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ABSTRACT:

SONIC VIRTUES IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN SUFISM

The paper analyses the performance of *inshād* and *sam ‘a* within the collective *haḍra* ritual of a contemporary Egyptian brotherhood, with the aim of describing how Sufi disciples engage with competing aesthetic discourses in the definition of modernity and morality in Egypt.

Through an in-depth ethnographic description of ritual aesthetics, it describes on one hand the specific sensory epistemology that backgrounds the interlocutors' notion of virtuous self and their grammar of aesthetics and, on the other hand, it describes how the interlocutors creatively build trajectories of sounds that blur the boundaries between both religious/secular and modern/traditional conceptions of aesthetics, dominant within the contemporary Egyptian soundscape. The Burhani grammar of aesthetics implies a particular conception of moral personhood, which draws together the mundane and the religious in a quest for a modern form of Islam, seeking for the spiritual within everyday life and throughout contingent sensibilities. It thus brings about a specific articulation of the sensorium and an architecture of the self, which are alternative to the forms of modern and moral selfhood dominant in the Egyptian contemporary public sphere.

In a wider perspective, this study has the double aim of highlighting the often-overlooked position of Sufism within the contemporary Islamic Revival through the lens of the contemporary debate over music, and of exploring the bearing of such debate on the everyday ritual practice and experience of the disciples of a contemporary Sufi brotherhood.

Keywords: aesthetics, moral selfhood, Sufism, modernity, Egypt.