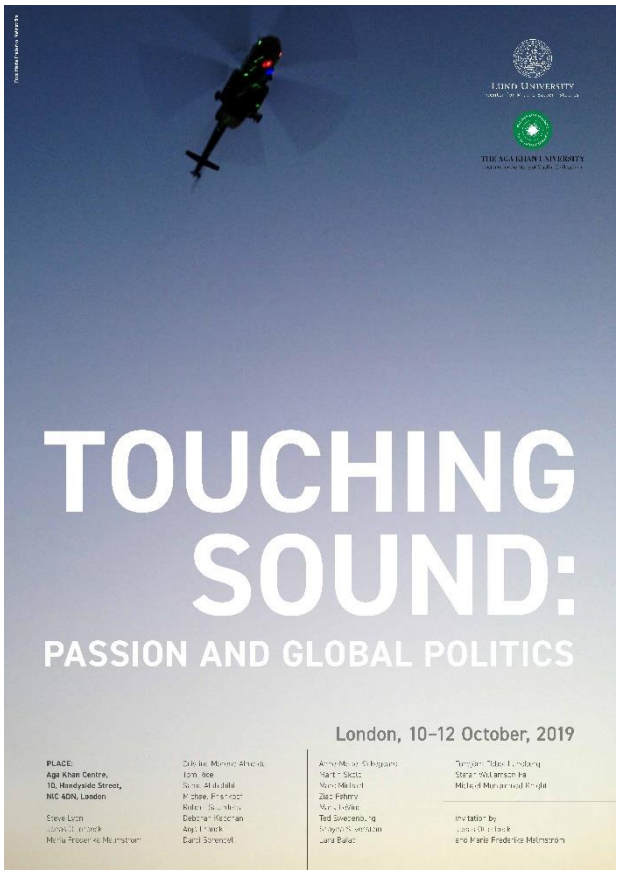
agentic, human actors or the objects that themselves "weave in and out of sound in complex ways" (Bull 2019: 23).

That being said, it is undeniable that in the last decade sound studies have become an increasingly utilized set of approaches of inquiry in Middle East and area studies more broadly, especially for "those adventurous researchers in search of new approaches" (Shih 2021). As Andrea Stanton and Carole Woodall (2016) point out, "Over the past decade, historians have finally started listening to the past … Historians today are 'listening to the past with an intensity, frequency, keenness, and acuity unprecedented in scope and magnitude'. However, scholars of the modern Middle East have yet to join this auditory revolution. Whether working in history, political science, anthropology, or gender studies, they are still largely producing soundproof, devocalized narratives." We are learning how changes in soundscapes over time reflect an interaction not just of the human and fabricated, the natural and organic, but of the technological, capitalist and commodified with the personal, private and grassroots (Fahmy 2020). Drawing on the fields of performance studies, sound studies, and ethnomusicology, scholars are asking how sound and music are crucial domains for cultural expression, identity production, and political action in MENA. They are combining a wide range of material: performance traditions, art music and popular music, religious practices, sound art, and revolutionary aesthetics, all in order to become familiar with the cultural history of the MENA and the role of sound and music in negotiating social structures of class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and religion.

This work in the MENA is certainly part of a global trend in the still-young field of sound studies to "reorient sound studies toward the global South," as the recent volume *Remapping Sound Studies* has set out to do (although, it's worth noting, without a significant discussion of the MENA). It asks different questions in the process, concerning sound's relationship to technology, the question of sound as a relationship between listener and the thing listened to, and the conceptualization of sonic history as nonlinear and saturated with friction.

While all types of sound production, performance, audition and affection are within this purview, we agree with Jonathan Shannon's argument in his contribution to an IJMES roundtable on "studying the music of the Middle East" (Vol. 44, 2012) that "scholars of the Middle East and North Africa in all disciplines can learn much about their favored topics of interest through the study of music and related cultural practices … [Yet] when scholars have explored the ways in which music and expressive culture might shed light on their areas of expertise, they have tended to apply the conceptual tools of their home disciplines to the study of music: hence we have the sociology and anthropology of music, the history and politics of music and performance, and so on. Music in these studies remains a (usually passive) expression of more fundamental forces, reproducing the marginal position that music, and the arts in general, typically enjoy in Western societies – at best serving as an analytic tool but too seldom understood as an agent itself. Yet, following Iain Chambers, we might turn the tables and aim not for a sociology (or anthropology / economics / history /

politics) of music but rather for music as sociology (or anthropology / economics / history / politics) … We need to analyze music not only as a historical and cultural practice embedded in society but also as history, as culture, as society" (Shannon 2012).



Touching Sound: Passion and Global Politics - Research Agenda

The workshop, convened in 2019, brought together scholars, composers, musicians and sound artists to find new ways of describing and analyzing global politics, taking as its point of departure the idea of touching sound; exploring the relationship between sound's sonic, aesthetic and political dimensions. During the workshop, artists and musicians were given time to intervene. By enabling reflections about art, the artists and musicians also felt invited to reflect on the more academic discourse. Further, as most of the academics were also musicians, dancers and artists of other sorts, the affinity was there from the beginning, as a potential. At the workshop we used imagery, sound but also bodily movement to make us feel, reflect and dare to restructure the common intellectual, academic forms. We were both led in immobile meditation and physically active *dhikr*. The sound of art, sound art and unsound sounds were all part of the workshop. Artists as well as academics provided examples of how sound can raise critical awareness in a way that texts cannot. With voices, screams, chants, melodies, musical instruments, recorded everyday sounds, archival radio sounds, the unsound sound of torture but also utter silence, the workshop had to confront representations and presentations of the politics of sound. It created the opportunity for reflection and revaluation of possible research questions about sound and politics. We reflected upon how, for example, the materiality of sound, emotions connected to the sonic, censorship of sound, or propaganda through sound can help us to understand important aspects of power, counter power, claims to authenticity, authority, resistance or deviance. The workshop organizers took a calculated risk by not adhering to the established academic forms, but from the responses of the participants, it must be said that mixing together artists, musicians and academics turned out to be a success. It contributed to an openness and a lust for formulating and sharing ideas. As Jonas Otterbeck explained when outlining the background of the conference at the beginning of the workshop, the rather unusual (for conferences) goal was to create new ideas and networks, rather than to explicate already researched fields. If anything, the workshop could have been improved even further if even more sounds had been included.

We asked questions such as: how do sonic vibrations mediate consciousness? How does sound shape and/or constrain the actions of individuals and groups? In what ways are touching sounds important stimuli within everyday experiences and how/why does the sonic induce strong affective states? How does listening to noises, silences, click or pops affect us? By focusing on the under-studied realm of sound we will increase our understanding of the politics of the sonic, helping scholars move beyond conventional approaches to studying spaces in motion as well as spaces where motion has been forcibly stilled – by curfew, war, disease, etc.; opening up space to investigate the non-conscious forces that have a profound influence upon our thinking and our decisions in moments of intensity. From the perspective of research, this workshop opens an interdisciplinary conduit that should enable cross-fertilizations between the disciplines of anthropology, ethnomusicology, history, cultural studies, religious studies and political sociology, bringing together studies of aesthetic production, the environment, sub- and countercultures and technologies and affective dimensions of state as well as of societal power and contestation. In this we believe our collective project furthers the goal of leading sound studies scholars to "participate in decolonization as an affirmative gesture and not simply as critique" (Steingo and Sykes 2019).

How Can We Understand Today's Global Collective Body of Anxiety and the Fear of the Other?

More specifically, the sound of fear, the affective power of suspicion that both produces and helps produce and prolong conflict and even war? How can we further our enquiries into zones of social and political ambivalence and suspicion through the prism of sound, particularly in relation to passion and global politics? In what way is sound relevant to

achieving a fuller understanding of contemporary global politics? And what does passion have to do with it?

Sound fills up certain places and spaces in specific ways. Focusing on the under-studied realm of sound as a source of both affective data and discourse for the study of people and politics – what we term the 'politics of the sonic' – helps us to move beyond conventional approaches. It opens up space to investigate the non-conscious forces that have a profound influence upon our thinking and decisions in moments of intensity or the opposite. As such we believe all research in this kind of collaborative field should begin with the phenomenology of produced sound. In particular, we build on Malmström's fieldwork, as elucidated in her 2019 *"The Streets are Talking to Me": Affective Fragments in Sisi's Egypt* (University of California Press), to show how actors in focus have been politically, socially, culturally and often physically displaced from spaces and places within their city, Cairo. Many of them also live in constant fear of arrest, abduction and detention. Furthermore, to explore how sound can tell us more about being human and about the human imagination, Malmström and Brian Boyd tried to create a long, non-chronological sound piece that invites people to sense, experience and listen to the story of the aftermath of the 'failed revolution' in Egypt and what happened to it, especially after the disaster of 2013. The sonic piece goes hand in hand with the book mentioned above and was made with the ambition of going beyond the limitations of scholarly production, whereas textually oriented scholarship is still perceived as being of primary academic significance. Malmström's goal is to step aside from her academic persona, while making people experience matter, places and spaces through the politics of the ear in relation to an imagined or rejected nation. Furthermore, the piece introduced or reacquainted the participants of the workshop to the sounds of what Egyptians had gone through since 2011, what they were experiencing now as well as in relation to the future. Malmström wanted the participants to listen to the sounds of imagination, love and hope of a new homeland, political repression, collective depression, stasis, stress (not least since the economic collapse) hidden rage, uncertainty and more.

We also believe that these explorations cannot be limited to scholars alone, but rather must bring artists and musicians into the discussion and research from the start, not merely as subjects of research or interlocutors, but rather as collaborators in the fullest sense of the term (Malmström 2019; LeVine 2022).

Rather than taking macro-level politics and changes to the geopolitical map as our point of departure, the workshop explored political processes, values and relations from the vantage point of passion. As an illustrative case of passion and politics, Bartels (2013) raises the example of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, arguing that the conflicting emotions of love and hate should be understood as affective quanta that come to represent the collective passions of a whole nation: love meant love for the country, and hate meant hate toward all class enemies, viewed as enemies of a progressive China. She shows how passion was used to distinguish between "those who make up the 'us' and those who are 'other' and can thus be legitimately constituted as the object of hate" (Bartels 2013:43), and thus subjects to the

state of exception by their own governments (or in the case of war and/or occupation, foreign control) and the supreme violence that attends such a state (cf. Agamben 2003; Mbembe 2019).

As another example, many of Malmström's interlocutors in Cairo spoke about passion of varying intensity in the aftermath of 25 January Revolution: passionate love during the fervent moments of the uprisings, the 'death' of that same love during 'slow' periods, and the rebirth of passion (with the same person or another) during new politically intense periods. People were in love with each other but also in love with the potentiality of a new nation – strong passion when there was hope in the air and a 'dying' passion when it was not possible to grasp any public optimism or activity, the intense responses of these complex forces varying from love to fear, to euphoria, desire, shame, rage, depression and more. Both the women and the men to whom Malmström spoke highlighted certain urban spots, often with dreamy eyes and a touch of nostalgia in their voices. Something similar happened when they talked about the clothes they wore (they were 'sacred'), the taste and the scent of the food they ate, and the energy and euphoria they sensed from the crowd in Tahrir Square during the first eighteen days of the 2011 uprisings (Malmström 2019).

For us, it is therefore crucial to ask questions such as: How do politics of passion contribute to strife and conflict? To ethnic and sectarian categorizations? To loyalties and alliances? What is the emotive component of critique, protest and mobilization, challenging authoritarian regimes and power relations? How is passion interrelated with politics of displacement? With senses of uncertainty, experiences of persecution, the loss of a national home? And how may affect simultaneously work toward strengthening people's sense of belonging and public intimacy?

Moreover, what is the sonic imprint, the architecture, the DNA of passion? Can we "read sound into text," as Ziyad Fahmy (2019) asks? Can we produce, in Steven Connor's words (2004), "intersensuality" to match "intertextuality," and so account for the predominating sense in fact being shadowed and interpreted by other, apparently dormant senses? We also here think of "entrainment" – when affect travels and is contagious as everyone gets on the train, so to speak. And through entrainment, we can return to passion and ask how do emotions overdetermine the body. Great for music, but what about when fascists go on a march? Clearly, forces of sonic affect are not only positive. We need to understand the affective dimensions of both empathy and compassion, and how and where they differ and even conflict. Rather than merely celebrate the transmission of affect from one body and/or

object to another, we need, in Deborah Kapchan's words, to "train our body to understand experientially difference and even otherness".

As with all elemental forces, affect can be understood as possessing the qualities of both matter and energy. That is, the force can be considered to have both non-material and material substance, as a particle and as a wave – a discursive quantum and the force that moves it – and indeed both at the same time. If we consider the physical impact of sound waves, even on deaf people, we can understand how waves produce substantive and psychological reactions on those with whom they interact. However, what we always must remember is that the affective dimensions of, for example, the urban embodied experience and its attendant discourses might be significantly different from the corresponding affective dimension outside cities. Obviously, lived experiences are also experienced differently, depending on individual and collective political bodies in relation to time, temporality and context (LeVine & Malmström 2019). The research that underpins these findings is based on LeVine's and Malmström's (together with Ulrika and Eric Trovalla) project *Suspicious Materialities: Egyptian and Nigerian Cityscapes* (2017–2021), which explores how suspicion and solidarity spread affectively, emotionally and politically through the built urban environment in Africa's two most populous and strategically important countries. Our exploration of how the materiality of sound and other senses create relations of power, knowledge and agency illustrates how affect – the energy, forces and materialities underlying the discursive-ideological truth and knowledge regimes that produce the techno-politics governing everyday life – profoundly shapes communal and political subjectivities in both societies. Creating a unique methodological apparatus combining sound studies, historiographic, (para)ethnographic, ethnomusicological, performance, de-colonial and local theories and methodologies, our research has been collaborative and performative including as much collaboration *with* as research *about* the individuals, groups and communities with whom we engage. Our research shows how communities experience and respond to various powerful affective stimuli – that is, how affect becomes political; and how both communities respond to affective embodying and encoding by producing various forms of artistic expression in response, which then enable counter-disciplinary practices by marginalized, repressed and violated bodies and minds. A focus on sound studies in urban settings across countries both attenuates existing approaches to the field and offers new methodological tools and analytical lenses with and through which to explore the historical and contemporary experiences of city life in selected regions and globally. From the vagaries of contemporary development processes to the massive logistical, political, economic and ideological challenges posed by post-conflict reconstruction, such a focus will greatly strengthen development studies at a time when the collapse of old borders, and the growing inter- and trans-disciplinary and trans-regional research agendas demand innovative and broad-reaching approaches to develop the field further in the face of uniquely powerful challenges from a variety of state, institutional, private and communal sources.

In addition, our research to date has demonstrated the reality of what Malmström has termed "sound infrastructures," which we understand as sonic instruments of biopower. For

example, as we all know, displacement is a lived reality for around 67 million people around the globe (UNHCR 2018). While some are able to secure international protection in safe third countries, for the majority displacement is measured in years or even decades in refugee camps, transit sites or urban settlements (Brun 2015). Tom Western (2020: 1), who has explored sound in relation to migration and refugee camps, notes that auditory cultures develop in displacement, while sounds of citizenship are playing a key role – and this is still not been recognised in the debates about freedom of movement. Hence, by focusing on the under-studied realm of sound, we gain a fresh vantage point from which to interrogate the way individuals and collectives experience and navigate different forms of displacement. If we reflect upon the ways in which the materiality of sound, the forces of passion connected to it, as well as its censorship, and use these as a tool of propaganda to produce certain affects, it helps us to understand important aspects of power, counter power, claims to authenticity, authority, resistance or deviance.

Mass displacement is one of the major challenges of our time. But displacement is not only the result of violent conflict, natural disaster, resource extraction, gentrification, political turmoil or the global war on terror. For some, the result depends on government politics in relation to 'unwanted' citizens. Sound can, as is the case in today's Egypt, be used by a regime as sonic infrastructural violence that operates on embodied levels – as a form of political control, violence, urban exclusion, stigmatisation and displacement (cf. Malmström 2021). During Malmström's recent fieldwork, and after the ousting of President Morsi in 2013, she noticed countless examples of how materialized sonic experiences are consciously constructed and used by the autocratic military regime in Egypt to discipline and mould its (especially male) citizens. For example, by forbidding particular music or by detaining artists; by military use of acoustic vibrations; by constantly playing national anthems on the radio and TV; by monitoring and controlling communications (not only the surveillance of phone conversations, but cutting communications and thus disturbing and constantly frustrating people); by employing unbearably loud sounds during torture or by closing downtown bars, cafes and bookshops; and by silencing the iconic Tahrir Square during the anniversaries of the 2011 revolt, the regime controls and limits parts of the cityscape of Cairo for its citizens (Malmström 2019).

We assert that approaching sonic infrastructural violence in relation to lived experiences of urban stigma is key for the much-needed advancement of our theoretical comprehension of the sensory consequences to citizens in autocratic regimes. The vibrations of sound have a unique power to induce strong affective states, including heightened states of

attention, paranoia, suspicion and anxiety (Malmström 2019; LeVine & Malmström 2019). In this regard, our participants asked numerous questions.

Here we offer a few insights drawn from several days of lively discussions and participatory activities. One issue, related to the intense kind of practice involved in the collaborative explorations that we pursued, produced many insights that, while directly impactful in terms of shaping the phenomenological and epistemological grounding of our research, were not immediately translatable into discursive text (in that sense, their affective power, the ability to shake loose old thinking and stimulate new ideas, research questions and practices by participants was one of the hallmarks of the gathering).

Kapchan led us through a discussion of the 'sound of proximity.' She pointed out that in sound studies – central to the analytical power of the approach – the discipline perceives sound as tactile: the sound hits your body. Kapchan asked, "What do bodies in proximity produce? What does sound in proximity produce?" Those studying sound must "touch sound" – that is to say, the sound that accompanies touch. She further led us to discuss how we can conceive of sound not just as accompanying touch but as a *form* of touch – using the example of sound touching a person through air pressure changes affecting the skin.

Similarly, Mark LeVine focused on the relationship between sound and pain. Not simply or most often when sound itself is used as a weapon to harm people (as with sonic weapons, low frequency or sonic charges, etc.), but also how abuses such as torture and murder are inherently 'soundful' – that is, they depend on sound as a core property of their affective power. This raises the question of whether they can be represented without sound, even more so than images. Participants then asked whether sound can be transformed or transmuted into something else and still represent the specific actions within which it is embedded. LeVine chose to reflect on the experience of imprisonment and torture in Egypt by creating a pastiche-like 'song' composed of snippets of recorded torture as well as of field recordings of the Egyptian revolution, mixed together with a profound analysis of the importance of grounding oneself in sound by the Indigenous Australian author Tyson Yunkaporta (2019).

In response to these discussions, Michael Frishkopf explained that resonance is the key to answering this question, the idea of the 'soundworld' as a species, subgenre or component of lifeworlds. He explained that an organization he created, 'Music for Global Human Development', perceives music as a technology of tremendous potential for social justice, resilience, and positive change, that entails participatory action research projects in music and its role in economic and social development. It is centred on global collaborations between academics, NGOs, government organizations, musicians and others applying ethnomusicology to real-world social issues, focusing on peoples who have been marginalized – socially, politically, economically – by colonialism and its aftermath, and linking them to others across the globe. In the process, these links, resonating with the emotions of musical communication, are transformed into what he termed 'threads',

extending horizontally across ethnic divides (weft) as well as longitudinally, across generation gaps (warp). Together they weave a new, global social fabric of understanding and connection, in which new patterns emerge.

These music-centred projects, including related arts (dance, poetry, drama) are ideally twinned with evaluative evidence-based research, gauging impact through anthropological and sociological study. They are carried out as collaborative projects in partnership with artists and other experts in each locale, resulting in change for all participants, rippling outwards. The aim, in every case, is global human development, as well as development of the global human, weaving the global social fabric, one thread at a time.

Frishkopf explained the ongoing difficulties of such a project by reminding participants of the ongoing 'system colonization of the lifeworld,' to borrow Habermas' terminology. 'Resonance' is able to re-humanize the lifeworld, which is one major goal of the Aga Khan Music Initiative in which he has been participating. But even here there are multiple logistical, cultural, political and sonic problems to overcome. For example, in Aswan, the centre of the music initiative, tourism has become a major problem vis-a-vis the colonization of local life and sonic worlds. Moreover, as new and traditional instruments circulate in and out of the city, the sonic grounding becomes hard to maintain. At the same time, the increasing presence of girls and young women in music schools is changing the sonic vocabulary as well as the timbre of traditional music. This is made even more complicated by the fact that the Nubian population in the Aswan region looks to Cairo for its cultural referents, while another part of the population has closer ties to what today is Sudan and looks to Khartoum, which has a very different soundscape.

Hence, by acknowledging sound (whose vibrations are material and can be measured) we are able to explore vibrations as sonic political infrastructures as well as the intimate links to passion. Given the inherent affective power of things, the more things are concentrated in a given space, the more 'charged' the area may become. Of course, the density of objects that can convey affective charge is made even more powerful by the fact that sometimes one object has an overwhelming degree of charge – for example, Tahrir Square in Egypt during the 25 January 2011 Revolution. It is impossible for anyone who experienced the 'Republic of Tahrir' – the space carved out of Cairo's central downtown traffic circle during the eighteen days of uprising during January and February 2011 and the subsequent occupations until the coup of 30 June 2013 – not to have been (quite literally) moved by the incredible force of sonic expressions and passion that inhabited Tahrir Square. For another fruitful example, we can turn to the music of Palestinian rappers such as Ramallah Underground or the myriad Gazan hip-hop collectives who, for the newer generations, have created powerfully dissonant music that forces the listener to think, and act, against power (cf. Adorno, 2002).

Whether it is DAM furiously rhyming against the Israeli society that has taken over their homeland in Hebrew (e.g., their song 'Born Here') or Ramallah Underground's beat makers

using the very sounds of the occupation – both its violence and the daily struggles – to create a sonic vocabulary that produces aesthetic textures that even the most powerful forces of the occupation cannot erase, music's affective force and potentiality enables crucial insight into how people resist and even hope for a better future in the face of ongoing oppression (LeVine & Malmström 2019).

One other major discussion that took place between our collaborators concerns the relationship between spatial and sonic architectures; an important discussion given the emphasis placed on architecture by the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations. One goal shared by most participants was creating new epistemological as well as analytical relationships between sound and architecture, 'insonating Islamic architectures,' as one participant put it, or creating an 'architecture of the sonic' that helps us understand the relationship between the visual and sonic representations of lived experience through space and time. If seeing architecture is to illuminate it, to hear it is to insonate it and, at least in theory, to enable greater transmission of empathy through the affective power it generates. There are countless examples of how materialized sonic experiences, as well as what Malmström terms 'sonic infrastructures' as mentioned above, are sonic instruments of biopower, consciously constructed (cf. Anand et al, 2018; Cardoso, 2019a & b) and used by the autocratic military regime in Egypt to displace, stigmatize, discipline and 'produce' its (especially male) citizens. And as Larkin (2013: 330) and others point out, it is not only citizenship that is fluid, but infrastructures are too.

Infrastructures are not, in any positivist sense, simply 'out there.' The act of defining an infrastructure is a categorizing moment. Taken thoughtfully, it comprises a cultural analytic that highlights the epistemological and political commitments involved in selecting what one sees as infrastructural (and thus causal) and what one leaves out. Malmström discusses in a recently published article that the sonic dimension of this construct is substantial, not least because sound infiltrates our bodies and the environments in which we live, and has its own politics too. By acknowledging sound, whose vibrations are material and can be measured as infrastructures, we are able to explore vibrations as sonic infrastructures; as tools of techno-politics (Malmström, 2021).

Finally, in this regard, our discussions and experiments during the meeting demonstrated just how sonic relations induce social relations: call and response, polyrhythm, polyphony, all forms of semiotic ambiguity – poetry, music, individual expression – common feelings that are both understood at a pre-epistemological and discursive level yet also profoundly complex and difficult to account for.

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