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Tarab to Tahrir: A Musicological Telling of Egypt's Journey from Postcoloniality to Popular Rebellion

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*Tarab to Tahrir: A Musicological Telling of Egypt's
Journey from Postcoloniality to Popular Rebellion*

by Alexandra Prow

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a major in the program in
Music.

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Abstract

By examining Egyptian music from Presidents Nasser to Mubarak, this thesis explores the ways in which Egyptians have expressed the growing pains of postcoloniality, which range from indignation in the face of authoritarianism to the exhilaration of unity and shared hopes for the future. This paper focuses on Egypt's national music chronologically, looking at both state-sanctioned and state-repressed music. Beginning with the classical *tarab* style, the study analyzes the ways in which political powers, particularly Egypt's presidents, have aligned with cultural movements to effectively monitor and shape the Egyptian national identity. With time, more modern, self-produced genres such as *shaabi* and *mahraganat* allowed musicians to actively challenge the growing military industrial complex. By making the music they wanted, these musicians were among the first to voice discontent against the regime. Ultimately, all paths led to Tahrir Square, which brought together numerous national genres to demand democracy. Each musical style analyzed here represents an instant in the Egyptian nation-building process. This musicological survey intends to align just a few moments, some of Egypt's most prominent musicians and their songs, to understand the path of a nation to revolution.

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Introduction

My entrance to the academic study of Arabic music happened rather accidentally. I would like to say that I had always intended for my undergraduate studies in music and Arabic to complement one another. In truth, however, they began as two random interests. Once I chose to study music for my undergraduate degree, I resigned myself to melodic dictations and discussions of counterpoint. Similarly, most of my Arabic studies entailed endless grammar charts and vocabulary lists. In comparison to the macroeconomics and sociology students I knew, my concentrations felt niche, if not completely insignificant. As I became more involved in international studies and politics, however, I was consistently the student in the group who could offer perspectives on different artistic and cultural identities. There would inevitably come the day in a seminar or a study trip abroad when I was expected to perform with other musicians, chat with them about their training, make connections via a shared background and love of music. From a social scientific perspective, music was my “in” to conversations with new interviewees. Though I initially accepted this extroverted identity with anxiety – and a few moral reservations – I began to see its merits with my research. This musician identity granted me access to groups of artists, most of whom belonged to tight-knit circles of intellectuals and political activists. Under the guise of being “just a musician,” I have met and befriended progressive musicians from Cuban state conservatories and the artists who organized Morocco’s February 20th Movement.

Of the studies I have read on world musics and their sociopolitical contexts, much scholarly language centers around music as an essential shared human experience, as a “universal language.” This, in my opinion, is reductive and paternalistic. Music does not sound the same between cultures. Concepts of rhythm, pitch, and harmony vary country to country. Perceptions of beauty are deeply bound in context, both social and historical, and to argue that music breaks down these borders diminishes the centuries-old skills developed within countless music traditions. Music is only a universal language for the oppressor who has told another group what music should sound and feel like. The stories shared in making music, however, can serve similar purposes for disparate groups of people. Whereas perceptions of music’s aesthetic qualities differ listener to listener, the basic making of music can be felt across all persons. Humans like to make noise. We revel in our capacity for expression. We constantly seek new venues for interpreting our human experience, with some of the boldest and most forward-thinking art made just for the artist herself. Often, the end result matters little. Whether a melody is pleasing to others or not, whether it is nested under “bad pop” or critically acclaimed, whether it is played over and over until a record is bent out of shape or heard only by its maker, the making of music is a privilege of life. Its existence marks the human experience in all its colors.

When the Arab Spring broke out in early 2011, droves of journalists, activists, and academics jumped to hypothesize on just how this great social phenomenon occurred. Some looked to political theory, others to pure economics. No angle went unconsidered in hypothesizing as to how an entire region effectively mobilized people who faced immense government oppression and demanded change. Many of these studies provide substantial insight; quite a few are included in this thesis. Despite genuine effort, however, I read these scientific analyses of rebellion as numbers, cold and impersonal.

Having arrived at college the first year of the Arab Spring, I can chart my academic growth through the ways I have tried to understand what was going through Mohamed Bouazizi's mind when he set himself on fire on December 17, 2010. I looked to newspapers, research journals, history books, and nothing appropriately humanized the experiences of the powerful, brave people of the Arab Spring who rejected oppression and were often killed for it. Having already tried my hand at other disciplines for understanding, I decided to approach the Arab Spring with the medium I knew best. I looked to music because it is how I relate to the world around me. It is how I comprehend the experiences of people I do not know. And so, with this last grasp toward understanding, I dug into Arabic music and tried to connect the dots.

Here I look to Arabic music to fill in the gaps between headlines and essays. Without an angle for examination, human history becomes a messy timeline to unravel. Where does one start? What ends up mattering? Whose voices are telling the narrative and whose are being silenced? Trying to grasp even the smallest incident, a missing bicycle or a traffic jam, can be connected to anything: morality, politics, empathy, prejudice, money. So when I set about this exercise to educate myself on the Arab Spring, I looked for music because it fleshed out the stories. In a state with a long history of repression and silenced dissenters, examining the music Egyptians were making and consuming at key political moments allows for alternate narratives to be surface. From the poetry a classical musician sings to the simplest chord progressions of a pop song, every instance of music-making tells a story.

This study engages the music of an entire era, from colonial independence of the 1950s to the contemporary demands for democracy that never came. I concentrate here on Egypt, both because of its positionality within the Arab political identity and its prestigious musical community. Egypt has felt the pains of colonialism, the exhilaration of independence, the inequities of neoliberalism, and the consequential power in saying, "Enough." By nature of focusing on more than five decades of history, this research captures only the briefest moments of a richly diverse and multifaceted musical narrative. Some great artists are only mentioned in passing, others not at all. The goal here is not to render an exact telling of Egypt's musical identity since independence. This is both out of my scope and academic ability. Rather, I aim to contextualize Egypt's fraught political history, which on its own can be difficult to access and nearly impossible to comprehend as an outsider, within a broader emotional experience. Is being Egyptian inherently political? Is Egyptianness holding a certain view on Israel and Palestine? Speaking a particular dialect? Or is it the cultural cues picked up in everyday life, listening to music in a cab or going out to dinner? By studying Egyptian music, I analyze shared emotional experiences that define a transformative and deeply influential period of growth for the Arab world.

I begin my study with one of the world's most charismatic and emotionally rigorous musical genres, *tarab*. Chapter 1 provides an overview of this music style that has come to define the classical Arab musical canon. Arguably, all music taps into an emotional state, yet by focusing on one of *tarab*'s biggest stars, Umm Kulthum, we see a unique outpouring of national feeling communicated by a single musical icon, a master of her trade. Chapter 2 addresses Umm Kulthum's relationship with the rise of Egypt's captivating postcolonial president, Gamal Abdel Nasser. During this era *tarab*

engendered a sense of national identity that previous colonial oppression had silenced. With Umm Kulthum, Nasser created an empire and established the sentiment of the “Arab World” as we know it today. Following Nasser’s death, President Anwar Sadat pushed Egypt toward modernism and neoliberalism, and the cost to millions of Egyptians’ livelihoods can be found in a splintered Egyptian sound. Chapter 3 considers the *shaabi* genre and its pop descendants as a necessary departure from the oneness of *tarab*. Egyptian society could no longer express itself within the same musical style because no one artist could capture the concerns of an increasingly divergent population. Chapter 4 sees President Hosni Mubarak inherit a frustrated, economically exhausted Egypt that had consistently chosen to privilege its elite classes. Over the span of thirty years, Mubarak attempted to preserve Sadat’s policies while reviving Nasser’s unified Egypt. The rise of self-produced transgressive music speaks to the failure of this agenda and the subsequent angst amongst Egypt’s disenfranchised. The closing Chapter 5 finds Egypt at its tipping point – Tahrir Square and the Arab Spring. In the eighteen days of Tahrir, Egyptians demanded acknowledgment from their government and expressed their revolution with every musical tradition available. It was in Tahrir Square that Egyptian music once again allowed common people to come together and demand better lives.

Chapter 1 – Tarab and Mother Egypt

Just as any trend in sociopolitical history derives from a range of influences, from the traditions of ancient civilizations to the most recent technological development, music has been woven into the human narrative in a method rather difficult to pinpoint. This study begins with classical Arabic music, which has existed in some form since the medieval Islamic era. Though the functions and intentions of the classical style have changed over the years, *tarab*, or the feeling of ecstasy brought on by Arabic art, has enriched the music of the Arab world for centuries. Deeply embedded in the Islamic tradition, *tarab* has long been associated with religious love and a spiritual connection with Allah. *Tarab* is not specifically a genre but a concept indefinable in Western language. The term has been used since medieval Islamic writings and has come to describe similar yet specific phenomena: indigenous, secular music of Middle Eastern Arab cities; and the ecstatic musical affect, or “the extraordinary emotional state evoked by the music.”¹

A highly technical and specialized art form, *tarab*'s theoretical intricacies and intellect rival the most involved Western composition. Unlike some traditions in which the formula of music trumps emotionality, *tarab* artists acknowledge the natural ethos of music in an innately physical way, often inducing a trance state.² Emotionally charged not only in its composition but also in performance practice, *tarab* tends to be highly interactive.³ There are nine main *maqam* (or modal) families in Arabic music theory, and each is known to evoke a certain emotion, thus providing its musicians with a preset context before the piece even begins. *Tarab*, therefore, is a musical experience wrapped up in the relationship between the physical body, the spirit, the human ear, the performer, the society and politics surrounding it, and the music itself.

Due to *tarab*'s longstanding presence within Arab culture, its many phases and artists have occupied a complex and unique position in the storytelling of Arab civilization. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the style as it has been known more recently, emphasizing the impact of one of *tarab*'s most famous performers, Umm Kulthum, and her role in the development of the genre. Here I provide the background necessary for understanding the progression of Arabic music from a religious, traditional medium to a more popular, accessible genre in which other modern Arabic styles are rooted. Essential to *tarab*'s canon is the ecstatic state, which has persisted across decades and styles to become a hallmark of the Arab musical experience. My study focuses on this musical capacity for emotionalism, which eventually became instrumental to larger political and cultural change for the Arab world.

Experiencing *tarab*

Because *tarab* is defined so broadly and more by the sentiment of the music than by the style itself, it is difficult to describe exactly what happens in a typical

¹ A. J. Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

² The Ancient Greeks developed a concept of “ethos of modes” which related an emotion or spiritual feeling with a specific mode. Plato addresses this modal relationship in *Republic*, but because modal counterpoint eventually gave way to more key-related composition, Western music does not supply a proper example of modal emotionality.

³ Racy, 4-5.

performance, though the performativity of the style is essential to its nature. Jonathan Shannon generalizes tarab as “an emotional state aroused in listeners as a result of the dynamic interplay between the performer, the music, song lyrics, the audience,” and other factors.⁴ Recorded by outside observers as early as the eighteenth century, *tarab* has maintained its presence in Arab life up to the present day, most notably in urban areas like Damascus, Aleppo, and Cairo.⁵ To more fully understand what happens in *tarab* and performances of it, I will briefly touch on some of the elements Racy has outlined which comprise the *tarab* experience: culture, music and lyrics, and *Saltanah* and trance.

Culture

The culture around *tarab*, steeped in tradition and emotionality, depends on a variety of factors, including the arduous process required to excel in the style and the manners expected from both musicians and audience members. In *tarab* culture, talent is expected to manifest itself early on in a performer’s life, and *tarab* performers consequently obsess over music for the rest of their lives. In the past *tarab* musicians were discovered and then shepherded into an apprenticeship with a master. However, the proliferation of the modern conservatory system has formalized and streamlined this process for aspiring musicians.

A style strongly influenced by gender inequities, *tarab* after the medieval ages (during which many women were known for their musicianship) has been dominated by male singers due to more recent expectations that women uphold a level of decency that music making does not permit. Though we will soon look at Umm Kulthum, the female music idol that contradicted this norm, it is important to note the ways in which she artfully navigated this socially exclusive genre; Kulthum mastered the social codes of behavior expected of *tarab* musicians and audiences.

All *tarab* artists operate under a code of *adab* (essentially, “manners”), which also appears in other professional and religious groups throughout the Arab world, particularly in charismatically spiritual Islamic spaces. Stature in the performance world rides upon one’s morals and dignity, an “immoral artist” constituting “an insult to the art.”⁶ Therefore, the most prominent *tarab* artists often serve as role models for their local communities and countries. Though famous *tarab* musicians like Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum certainly appealed to the Arab masses through their personal stories and musical ability, they were also exemplary examples of the socially conscious Egyptian citizen. Arab listeners hold their performers to high moral standards – *tarab* performers are thus go-to charismatic figures with whom communities instruct good citizenship. As we will see with Umm Kulthum later on, when the *tarab* performer becomes popular on a national or even international stage, he or she can be useful for state apparatuses in the instruction of patriotism and regionalism as well.

The demand for good behavior is not limited to the performers, however; listeners are expected to be considerate of the musician and his or her performative needs. Calling out requests (particularly ones that are in an unrelated *maqam*) or indifference to the musicians is judged in the *tarab* community. The performer, particularly the singer, is

⁴ Jonathan Shannon, “Emotion, Performance, and Temporality in Arab Music: Reflections on Tarab,” *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (2003), accessed December 1, 2014, doi:10.1525/can.2003.18.1.72.

⁵ Racy, 1 – in reference to Guillaume André Villoteau’s *Description de l’Égypte* (1826)

⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

primarily responsible for creating *tarab*, but “it is the connection between the performers and the audiences that best explains *tarab*.”⁷ Both parts must equally invest in the moment. Here enters the *sammi’ah*, or “diehard *tarab* listeners,” who hold a special role in the success of a *tarab* musician. Innately musically knowledgeable, *sammi’ah* are attuned to the technical side of *tarab*, though they may not necessarily know the *maqamat* by name, and tend to show a predisposition to deep feeling for music.⁸ They understand the music at a core level. Though often a small proportion of a large audience, *sammi’ah* help lead the performance, sometimes by calling out musically appropriate requests or by keeping silent altogether and letting the performer create *tarab* organically.

Music and lyrics

Because this research will primarily deal with *tarab* music performed by the generation of Umm Kulthum and beyond, I will not go far into the history of *tarab* styles, but it is important to recognize the relationship between various genres. The earlier styles of *tarab* incorporated both Islamic vocal recitations and secular gestures from the Ottoman world. From this model, the “modern” *tarab* style takes its use of basic Arab instruments and modal improvisation as a technique for inducing ecstasy.⁹ Modern day Arab classical *tarab* is highly lyrical, abstract but not programmatic. A primary singer leads the performance, supported by a *takht*, or an ensemble of “sound timbres” such as the *ud* and the *qanun*.¹⁰ The music is heterophonic, which stems from the small size of the *takht* ensemble. The lack of harmony naturally distinguishes it from most European styles. Some European listeners upon first hearing Arab music characterized the style as a “frightful medley, devoid of melody or measure.”¹¹ Though these types of generalizations clearly stemmed from colonialist, essentializing perspectives, they help demonstrate exactly how profound differences between Arab and European traditions of music-making have been.

The openness in structure naturally sets up opportunities for improvisation (which is a major tool in creating *tarab*) but also requires complete concentration from every member of the ensemble to permit melodic leading. According to Racy, the contrast between individuality and togetherness is essential to the style. The leader/vocalist works independently in subtle ornaments on the sparse yet highly repetitive lyrics, while the ensemble must focus their collective attention to move together into the modulations and emotional peaks of the piece.

Arab music works off a twenty-four tone scale based on quartertones (half of a half-step in Western classical music) and more than seventy-two melodic scales of *maqamat*. The *maqamat* fall into seven *maqam* “families,” each connoting a different emotional experience. Each *maqam* (singular of *maqamat*) consists of seven notes that repeats at the octave and is built on a scale characterized by certain common phrases, dominant notes, and modulatory paths. The modal movements in a song are “temporally

⁷ Shannon, 78.

⁸ Racy, 40-41.

⁹ Racy, 75.

¹⁰ Ibid, 76-77.

¹¹ Francisco Salvador-Daniel, *The music and musical instruments of the Arab* (New York: C.S. Scribner and Sons, 1915), 43. May it be noted that the author finds this colonialist and dehumanizing interpretation of Arab music deeply problematic.

flexible” and unbound to a specific tune, which keeps the piece progressive even though many last more than an hour.¹²

Despite the length of the performance, any given *tarab* piece may use only a few lines of text, but the lyrics are critical to the ecstatic effect of the song. *Tarab* pieces predominately employ poetry about sacred and secular love, though a variety of themes are expressed, including commentary on politics and religion. The Arabic language is famous for the multiplicity of meanings in each phrase; when I was studying Arabic with a Moroccan professor, he always said,

Every Arabic word has a basic meaning, a second meaning which is the exact opposite of the first, a third meaning which refers to either a camel or horse, and a fourth meaning that is so obscene that you'll have to look it up for yourself.

Because of this, *tarab* lyrics often speak on several ideas at once, and *tarab* musicians have frequently utilized ambiguity of lyrical intention to broach controversial topics with little impunity. Love poetry, for example, has been used to praise a political figure, to rally against unjust systems, all while claiming innocent intentions. During the considerable unrest of the early 1940s against King Faruq and the British government, Umm Kulthum first adopted a distinctly political tone with songs like “Wulid al-Huda,” which includes the line, “You [Mohammed, the Prophet] gave justice to the poor in front of the rich.”¹³ This song was performed during a time when political corruption was widespread and the Egyptian public was deeply frustrated with the wealth of the monarchy. Umm Kulthum, however, was able to raise a chastising eyebrow to the establishment while in appearance singing about the Prophet. Further on in this research, we will examine this means of expression and resistance in application to the Egyptian military state, particularly when Umm Kulthum became a strong supporter of the Nasser government.

Trance and *saltanah*

Moving forward from the tangible, musical nature of *tarab* performances, I will now focus on the more elusive effect of *tarab* – the feeling of ecstasy or trance induced from Arab classical music. As previously mentioned, the term *tarab* dates back to Islamic antiquity, but only recently has it been used to categorize Arab music specifically. Historically, the term was associated foremost with the recitation of poetry and the Qur’an, opening later on to denote a broader term in Arab culture meaning “a type of aesthetic bliss or rapture with respect to an art object.”¹⁴ The feeling of *tarab*, however, is hard to define for someone who has never experienced it. The following is an anecdote from the famous “The Book of Songs,” written by Istafani. It describes the famous singer Jamila performing an erotic poem by ‘Umar ibn-Abi Rabi’a at a concert in her home during the Umayyad caliphate, a time in which female performers were still common:

¹² Racy, 98.

¹³ Virginia Danielson, “Performance, Political Identity, and Memory: Umm Kulthum and Gamal Abd al-Nasir,” *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 111.

¹⁴ Shannon, 74.

As Jamila sang, all those gathered there were seized by *tarab*: they began to clap their hands, beat time on the floor with their feet, and sway their heads, shouting: “We offer ourselves in sacrifice for thee, oh Jamila, to protect you from all evil...How sublime your song and your words!” As for the poet ‘Umar, he began to shout out: “Woe is me. Woe is me...” He tore his robe from top to bottom, in a state of total unconsciousness. When he came to, he felt ashamed and began to apologize, saying: “By Allah, I could not restrain myself, for that beautiful voice made me lose my mind.” The other guest answered him: “Console yourself, the same happened to us all, and we fainted. But we did not tear our clothing.”¹⁵

As demonstrated by this brief moment, it is clear that *tarab* is both highly personal and communal. To lose oneself in the music, one must become completely vulnerable and accept a lack of control over one’s physical and spiritual state. In this vein *tarab* closely resembles a religious trance not unlike the *wajd* trance state evoked during Sufi spiritual practice. The music enraptures the listener and can lead to the “worst extremes of madness, even death” or “be reduced to a pure and simple musical emotion of which no sign...is externally visible.”¹⁶

The term *tarab* invokes many styles of participation and appreciation of the music at hand. The state required of the performer to induce *tarab* in listeners, however, is more musically specific. The *saltanah* state applies solely to the performer and is reached before and during the actual performance. *Saltanah* is the means by which musicians affect a *tarab* experience for their audiences.^{17,18} Whereas an amalgam of influences (some musical, some social) can lead to the *tarab* state, *saltanah* relies principally on the *maqamat*, or Arab modal systems, and improvisatory modulations within them. The *saltanah* state prepares the performer for improvisation and cohesion within the ensemble’s musicality. According to Muhammad al-‘Aqqad, an Egyptian *qanun* player interviewed by Racy, *saltanah* is a timeless and transcendent experience. He describes the effect: “If you have *saltanah*, you could easily sing or play from nine o’clock in the evening to nine o’clock in the morning. Time passes and you don’t feel it.”¹⁹ Later on I discuss who accesses *saltanah* and what is required of the artist, both personally and musically, to induce such a state.

From this point onward I will continue to use these terms of *tarab* music and trance to analyze the impact of *tarab* on the Egyptian community and Arab world at large. Historically, *tarab* has been performed in localized, private spaces such as weddings and community events, in part because of the social ease required for such vulnerability to manifest itself between audiences and the performer. Unlike traditional folk music, *tarab* demands full emotional engagement; therefore it is not suited for passive listening or large-scale crowds. The risk of letting oneself go into the music, of

¹⁵ Secondary source: Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 281. Original quote taken from Simon Jargy, *La musique arabe*, (Paris: P.U.F., 1971), 25-26.

¹⁶ Rouget, 282.

¹⁷ Racy, 120.

¹⁸ Shannon, 75.

¹⁹ Racy, 125.

becoming emotional in a public space, resides at the core of *tarab*. For this reason, the few stars of Arab music that resound in history are phenomena of success.

The Great Four of Arabic music include Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Farid al-Attrach, Umm Kulthum, and Abdel Halim Hafez, each exceptional in his or her own way but all extraordinary in their powerful rendering of *tarab*. Though each performer developed a cult following in his or her own regard, Umm Kulthum stands as the symbol of *tarab*'s power over mass audiences. Widely considered the greatest female Arab singer in history, Umm Kulthum captured the essence of the Egyptian experience and came to represent for many listeners the shared feeling of Arab nationhood.

Umm Kulthum, the Voice of Egypt

The first time I went to an Arabic-speaking country, every family I sat with, upon finding out my background in music, played an Umm Kulthum song for me. I could have been floundering my way through broken dialect and picking up bread with the wrong three fingers for hours, and all would be forgiven by my mentioning her name. Knowing just one Umm Kulthum song as an American traveler in the Arab world guarantees so much happy reception, particularly from older generations. As Virginia Danielson, upon whom I will be relying quite extensively for this section, aptly summarized, "Imagine a singer with the virtuosity of Joan Sutherland or Ella Fitzgerald, the public persona of Eleanor Roosevelt, and the audience of Elvis, and you have Umm Kulthum."²⁰ Informally adorned with the title, "the Voice of Egypt," Umm Kulthum has been canonized in the popular imagination as one of Egypt's most charismatic ambassadors. Her live concerts eventually reaching almost every home in the Arab world, her career spent both traveling abroad and serving in government advisory positions for the Ministry of Culture, Umm Kulthum's music and public persona extended into countless facets of Egyptian life. The following chapter will dive into the ways in which Umm Kulthum's musical and social stature interwove with the politics of Nasser's presidency. I will first explain her musical style and then summarize her musical career and personal background to better contextualize her ascension to the symbol of "Mother Egypt."

Origins

Born in a village of the Nile Delta around 1904, Umm Kulthum grew up in a religious peasant family, her father serving as the *imam* of the local mosque and her mother described as a simple, God-loving woman.²¹ She was instructed in Qur'anic pronunciation and recitation at a nearby *kuttab* (Qur'anic school), and like many village children of her time, this was the extent of her formal education. Her father sang at local celebrations for supplementary income, and whenever her brother was unable to attend, Umm Kulthum would go instead, learning by imitating his religious songs and recitations of Qur'anic verses.²² After her father noticed her strong singing voice, Umm Kulthum

²⁰ Virginia Danielson, "Umm Kulthum Ibrahim," *Harvard Magazine* July-August (1997), accessed December 2, 2014, <<http://harvardmagazine.com/1997/07/umm-kulthum-ibrahim>>.

²¹ Virginia Danielson, "Umm Kulthum," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), accessed December 2, 2014, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48893>>.

²² Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 22-23.

began performing with the family at local events more consistently. At these concerts she dressed as a boy to uphold the norms of village modesty.

Even as a young girl of seven, Umm Kulthum's reputation was growing, and the family began traveling farther, acquiring better earnings and a small group of patrons.²³ Umm Kulthum progressed toward commercial entertainment, aided by the interconnectedness of elite families along the Delta, and began charging more for her concerts. She came under the guidance of a local classical singer Mohamed Aboul Ela around the age of sixteen and began training more publically as a female singer. Encouraged by pseudo-managers and patrons to move to Cairo, she continued to travel and make a name for herself, working toward a tailored artistic identity and musical style.

Cairo

The family finally made the move to Cairo in 1923, where theater agents arranged for her to sing during the intermissions of plays. She navigated and used her Bedouin identity to create a unique performance persona. Most popular singers of the time came from the Cairo-Alexandria area; thus, Umm Kulthum's rural, indigenous background helped her stand apart. She played into this image of the pious, traditional woman and gained traction among a more metropolitan public. At this time the singer expanded her original repertoire to include popular songs and historic Arabic poems while continuing to dress modestly in men's clothing for performances.²⁴

Odeon Records approached her in 1923, and over the course of three years Umm Kulthum released fourteen new songs, departing from her traditional repertoire and working on secular pieces. Due to her large audience base in the Egyptian countryside and the proliferation of record players in public venues, Umm Kulthum's first recorded album was a financial success. She sought out teachers for a variety of musical skills, learning composition and performance techniques from the famous instructor al-Shaykh Abu l'Ila Muhammad. Additionally, she studied poetry memorization with Ahmad Rami on and learned to play the *ud* and sing complex Arabic melodic songs with Mahmud Rahmi.²⁵ The year 1926 marked a turning point for the singer; she had established her social stature in the Egyptian music scene, adopted a distinct style of modest yet cosmopolitan dress for performances, and most significantly replaced her family ensemble with a well-regarded *takht* ensemble. By 1928 she had gradually surpassed her contemporary artistic rivals Munira al-Mahdiyya and Fathiyya Ahmad and become a major face of the Egyptian music industry.

Developments in musical style

Umm Kulthum continued to develop her style throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s and entrenched herself within the romantic monologue genre. This style combined the musically challenging *dawr* genre of the nineteenth century and the love poetry of Al-Qasabji and Ahmad Rami.²⁶ She experimented more within various *maqamat* and

²³ Ibid, 29.

²⁴ Ibid, 51.

²⁵ Ibid, 56.

²⁶ An informative article on the work of Sayyed Darwish, the pioneer of the monologue form, can be found in Saed Huhssin's "The 'People's Artist' and the Beginnings of the Twentieth-Century Arab Avant-Garde," in *The Arab Avant-Garde*, ed. Thomas Burkhalter, et. al., (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013).

incorporated colloquialisms within her songs, developing a reputation for her virtuosity and improvisations. Though Umm Kulthum was becoming an icon of style, performance, and composure, her voice itself continued to grow and set her apart from the others of her time. Conscious of her background, she maintained a localized idiom and kept the image of the essential classical Arabic singer even when experimenting with new styles.

Possessing a wide vocal range, Umm Kulthum was famous for her powerful tone in multiple registers and command of many *maqamat*. She could change the color of her tone depending on the emotional context of her pieces and she often used these changes for ornamentation and textual emphasis.²⁷ Umm Kulthum was renowned for understanding the meanings of the poetry she sang, rarely making a mistake in Classical Arabic pronunciation. This was attributed to her intensive childhood study of the Qur'an – another subtlety in her singing that reminded audiences of her religious background.²⁸ All these developments in voice created Umm Kulthum's "Egyptian-ness" and set her on the path for national symbolism.

At the advent of the Egyptian state radio station in 1934, Umm Kulthum achieved an unprecedented stature. The state loved everything about Umm Kulthum, from her voice to the clothes she wore to her pristine Egyptian background. And Umm Kulthum, like many key figures of recording history, used the advent of radio programming to spread her music and widen her audience base. Towards the late 1930s she began her famous Thursday night concert series, which continued for almost forty years and has come to define her living legacy.²⁹

The golden years

Umm Kulthum's extensive career is perhaps most remembered for the years of her "golden age" between the 1940s and the early 1950s. She starred in several musical motion pictures and attracted larger audiences, steadily becoming a cosmopolitan figure in Cairo and the broader MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. This period was also characterized by Umm Kulthum's shift in repertoire from her more modern love songs back to a more "authentic," Classical Egyptian collection. Working with composers Riad el-Sonbati and Zakariya Ahmad – as well as poets Mahmud Bayram el-Tunsi and her longtime poet collaborator Ahmad Rami – Umm Kulthum's work began to take on a distinctively populist tone, addressing the working class in much of her music. She simultaneously incorporated more classical Arabic into her lyrics, which appealed to the more religious, traditional audiences.³⁰

Umm Kulthum's professional trajectory, however, was not always upwards. After several bouts of illness and the death of her mother in the late 1940s, Umm Kulthum considered retirement. She received medical treatment in the United States in 1949, and when she tried to return to her usual concert schedule in 1951, audience exhaustion, her personal health issues, and the mandatory anti-riot curfews of King Faruq's government led to "the worst [season] in her history."³¹

²⁷ Ibid, 92-93.

²⁸ Ibid, 97.

²⁹ Danielson, *New Grove*.

³⁰ Danielson, *Voice of Egypt*, 121.

³¹ Ibid, 161. Originally taken from *Ruz al-Yusuf* no. 1241 (March 24, 1952), 32.

Then came the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and its subsequent years of political transitions. Following the Revolution, Umm Kulthum caught a second wind and began composing more national songs. Between 1952 and 1960, nationalist music made up almost half of her repertory.³² The 1950s proved to be a time of political growth for the artist. Though she had always held cultural sway, she now commanded more substantive social power in the Arab world. It is from this moment in Arab nationalist history that I examine Umm Kulthum's relationship with President Gamal Abdel Nasser and her role in the construction of Egypt's postcolonial identity.

The next chapter traces this new era in Umm Kulthum's history and addresses the cult of personality that developed around the artist and her President. We see by looking at Nasser's rise to power the similarities between the two idols and the ways in which Nasser benefited from Umm Kulthum's charismatic authority. Ultimately we see the new President draw on Umm Kulthum's artistic legacy to manufacture the "Golden Era" of Egyptian history and culture. Nasser needed a singular voice of Egypt to proclaim the ideals of the new nation-state and to form a collective populist identity.

³² Ibid, 164.

Chapter 2 – The Sound of Nasserism

In his 1985 treatise on the political economics of music, Jacques Attali maps out the three strategic usages of music by power systems in contemporary political history: to make people *forget* violence, to make them *believe* in the harmony of the world, and to *silence* and censor the human voice.³³ Nasser's Egypt – considered here from the Free Officers' Coup of 1952 to Nasser's death in 1970 – and the popularization of *tarab* embody the cycles of Forgetting and Believing experienced by Egypt and the larger Arab world in the face of nation-building. For every post-colonial state, the nation must work to forget the violence incurred both upon and within it; in Egypt's case, *tarab* became a mechanism for erasing the violence and confusion of the military from public memory. Through *tarab*'s superstar Umm Kulthum, Nasser's government propelled the concept of Egyptian nationalism and manufactured the belief in an Arab national identity with Egypt at the forefront. This chapter will follow the growth of *tarab* as a regional rallying point under Nasser and analyze the purposeful construction of Egypt's "Golden Era" with Umm Kulthum as its idol, all while the government quietly established an uncontested military state.

Charismatic authority

Max Weber's extensive sociological work *Society and Economy* approaches political legitimacy by looking at its sources and effectiveness. According to Weber, domination, or "the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons," expands past economic objectives and usually applies to the political and social realms of society.³⁴ Weber divides authority into three categories, but here I focus solely on charismatic authority. Weber defines charisma as a quality possessed by an individual that sets apart his or her personality as superhuman or at least exceptional, typically with a propensity toward leadership.³⁵ This ranges from more primitive ideas of a human endowed with magical powers to one displaying extraordinary wisdom or ability in battle.

Charisma is divinely bestowed at birth; charismatic authority, however, is agreed upon by a community. It is this process of agreement that varies in every situation and supplies the most interest for this particular study. Of the global revolutionary movements that swept the colonized South and East after World War II, most claimed a populist goal of working for the common man; yet consistently, a charismatic figure rose out of the people's movements to lead and later rule. This can be seen most clearly with Mao Tse-tung's Chinese Cultural Revolution, and Che Guevara and Fidel Castro's socialist Cuban Revolution. In removing the vestiges of colonialism in their respective countries, these men became idols, representatives for equality and national strength.

More than political figures, these personalities have been immortalized through living popular culture. Mao's poetry and writings appear all over the world, quotations from his *Little Red Book* plastered onto many of China's walls; Che Guevara's profile is

³³ Jacques Attali, "Listening," *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 19-20.

³⁴ Max Weber, *Society and Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 212.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 241.

known as “the face that launched a thousand T-shirts.”³⁶ These men were not temporary leaders; they developed cult fame. They defined their nations. Among this collection of demi-god revolutionaries was Egypt’s great populist leader, Gamal Nasser, who became one of the Arab world’s most beloved and controversial figures.

The leaders of revolutions

Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt’s second President and political icon of the Arab world, set the standard for modern Egyptian and Arab post-colonial politics while accruing unprecedented popularity. The widespread adoration of Nasser across the Arab world was and remains “arguably greater than that of any other political leader since the Prophet Mohamed.”³⁷ His presidency marked the first time a native Egyptian had taken power in Egypt since the Pharaohs; he championed a new era for Egypt, finally in Egyptian hands. Nasser, however, did not achieve this stature alone. How did Nasser achieve such extensive charismatic authority, breaking down the barriers between omnipotent ruler and the masses?

Nasser was not always the hero of Egypt, which is easily forgotten in nostalgic retrospect; the first few years of Nasser’s political presence were fraught with public apprehension and inner-circle mistrust.³⁸ And yet the collective Egyptian memory forgave him his rocky beginnings and chose to rally around the demigod he became. How did Nasser develop this charismatic authority for which he is so longingly remembered? Who were his helpers?

Behind the startling rise of Nasser’s celebrity, Umm Kulthum’s Thursday night concerts played. Her songs provided the background for Nasser’s ascent to political glory and in return she gained unprecedented international renown. She was the star of her realm and he of his. Many people associate a certain piece of music with a time in their lives, and thus with an era in history. In the case of Umm Kulthum and Nasser, however, their celebrity was inextricably bound, each immortalized by the other. Umm Kulthum was for many listeners the perfect icon – devout, charming, talented, business-savvy. Moreover, she represented Nasser’s perfect Egyptian – religious, rural, unabashedly Arab. Even now, Egyptians associate the two: “[Umm Kulthum’s] voice reminds us of the Nasir years—a time for which we are very nostalgic now, even though we didn’t much like it when we lived it.”³⁹ Umm Kulthum’s music has served as a gloss over history, a sign that problems with Nasser’s regime were not all that serious. People ask, how could music like that come out of a corrupt state?⁴⁰

In the following pages, I provide a brief summary of Nasser’s journey toward political rule. Nasser’s and Umm Kulthum’s stories were not all that different – both followed a similar path to eventually become populist icons of their time. From this historical foundation, I reflect on the ways in which Egyptian arts, specifically Umm

³⁶ Angelique Chrisafis, “Che, my father,” *The Guardian*, May 2, 2002, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/may/03/cuba.angeliquechrisafis>.

³⁷ Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to the Muslim Brotherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 51.

³⁸ Steven A. Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁹ Danielson, “Performance,” 110.

⁴⁰ Hosny Guindy and Hani Shukrallah, “Liberating Nasser’s Legacy,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, October 4, 2010, accessed March 1, 2015 from <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2000/501/nasser2.htm>.

Kulthum and *tarab*, helped Nasser achieve the authority that defined his political career. Though this essay certainly highlights the key political moments of Nasser's presidency, I direct my focus toward the music playing at the time of policy-making. Specifically, I use Umm Kulthum's national presence to analyze the advent of Arab nationalism and Nasser's golden years. Most poignantly, we see how Umm Kulthum's music saved Nasser after the catastrophe of the Six-Day War and thus helped the Egyptian people believe once again in the idea of a unified nation.

Nasser's Egypt

The young leader

Born in 1917 to a working class family near Alexandria, Gamal Abdel Nasser spent many years of his childhood on the move due to his father's postal service job and the death of his mother, Fahima, in 1926. Nasser moved between families' homes, eventually settling with his uncle in Cairo, and there he attended the *al-Nahda* school, which was known for producing politically involved, nationalist thinkers.⁴¹ Because of his modest background, Nasser quickly adopted an understanding of Egyptian class divisions and was heavily involved in politics at an early age. A reader of nationalist ideology, Nasser readily consumed the poetry of Ahmed Shawqi, novels by al-Aqqad (who focused on Muslim heroes) and al-Hakim (who wrote on the need for a charismatic leader in Egypt).⁴² Nasser joined the ultranationalist Young Egypt Society in 1935 and began organizing protests against British rule, heading the November 1935 demonstrations against the Ismail Sidqi regime.⁴³ He allegedly only attended three months of his final year of secondary school due to increasing involvement with the student political movements sweeping Egypt at the time.⁴⁴

Nasser gained entrance to the Royal Military Academy in 1937 and there became close with Abdel Hakim Amer and Anwar Sadat, who later became his comrades in arms and with whom he confided his discontent with the corruption of the monarchy. Stationed in Palestine during the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, Nasser quickly noticed the Egyptian army's inexperience yet was greatly encouraged by his experience fighting alongside Palestinians.⁴⁵ Under Nasser's military command, Egypt managed to secure the Faluja Pocket, though the area was eventually ceded to Israel.⁴⁶ Nasser returned home a military hero, but one increasingly frustrated with the monarchy.

By early 1950 a group of dissenting leaders of the Egyptian army publically adopted the name "Association of Free Officers," and unanimously elected Nasser chairman. In January of 1952, Nasser moved to separate the army from the monarchy's realm of power. The Free Officers decided to put forth a named leader and elected Muhammad Naguib to stand as head, though Nasser still controlled much of the group's ideology. There were many disagreements within the coalition, but all Free Officers agreed that the monarchy needed to fall for any substantive change to occur in Egypt. On July 22 the Officers finally launched their attack against the monarch, seizing control of

⁴¹ P.J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 24.

⁴² Said K. Aburish, *Nasser, the Last Arab* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 11-12.

⁴³ Vatikiotis, 28-29.

⁴⁴ Robert Henry Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 32.

⁴⁵ Osman, 63.

⁴⁶ Aburish, 25-26.

the armed forces and all government buildings. King Faruq was expelled to Italy within three days.⁴⁷

A new Egypt

Naguib was formally declared President of the new Republic of Egypt on June 18, 1953, Nasser second behind him. Tensions within the RCC (Revolutionary Command Council, the Free Officers' new governing title) soon followed, and though most strife occurred internally between Naguib and Nasser, it became clear that the RCC and the army had divided.^{48 49}

In the months that followed, Nasser and the RCC plotted against Naguib and demanded the dissolution of the army movement. This led to considerable civil unrest and demonstrations across Egypt. Nasser was becoming a contentious personality both within and outside of the military. Enigmatic in his public life, Nasser was for many civilians a shadowy military figure and nothing more. The Muslim Brotherhood considered Nasser a threat to their goals for governance and attempted an assassination on October 26 at a labor rally in Alexandria. Nasser, unharmed, famously continued with his speech and declared, "My life is yours, my blood is a sacrifice to Egypt... Gamal Abdel Nasser's life is your property; I have lived for you, and will do so until I die, striving for your sake."⁵⁰ In that moment the Egyptian public fell in love with their leader. This can be seen as Nasser's first emergence from his shadowy political background as the "courageous, beloved son of Egypt."⁵¹

Nasser returned to Cairo with new authority supported by an admiring Egyptian public, and ordered thousands of Brotherhood followers jailed and Naguib removed from office. He became the de facto leader of the RCC and the Egyptian state, serving as an international liaison and mediator of Egyptian foreign policy. Most notably, Nasser represented Egypt at the Bandung Conference of 1955, a meeting that established the third world as a political entity. A new Egyptian constitution was drafted in January 1956 and Nasser was soon put forth as a presidential candidate. At the June elections, both the constitution and Nasser's nomination passed with an overwhelming majority.⁵² Nasser was officially President, and the next fourteen years would be characterized by bold social stratagems and changes in the international political landscape, including the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the tumultuous Six-Day War.

Throughout these watershed moments of Egyptian history, Nasser's popular status increased to an iconic level even when many people remained unhappy with administrative corruption. Considering this, one should ask how Nasser gained such a cult-like following? His original politics were messy and marked by ideological convolutions, and his Presidency carried a long trail of jailed regime dissenters, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵³ Yet Nasser managed to win over many Egyptians and fostered hope in the future of his country. By 1962, Nasser had completely

⁴⁷ Cook, 39.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 51.

⁴⁹ Vatikiotis, 145.

⁵⁰ Reported in *al-Ahram*, October 27, 1954. Translation provided by Vatikiotis, *Nasser*, 144.

⁵¹ Cook, 64.

⁵² James P. Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 67.

⁵³ Osman, 92.

restructured the Egyptian identity, creating an “authoritarian populist movement, characterized by the cult of the chief, the prince, who is acclaimed by the nation through plebiscite.”⁵⁴ In studying Nasser’s careful construction of his public image, we can see how he achieved an authority untempered by political failure. Embedded in this image is his relationship with Umm Kulthum, who provided the charisma Nasser’s campaign desperately needed. With Umm Kulthum’s music and stardom, Nasser obtained the trust of the Arab world and built a regional identity.

Umm Kulthum and Nasser: A special relationship

In the aftermath of the 1952 revolution, almost every Egyptian artist wrote songs supporting the new government. Egypt had a renewed hope for the future, and so did its musicians. According to Danielson, when Umm Kulthum first heard of the revolution, she immediately commissioned her colleagues Rami and al-Sunbati to compose the celebratory national piece, “*Misr Allati fi Khatiri wa fi Dami*” (or “Egypt, Which is in my mind and my blood”).⁵⁵ She continued along this course of performative celebration throughout the ‘50s and commissioned over thirty songs in the nationalist tradition. This period also marked Umm Kulthum’s entrance to the political sphere, during which she took on social causes and began to accentuate her modest, populist background. Her Thursday night concerts had become an integral part of the Egyptian soundscape, thanks in large part to the popularization of the radio. This state radio, used as a weapon by both Umm Kulthum and Nasser, connected the world’s most populous Arab country with the sounds and agendas of Nasser’s regime.

The radio

When analyzing the charisma of a political leader, we must consider not only his or her natural talents but also the ways in which this person goes about applying those talents. Nasser knew his gifts in oratory. A commanding speaker, Nasser could make his listeners fearless, using Egyptian Arabic colloquialisms in key oratorical moments and drawing upon Egyptian pride in its own history to rally the masses.⁵⁶ Oratory in the age of the radio was an entirely new field for cultural dissemination and propaganda, and Nasser took advantage of this technology like no other Arab leader had before.⁵⁷ He greatly expanded public radio as soon as he gained power and began the landmark “Voice of the Arabs” program. This program eventually became Nasser’s main tool for identity formation and the spread of Arab nationalism. Radio allowed Nasser to speak to the Egyptian people as a whole, and it gave the nation a time every day when people across all socioeconomic classes would hear the same message. State radio affected not only the national scene; the rest of the Arab world tuned in for the state-sponsored Egyptian music and as a result developed a stronger sense of regional unity and Arab nationalism.

As stated in the previous chapter, Umm Kulthum had been using the power of the radio since her career in Cairo began. Umm Kulthum popularized and mass-produced *tarab*, a deeply personal music genre that necessitates intimacy and trust with other

⁵⁴ Vatikiotis, 154.

⁵⁵ Danielson, “Performance,” 113.

⁵⁶ Danielson, *Voice*, 166 and Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: from Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 147.

⁵⁷ Dawisha, 150.

listeners. For years, her voice had induced this spiritual state in the Egyptian and broader Arab population at the same time every month. Nasser recognized the cultural hegemony Egypt had over the Arab world. Cairo was at the epicenter of Arab art and was producing legendary music, and Nasser's radio programming succeeded because of it.⁵⁸ People tuned in for the music, allowed Umm Kulthum to move them to an elevated emotional state, and in turn became vulnerable to the propaganda that followed.

Umm Kulthum as a weapon

Virginia Danielson argues in many of her writings that Umm Kulthum did not concede to the nationalist cause in any exceptional way; her emotion for the nation was real, and this was communicated in her art. Some say that Umm Kulthum was a "powerful weapon" for Nasser and his political agenda. Danielson fleshes out this claim, concurring that Umm Kulthum and Nasser's relationship was formative for Egyptians but countering that many artists were doing the same, most notably Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Umm Kulthum had performed politically charged music since the 1940s. Songs like "*Salu Qalbi*," "*Wulid al-Huda*," and her "University Song" resonated with the Egyptian public with a populist, religious sentiment, calling for the necessity of struggle against corruption and the rich while Nasser was still unknown.⁶⁰ She had performed for Egyptian soldiers at al-Faluja in 1948 (whose audience included Nasser himself) and donated proceeds from her concerts to social programs. For this reason, I argue that Umm Kulthum's level of awareness of Nasser's attachment to her was insignificant. Umm Kulthum was already political before Egypt gained its independence. She was the voice of two Egypts: the colonized and the free. Therefore, by placing her in government positions and famously bringing her together with singer Abd al-Wahhab for a concert in honor of Egyptian National Day, Nasser deliberately aligned his legacy with hers.⁶¹ In turn, Umm Kulthum benefited from Nasser's support, gaining funding for a state Arab music ensemble and working with the Ministry of Culture to foster a new era of music making for local Egyptian musicians.

Charismatic authority, by nature, can be shifted, reduced, or augmented by the charisma of those associated with it. Because Umm Kulthum dedicated over half her repertory to nationalist and Nasser-praising music throughout his presidency, Nasser's charismatic authority increased with every popular move Umm Kulthum made thereafter. Consequently, I personally believe that by thoroughly dominating their independent spheres of power, Nasser and Umm Kulthum represented for the Arab world the ideal Egyptian populist icons. They did not have to be best friends for their popularity to benefit one another. They were the treasures of their nation, bound together in the Egyptian mind. Thus, when Nasser's Egypt began to encounter failure, Umm Kulthum's music played an essential role in the public's reception of defeat. The Six-Day War could have been the end of Nasser's presidency, or even the end of a new socialist Egypt. But Umm Kulthum knowingly used her own authority to boost Egyptian morale and make the

⁵⁸ Ibid, 148.

⁵⁹ "Performance" is more of an argument against the "weapon" theory, *Voice of Egypt* grants it more validity; Danielson, *Voice*, 171.

⁶⁰ Danielson, "Performance," 111. Official years of release for these songs unknown.

⁶¹ Ibid, 167 and 173. Umm Kulthum held various positions on committees concerned with Egyptian cultural policy.

people believe once more in a new Egypt; *tarab* consequently took a new shape for Egyptians.

The Six-Day War

In the years leading up to the Six-Day War in 1967, Nasser had become the face of Arab nationalism. He had founded the Arab League, served as President of the United Arab Republic (a union between Egypt and Syria that dissolved in 1961 after only a few years), and distinguished himself as an ally to the Palestinian people. Like many Arab leaders, Nasser strongly opposed the Israeli government and occupation, seen early on during the Suez Crisis of 1957 and the 1964 Arab League summit, after which Nasser established the Palestine Liberation Organization.⁶²

The exact details of the Six-Day War are beyond the scope of this study, but the overall timeline is as follows: On June 5, 1967 Israel launched an air attack on Egyptian air fields and destroyed a large amount of the Egyptian Air Force, seizing el-Arish and cutting through much of Egypt's defense. Nasser's Army Chief of Staff, Abdel Hakim Amer, ordered the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from Sinai the next day – much of this decision-making going on without Nasser's knowledge – and within five days Israel had captured the Gaza Strip, Sinai, Jordan's West Bank, and Syria's Golan Heights.⁶³

For Nasser's presidency, the Six-Day War stands as a moment of utter catastrophe. Nasser's regime was anchored by his prowess as a military leader, and Egypt's defeat removed the supernatural element from Nasser's authority and charisma. His public apology and recognition that he had misled the Egyptian army opened up the president to public criticism. On June 9 Nasser made a televised announcement of his resignation from the Presidential office. Yet the Egyptian public responded immediately, filling the streets and rejecting the resignation, famously chanting, "We are your soldiers, Gamal."⁶⁴ The Egyptian people hurt for their losses, but they refused to lose Nasser and his hopes for a Golden Age in the same hand. Here we see Nasser charismatic hold on the Egyptian emotional state stronger than ever; even in the face of immense failure, Nasser appealed to Egypt. No longer a demi-god, Nasser positioned himself as a flawed leader trying his best and the Egyptian public received him with open arms. Nasser had become human to the Egyptian public and they loved him as a brother, accepting his mistakes and insisting that he try again.

It is at this unique moment in post-colonial Egyptian history that we must ask how Egypt dealt with its first international diplomatic nightmare, and more personally, a hurt ego. In search of a way to believe again in the nation and to forget the public shame of defeat, the people looked toward their mother figure, the "Artist of the People in the Battle."⁶⁵ The last segment of this chapter focuses on Umm Kulthum's final performative identity – the political mother – to fully understand how she, in her own way, saved Nasser's legacy and cemented his iconic status.

⁶² Madiha Rashid al-Madfai, *Jordan, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process, 1974–1991*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 21.

⁶³ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ Aburish, 289.

⁶⁵ Laura Lohman, "'The Artist of the People in the Battle': Umm Kulthum's Concerts for Egypt in Political Context," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009).

Mother Egypt

Nasser's withdrawal of his resignation after the Six-Day War began a period of sweeping ideological change for Egypt: there were corruptions to air, economic changes to be instituted, and diplomatic relations to reconfigure. There was no returning to the days of the perfect "new Egypt." At the same time, Umm Kulthum herself launched one of Egypt's largest campaigns to restore the Egyptian reputation throughout the Arab world. Umm Kulthum had already distinguished herself as a semi-political figure during Nasser's presidency; however, the failure of the Six-Day War propelled her to an iconic international status. She gave substantial monetary donations to the Egyptian army and her post-war international concert tour raised considerable funds to support the Egyptian economy.

A week after the official military defeat, Umm Kulthum donated the equivalent of 20,000 English pounds toward Egyptian infrastructure lost during the war and began composing new nationalist repertoire, readying herself for an international fundraising tour.⁶⁶ In August 1967 Umm Kulthum began touring in Egypt, directly addressing the failure of the war and calling for Egyptians to donate to their country. Her re-ignited performance presence also provided a common, open space for Egyptians to accept their defeat. Though music has always been a vehicle for mourning and acceptance, Umm Kulthum's *tarab* stands as a particular phenomenon. *Tarab* being as charismatic and emotional a genre as it is, Umm Kulthum's music allowed for Egyptians to shed the stoicism of the military state and mourn publically, emotionally, with a mother figure nearby.

Well into her sixties, Umm Kulthum began her international tour in 1967, performing across the Arab world and as far as Paris. Yet she was careful to remain apolitical during her concerts – she supported Egypt financially with the tour but ideologically she remained silent. Absent from her international set were her patriotic songs. Instead she fell back upon her more traditional *tarab* repertoire that left interpretation primarily up to the listener.⁶⁷ This song collection allowed for Umm Kulthum to still address social issues without overtly referring to the political, a technique she had mastered long before revolution. She needed to unite the Arab world for Egypt and assure the media and international audiences that she was just a singer performing music, nothing more.

Additionally, she served as a vehicle for the reinforcement of Arab nationalism by performing non-Egyptian poetry, praying with the Tunisian first lady, and providing considerable media coverage for the Egyptian cause across the Arab world.⁶⁸ After concluding her international tour with a highly politicized concert series in Libya in 1969, Umm Kulthum returned to Egypt a national hero and political figure. Umm Kulthum's late artistic transformation was so exceptional because she kept herself removed from the messiness of government while still serving the regime's interests. At times she was simply a singer, at others a crusader for Egypt.

⁶⁶ "Umm Kulthum Presented a Check for 20 Thousand Pounds Sterling," *al-Ahram*, June 20, 1967, and "Umm Kulthum Travels to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to Collect Donations," *al-Akhbar*, July 22, 1967.

⁶⁷ Lohman, 44.

⁶⁸ Danielson, "Performance," 116.

Umm Kulthum and the military state

To pull together the many sociopolitical elements between Nasser, *tarab*, and the Egyptian people that characterized Egypt post-Revolution, I argue that Umm Kulthum and her music worked as a vehicle of both nation-building and the reinforcement of the military regime. Umm Kulthum's acknowledgement or even awareness of this role is unimportant to the reality of the modern Egyptian political landscape. Nasser was the first of a series of presidents (and arguably, dictators) who established the role of the military in governing that continues today. Umm Kulthum, by performing during Nasser's reign and then aligning herself with the interests of his government, imparted to the Egyptian people the regime was reliable and worth supporting. This is not to say that Umm Kulthum calculated these political motives, or that she was even aware of them at the time. In retrospect, however, we see that the phenomenal love the nation had for Umm Kulthum allowed her considerable sway over national sentiment. Thus, when the military state was brought into question, Umm Kulthum's decision to support the government helped to maintain the status quo and revive the belief in a better postcolonial nation.

Chapter 3 – Neoliberalism and Shaabi

Nasser, as we have seen, used his national cultural projects as tools to connect with a newly post-colonial population. He gave the people an artistic renaissance, supported voices that consoled the nation, and joined the Arab world under a single identity. In return, the Egyptian people forgot his suspect military history and forgave his atrocious human rights record in favor of a vulnerable, charismatic leader of the people. Nasser's presidency was one of pan-Arab nationalism and a new Egyptian cosmopolitanism, strong socialist values and trade alliances with the Eastern Bloc. He was the new pharaoh Egypt had waited for, and Nasser made the country feel that it was reclaiming its illustrious and ancient heritage. Cairo teemed with new creativity, and the relief of postcoloniality overshadowed the suspect censorship and religiously repressive policies of Nasser's reign. When Nasser finally failed, the Egyptian people rallied and supported him. The Arab world, however, began to see Egypt differently. By the time of his death in 1970, the Six-Day War and the War of Attrition had marred Nasser's political legacy; his presidency had become more protectionist and totalitarian, setting a policy that Anwar Sadat would later inherit. And yet the Arab world still reeled from Nasser's absence, shocked by the loss of a much-too-young father, and the last years of a troubled presidency were wiped clean by the forgetfulness of nostalgia and mourning.

When Anwar Sadat came into office at this contentious and fragile time for Egypt, the entire world was watching. Many Egyptians felt lost without the only leader they had followed since the exodus of the colonizer, but others looked hopefully toward the possibility of a new economic and political future for Egypt. Nasser's popularity had not protected the common Egyptian from poverty and struggle, and by the late 1960s it was clear that the economic policies and warmongering of Nasserism were not working.⁶⁹ Though Sadat commanded none of the charisma or support with which Nasser entered his presidential office, Sadat was not a timid leader. Characterized by a complete ideological shift from the past two decades of socialist Nasserism, Sadat's presidency ushered in a new liberal capitalism, an alliance with the United States, and unprecedented peace with Israel.

Though this chapter speaks to the broader changes in the Egyptian musical and cultural landscape under Sadat, I chiefly examine the impact of *infitah* (Sadat's "opening up" economic policy) and the shift toward Western capitalist production upon the Egyptian music scene and recording industry. The voices of Egypt's Golden Age, Abdel Halim Hafez and Umm Kulthum, both died shortly after Sadat ascended to the presidency (1974 and '75 respectively) and their passing marked the end of an era. Egyptian music faced a new economy, new technology, and an open market. This time was marked by the arrival of the cassette in the recording industry, the rise of pop music, or *shaabi*, among the lower classes, and stricter economic divides between Egyptian music consumers.

This section examines the new culture Egypt faced under Sadat. We find local Egyptian and Arab musicians largely disappearing from the picture, leading to a dismantling of Egypt's cultural renaissance. Sadat's open market of *infitah* created a music industry, the traditional apprentice relationship falling to more commercial production. In many ways, the "death of Egyptian music" communicates just as much about Egypt's current sentiment as did the Golden Age. In this chapter we abandon

⁶⁹ Cook, 112.

analyses of charisma and nationalist music and look to music as it relates to Anwar Sadat's presidency, a reign that departed entirely from Nasser's precedent, forever altering the country's role in international politics. I begin by explaining and questioning the dearth of information on music made during this time, following with a brief overview of Sadat's legacy and policies, most notably *infitah*, to situate the reader with a new presidency and a new Egypt. Next, I analyze the effect of *infitah* and globalization on the Egyptian recording industry, which feeds into a discussion on the music of the era: *shaabi* pop. Reactions to *shaabi* across the economic classes of Egypt provide insight into the effects of Sadat's policies on everyday culture and further illuminate the Egyptian reaction to a globalizing and Westernizing economy.

Where did the art go? Questions of research

Anwar Sadat is one of the most interesting political figures of the twentieth century, yet very few academics have analyzed the artistic legacy of his presidency. The dearth of musical scholarship on Egypt post-Nasser and Umm Kulthum is stunning. Under Nasser, Cairo dictated the Arab world's cultural identity. However, as quickly as it rose to prominence, Egyptian music entered the collective memory as a relic of past times. Yes, some of *tarab*'s greats were rounding out their careers when Sadat took office, but music did not simply disappear from Egyptian life; the challenge, then, is to discover where it went.

Finding little Sadat-era music, I turned to the one English-speaking scholar whom I believed would acknowledge and explain this jarring absence of music. Virginia Danielson opens her article on Egyptian popular music since the 1970s, "New Nightingales of the Nile" with this anecdote from her research abroad:

"Why buy all those?!" a street vendor in Cairo asked as I picked out photographs of young singing stars he had for sale. "Take more of these," he suggested, proffering stills from the 1950s films of 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz and photos of Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab and Umm Kulthum. "Those were really good days...the old singers were really good singers. There's nothing like that now. Umm Kulthum and 'Abd al-Halim, they're all gone and the rest are *kalam fadi* [literally 'empty talk', indicating something nonsensical or of little value]."⁷⁰

The idea of the "death" of Egyptian music pervades in many communities of the Arab world. According to older generations, there is no one artist worth writing about, no genre that transformed the landscape of Egyptian music. For music lovers, Sadat's Cairo was remarkably ordinary. Musicians began looking abroad for inspiration and more performance opportunities; international artists like the Lebanese superstar Fairouz began dominating the music markets. Cairo was, in effect, left in the dust. This all leads me to ask, were there simply no good musicians during the 1970s and 80s? Were artists in Egypt pursuing other career paths, perhaps more profitable fields? Or was it something much larger altogether?

I would like to ask in this chapter what exactly causes "good music" to disappear from a national landscape. What policies and ideas on art pervade the

⁷⁰ Virginia Danielson, "New Nightingales of the Nile: Popular Music in Egypt Since the 1970s," from *Popular Music* 15 (1996), 3, accessed February 17, 2015, doi:10.1017/S0261143000008291.

community to hinder “authentic” creativity (a concept that, as previously discussed, dominates the discourse around Arab music)? Here I aim to find the intersections of economic policy, popular music, and international expectations to understand just how a country stops making music.

The new era: Anwar Sadat

Anwar Sadat, Nasser’s lifelong comrade in arms, was the acting Vice President when Nasser died in September 1970 of a heart attack. Sadat was relatively unknown to the Egyptian people at this time. Government and army officials initially disregarded him, viewing Sadat as a negligible threat to the heavily bureaucratized and efficient political machine developed under Nasser.⁷¹ Sadat had maintained a relatively low profile throughout his career and most of Nasser’s cabinet expected him to serve as a placeholder until he formally relinquished his presidential powers. The Egyptian people, however, began to warm to Sadat soon after he dismissed two of Nasser’s powerful regime figures, including the leader of the hated secret police, Sharawy Gomaa.⁷² This bold domestic move implied that Sadat’s administration, if allowed to continue, would not fall into the same corruption as Nasser’s. Egyptians responded with eagerly anticipation for what Sadat’s Egypt could look like.

In his second year as President, Sadat successfully led Egypt’s attack on Israel in October of 1973. The Egyptian military took Israel’s Bar-Lev Line and significantly depleted the Israeli air force.⁷³ For the first time in years, Egypt demonstrated its military prowess and successfully defended the Palestinian cause. Nasser’s Egyptian nationalist agenda had originated out of the anti-Zionist, pro-Arab cause. Consequently, Egyptians took Sadat’s sweeping victory as a promise for a united Arab future. This gained the new president the popularity he required to establish himself as ruler in his own right, ready to make changes to Egypt and emerge from Nasser’s long shadow.

Post-populism: *Infatih* and the Western alliance

Sadat’s military victory against Israel readied the Egyptian people for a new Egypt and a new leader. Nasser had been largely unsuccessful in his military ventures throughout the last decade of his reign. That he maintained such popularity in these years only further speaks to Nasser’s exceptional popular command over the Egyptian masses. In contrast, Sadat ruled with little charismatic authority and was not concerned with bridging the gap between government and the masses. As such, this victory was essential to bringing Sadat popular support. Succeeding in his first military venture, and against Israel no less, Sadat gained the authority necessary to try new policies and establish his own presidential agenda.⁷⁴

Featured most strongly in this “post-populist” structural shift were two essential changes: first, the introduction of *al-Infatih*, or the opening up of the

⁷¹ Eric Pace, “Anwar el-Sadat, the Daring Arab Pioneer of Peace with Israel,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1981, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1225.html>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Osman, 129.

⁷⁴ Scott MacLeod, “Anwar Sadat’s vision for Egypt,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2011, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/06/opinion/la-oe-macleod-sadat-20111006>.

Egyptian economy. Second, Sadat maneuvered Egypt's disbandment from the Eastern Bloc (i.e., the USSR) and fostered new alliance with the West (i.e., the United States).⁷⁵ As may appear obvious, these policies developed in tandem – the neoliberal capitalist transition for Egypt's economy appealed to Western political and economic interests. Furthermore, this new alignment with the US and rejection of Marxist Russia served to propel an altogether new market strategy.

Jason Brownlee, a scholar of US-Egyptian relations, situates *infitah* as a direct response to the large debt acquired from two major wars in less than a decade – certainly a sensitive rallying point for the Egyptian people at this stage. Ready to restructure Nasser's former populist agenda, Sadat implemented *infitah* in October 1973 with Law 43/1974. The law stripped away state intervention, provided substantial tax exemption for foreign companies, and lifted the previous requirement that foreign companies had to be partially Egyptian-owned.⁷⁶ Though some funds did come in from the Gulf within the first two years of *infitah*, the outside investment in Egyptian petroleum barely dented Egypt's outstanding deficit. Egypt relied on International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank loans and was soon suffering from the high “rent” that accompanied foreign aid. By 1977 Egypt was creaking under the weight of this debt. Sadat responded with an overnight removal of state subsidies for foods and basic necessities.⁷⁷ If the benefits of *infitah* were ever under contest before, this move demonstrated exactly for whom neoliberalism was intended: the elite and their friends in the military.

The Egyptian public responded in outrage, filling the streets to protest these unlivable economic policies. Sadat responded with repressive force, mobilizing the military in an effort to control protests. By the end of the so-named Bread Riots, the military had arrested over 1000 people, killing 80.⁷⁸ Sadat's long political game rested on hopes of US subsidies and support following negotiations with President Jimmy Carter. This was a far-away reality for Egyptians who could not afford bread from their local bakeries.⁷⁹ “Paralyzed between Nasserism and the new assumptions of *infitah*,” Sadat's expansive bureaucracy offered neither Nasser's socialism nor classic capitalism.⁸⁰

Peace with Israel

The Camp David Accords, organized by US President Jimmy Carter and signed on September 17, 1978 by Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, were the culmination of Sadat's appeals to the West. Here I address the role of the

⁷⁵ Raymond A. Hinnebusch, “Egypt under Sadat: Elites, Power Structure, and Political Change in a Post-Populist State,” from *Social Problems* 28 (1981) 4, accessed February 17, 2015, doi:10.2307/800057.

⁷⁶ Jason Brownlee, “Peace before Freedom: Diplomacy and Repression in Sadat's Egypt,” from *Political Science Quarterly* 126 (2011-2012) 4, accessed February 17, 2015, doi:10.1002/j.1538-165X.2011.tb00715.x.

⁷⁷ Marie-Christine Aulas, “Sadat's Egypt: A Balance Sheet,” from *MERIP Reports* 107 (1982), pp. 6-18 and 30-31, accessed March 1, 2015, doi:10.2307/3011724.

⁷⁸ Kirk J. Beattie, *Egypt during the Sadat Years* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 208.

⁷⁹ For a brief news clip outlining the riots, see: “Egyptians hit Soviet reaction,” from *Bangor Daily News*, January 24, 1977, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=aLszAAAIBAJ&sjid=vzgHAAAIBAJ&pg=3340,2175166&dq=food+riots+egypt&hl=en>.

⁸⁰ Aulas, 8.

peace treaty on Egyptian identity and status throughout the Arab world. In this context, it is important to recognize this pivotal moment as Egypt's official shift in both the international and domestic spheres. By agreeing to peace with Begin, Anwar Sadat, in the eyes of many Egyptians and Arabs worldwide, officially turned his back on Palestinians and with them the Arab community at large. For many this was the moment when Sadat officially sold his soul to the capitalist devil. Doing so, Sadat renounced Egypt's position as the stronghold of Arab idealism. Though Nasser promoted Arab nationalism under the auspices of commonality, these diverse nation-states were also united by what they were *not*: pro-Israel. Egypt was always quite distinct from fellow North African states, its identity politics bound primarily within its own ancient history and nationalism rather than ethnic or religious groupings. Never fully embracing the Maghrebi identity, Egypt possessed even fewer cultural ties to its Gulf neighbors. For Nasser, this worked to Egypt's advantage – Egypt was perfectly positioned to function as the unifier of the Arab world. The Camp David Accords, however, communicated that Egypt's allegiances were changing. Sadat had formally chosen the capitalist dream over pan-Arabism.

From this historical background, we now examine the cultural responses to this new Egypt, considering the role of neoliberal capitalism in the Egyptian music industry and the class divisions apparent in music-listening trends of *shaabi* music. A new genre mirroring the trends of global pop in parts of North Africa and Europe, *shaabi* artists abandoned Classical styles and catered to the cosmopolitan listener. How did this new generation of music makers embrace an increasingly globalized, capitalist market? How did the Egyptian masses express their grievances against the Sadat presidency in a modernized setting without the voice of Mother Egypt behind them? Hinnebusch argues that the Marxist model of “Conservation and Exclusion” aptly applies to Sadat's presidency: “the post-populist authoritarian state, despite pressures for a diffusion of power... can indeed persist – but its concentrated power is then used to *resist* social and political change rather than *propel* it.”⁸¹ I argue that this philosophy also holds true for the Egyptian musical scene under Sadat. The Egyptian state, in rejecting *shaabi* music and its creators, set up a dichotomy of good and bad music that was firmly rooted in the socioeconomic discontent of Sadat's Egypt.

Cassettes and an open market: The Egyptian recording industry

I have previously argued that the Nasser regime expertly manipulated its state radio and cultural resources to achieve a mono-focused, nationalist identity. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, the government and the recording industry were inextricably linked. During Sadat's presidency, more than 98% of Cairenes owned personal radios and they were rapidly expanding into rural areas.⁸² State radio thus dominated the dissemination of information and music across Egypt well into the 1970s. However, with the opening of Egypt's markets to global investment came the transformation of Egypt's recording industry and music market. Almost exclusively confined to the government-owned record company Sono Cairo in its early years, the Egyptian music industry was dramatically impacted by the growing success of

⁸¹ Hinnebusch, 443.

⁸² Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, “Radio and Musical Life in Egypt,” from *Revista de Musicología* 16 (1993) 10, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20795978>.

cassette recordings and private record companies. The cassette industry exploded in the late 1970s. Managers capitalized on Sadat's neoliberal policies to circumvent the strictures of national radio, making its own rules for the first time.⁸³ We see this challenge to the old ways of making and recording music embodied in the rise of Cairo's pop star, Ahmad Adawiya. Initially rejected by state radio, Adawiya looked to the cassette industry to find an identity for himself in the Sadat-era musical landscape.

Ahmad Adawiya

The economic terms of the 1970s music industry necessitated a new type of artist-entrepreneur unseen before in Egypt. Sales no longer relied on state-sanctioned approval of a voice or collection of lyrics but rather on popular appeal and a relationship to the everyday listener. Castelo-Branco cites Ahmad Adawiya as the vocalist who first challenged state radio and began the process of private recording and cassette distribution at the local level. Recognized as the first modern pop star of the Arab world, Adawiya heralded the pop music movement.⁸⁴ His lyrics were promiscuous, his voice sounded much more feminine than previous popular singers, and his music was spread via the streets of Cairo. Excluded from the state radio because of the "poor musical quality of his songs," Adawiya looked to other sources of dissemination. Adawiya released his first cassette through a privately owned recording company, *Sawt Al-Hub*, and sold over a million copies in 1972 alone. New technology and less national control over certain areas of cultural life allowed for a new type of Egyptian music to emerge with Adawiya at the center – *shaabi*, or music "of the people." In the five years following his momentous first release, Adawiya sold over five million tapes, utilizing the backstreet recording and pirated tapes of the street culture to spread his music across Egypt.⁸⁵

***Shaabi*: A music of the people**

Though Adawiya was certainly not the only *shaabi* musician of his time, his repertoire and style greatly influenced the *shaabi* tradition and in many ways characterized the genre as a whole. To begin, the word *shaabi* literally translates as "popular" in Modern Standard Arabic. Similar to contemporary American "Top 40" pop music, many consider *shaabi* of lesser quality than other vocal genres. Adawiya expertly straddled the line between "bad pop" and the classical legacies of his fellow Egyptian musicians. Seen as an Abd al-Wahhab for the Sadat era, Adawiya became famous for his fusion of musical genres, use of Egyptian dialect, and general sex appeal. Adawiya exerted an "Elvis effect" on many of his female listeners, and his lyrics carried heavy sexual innuendos recognizable to the average Egyptian listener.

⁸³ Ibid, 11.

⁸⁴ Andrew Hammond, "Music and Arabpop," from *Pop Culture Arab World! Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), accessed February 17, 2015, http://libproxy.vassar.edu/login?url=http%3A%2F%2Fsearch.credoreference.com%2Fcontent%2Fentry%2Fabc%2Fpop_culture_arab_world_media_arts_and_lifestyle%2F0.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

For example, one of Adawiya's most famous songs, "*Bint al-Sultan*," roughly translates as follows:

Oh daughter of the Sultan
Have mercy on the poor guy
The water is between your hands
and Adawiya is thirsty

On Abbas bridge
You are walking
And people are looking at your sweetness
Like fruits and pineapple

Give me water more and more
Your water is so sweet like sugar
Give me water more and more
Your water is so sweet like sugar⁸⁶

I do not need to explicitly lay out the innuendos in these lyrics, but the general idea is clear – Adawiya is speaking about young women in a way that many Egyptians, particularly traditionalists, found unsettling and overly sexualizing. This kind of controversy, however, served to distinguish Adawiya from the artists of the past. Young people in Cairo were not always perfect, pious children and the giants of the *tarab* past had largely ignored or glossed over this aspect of human nature. Whereas Umm Kulthum represented the rural and devout, Adawiya showed Egypt's increasing grasp toward the worldly and cosmopolitan. He tapped into the not-so-nice realities of the Egyptian experience and as a result gathered an immense following.

Egyptian cultural scholar Walter Armbrust credits Adawiya's "frank appeal to the masses – without any of the rhetoric of 'raising their cultural standards'" as what set him apart from singers backed by the state's cultural establishment.⁸⁷ As we will soon discuss, this foregoing of pretense directly ties to many of the class-based clashes under Sadat's new neoliberalism. First, however, I will provide an explanation of what exactly Adawiya's *shaabi* looks and sounds like, analyzing him both through his style and his broader implications for the Egyptian musical community.

Style

Adawiya unabashedly broke out of the classical tradition in his first album – he maintained the traditional orchestra sound of the Arab *takht* but slimmed down the length of each song, keeping more in line with the four to five-minute Western pop style.⁸⁸ Unlike Umm Kulthum or Abd al-Wahhab, here was a musician who did not

⁸⁶ This is a personal translation, so please excuse any phrasing discrepancies or differences between Egyptian and Modern Standard Arabic. The general idea has been communicated accurately.

⁸⁷ Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 182.

⁸⁸ Hammond.

care to fully elaborate on a theme, moving between *maqamat*, but instead relied on volume, vocal range, and tempo.⁸⁹ According to Armbrust, Adawiya's rhythms typically alternate between a slower "bump-and-grind" pace and a more upbeat disco tempo, all played "*ala wahda wa-nuss*, a traditional 'folkloric' rhythm." His songs are known as "*aghani shababiya*," or youth songs, and the upbeat disco rhythms predominant in his repertoire urge young people to dance. Adawiya's appeal, however, stems not only from his universal dance beats but also his appeal to Egyptian folklore and localisms. Literature on Adawiya focuses predominately on the folkloric aspect of this music, both in consideration of style and lyricism. This connection to the everyday Egyptian is what eventually came to characterize the *shaabi* genre.

Famous for his use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic and common country phrases, Adawiya brought forth a new wave of music for the Egyptian community. One did not have to be well read or even knowledgeable of classical Arabic to understand his music. This was Egyptian music made specifically for Egyptians and no one else. While Sadat's political economy was looking outward and pandering to the West, Adawiya ushered in a more nation-specific sound, honing in on Cairene culture and dialect. Songs such as "*Is-Sahh id-dahh ambu*" and "*Zahma*" evoke the sounds of the Egyptian everyday by using vernacular idioms and sound bytes of various noises from Cairo's streets. Adawiya songs use these colloquialisms in a tradition-minded way; his music typically falls under the categories of *mawawil* or *azgal*, poetic forms that adapt colloquial language to classical meter.⁹⁰

In this way we see Adawiya as the perfect bridge between the classical icons of Egypt's past and the increasingly globalized market of pop music emanating from North Africa at the time. The split reaction to this transition seen amongst the bourgeois and the common Egyptian illustrates the growing class tensions of the Sadat era. Music under Nasser served as a tool for uniting the Egyptian people despite socioeconomic differences; the *shaabi* movement under Sadat, in turn, exacerbated this divide and foreshadowed the class tensions that pervade Egypt today.

Critical response and implications of classism

Adawiya's critics came from many backgrounds – musical, political, intellectual, traditionalist, left-wing, right-wing, etc. – but all seemed to agree that Adawiya's music was simply not good. Like most pop music around the world, *shaabi* is not a music for all contexts. With its dance beats and informal lyrics, Adawiya's sound catered most to a more upbeat, fun-oriented audience, but this did not mean that his music did not serve a purpose. It filled a gap in the Egyptian repertoire that many had been waiting for.

Music lovers who longed for the cultural renaissance of Umm Kulthum and Abd al-Wahhab criticized Adawiya's lack of musical ability and stasis within only a few well-known *maqamat*. Conservatives who feared the hypersexualization of their sons and daughters criticized his "vulgar" dance lyrics and sexy image.⁹¹ Activists who resented the Sadat presidency and its capitalist agenda criticized Adawiya's

⁸⁹ Armbrust, 180.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 181.

⁹¹ The passage on Adawiya is actually presented in the "Vulgarity" chapter of Armbrust's book.

embrace of the Western pop sound and all that comes with it. For the intellectual elite, Adawiya's natural audience of "people who peddled bad foodstuffs, built shoddy apartment blocks, and made a fortune dealing drugs" encapsulated the new way of life under Sadat.⁹²

Obviously, these criticisms ring of a lot more than divisive music taste; Adawiya brought out the classist in many of Egypt's upper class and government ministries. The days of everyone forgetting their differences while listening to Umm Kulthum's Thursday concerts were long gone. In its place was a music very genuinely of the common man, and the elite of Sadat's new Egypt wanted nothing to do with him.

In response to the *shaabi* music for the poorer classes, we see traditional, state-sponsored Arab music ensembles reach new rates of attendance among younger audiences. Salwa El-Shawan's shows in her research on the Egyptian Ministry of Culture's official Arab music ensemble, *Firqat al-Musiqa al-Arabiyyah* (FMA), that Cairo's young educated elite comprised most of the ensemble's audience base in the late 1970s.⁹³ According to El-Shawan, 73.1% of FMA's polling respondents were between the ages of 23 and 43, with most coming from an income comparable to a university-level education background and the salary of a high-level government official.⁹⁴ The upper class and intellectual elite were fleeing to the state's conservatories and traditional Arab ensembles, while middle- and lower-class Cairenes were creating their own industry with cassette recordings and a backstreet market for pirated music. This divide, recognizable to many from a Western musical background, is often perceived as simply "the way things are" between classical and popular music. For Egypt, however, this was a sure sign of the growing class differences that heretofore had flown under the radar of Nasser's socialist agenda.

Conclusions

The Sadat presidency marked the beginning of a monumental shift toward capitalist, US-centered politics, bringing much social and economic turmoil for the Egyptian people. The divide between the bourgeoisie and the working-class Egyptian deepened and began appearing in all forms of culture, including music. As seen with the rise of and response to *shaabi* music, the everyday Egyptian required a new type of music that represented the urban reality of Sadat's Egypt. Classical music, including the emotional *tarab*, now belonged solely to those who could afford it. Musicians began focusing nationally, each artist making music for his or her socioeconomic class and reaching audiences with lyrics and sounds that rang truer to the reality of Egyptian life. The next chapter will pick up at this class-divided time for Egypt, examining Mubarak's long and politically fraught presidency and focusing on the result of these artistic and economic tensions: rebel music and the Arab Spring.

⁹² Hammond.

⁹³ Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, "Traditional Arab Music Ensembles in Egypt since 1967: 'The Continuity of Tradition within a Contemporary Framework'?" from *Ethnomusicology* 28 (1984) 2, accessed February 17, 2015, doi: 143.229.1.189.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 283.

Chapter 4 – Mubarak and Pre-revolutionary Music

Current research and reportage on Egyptian life has centered predominantly on the policies of Egypt's recent authoritarian figure, Hosni Mubarak, and his overthrow during the Arab Spring. Egypt's fourth and longest-reigning president, Mubarak ruled with extensive military influence, invoking a pervasive emergency state that contributed to his eventual removal in 2011. Due to both its span and controversial policies, Mubarak's presidency affected considerable transformations in Egyptian music, both in the formal industry and on the streets. First seen as a continuation of the gradual shift toward a global pop sound, Egyptian national music tastes diverged in the early 2000s. Like many other countries of the Arab Spring, Egypt's disproportionately large population of young adults held a powerful grasp on the nation's cultural and political leanings. With the median age currently at 25 years old, the past two decades has seen the average Egyptian get increasingly younger, more educated, and less likely to find employment.⁹⁵ Towards the late 1990s, this substantial youth population began to lean toward more transgressive styles associated with a newer, grittier Egyptian musical sound. The poetics of *tarab* left behind in a romanticized, postcolonial past, Egyptian musicians began pushing the boundaries of sound production and national identity itself, laying the groundwork for an historic revolutionary movement.

This study aims to situate the Arab Spring and the music leading up to it within the controversial policies first begun by Anwar Sadat. As seen in the previous chapter, Sadat's neoliberal agenda and pandering to the West had already incited a new wave of popular music that broke with the conventional and critically acclaimed music of Nasser's Golden Age. Just as the anger against Sadat grew with stunning force throughout the late 1970s, so the *shaabi* genre of Cairene streets reflected and adapted to this new energy and critical view of the government.

Here I consider Mubarak's presidency as it applies to the rise of new music genres coming out of the Egyptian music scene; I address the electro-*shaabi* genre, *mahraganat*, and the impromptu folk-inspired music of the Tahrir Square demonstrations. Much of Western scholarship and news media has focused on this dissident music as a catalyst to the Arab Spring, decontextualizing Egyptian musicians from their own artistic histories and pre-revolutionary sentiments. Finally, I analyze the growing momentum of the popular music industry and the role it played in the culture of resistance that is now so closely linked with Tahrir Square.

Transitions of Power: Sadat's Assassination

Anwar Sadat's neoliberal policies and new alliance with US interests incited a simmering public unrest unprecedented in postcolonial Egypt. Though this dissatisfaction only manifested itself in a few full-scale riots during Sadat's reign – the largest demonstration being the nationwide 1977 Bread Riots – it was clear to Egyptian officials and the broader Arab world that changes were coming. Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978, and the subsequent 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty marked a surge in internal unrest for Egyptian politics. Islamism was gaining popularity amongst Egyptians, particularly after Sadat jailed members of a

⁹⁵ “The World Factbook: Egypt,” CIA, last modified April 21, 2015, accessed April 27, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>.

threatening Islamist group, El-Jihad, and members of the Coptic clergy, including its Coptic Pope.⁹⁶

Already strongly disliked at this point in his political career, this show of oppressive totalitarianism pushed Sadat into pariah status. Tensions gave rise to tragedy on October 6, 1981. Sadat was assassinated by Egyptian military Lieutenant Khalid Islambouli at a military parade in celebration of the 1973 Operation Badr.⁹⁷ Twelve people were killed, and twenty-eight were injured, including Vice President Hosni Mubarak.⁹⁸ The days following Sadat's murder illuminated the changes in public sentiment toward the presidency that had been underway since Nasser's death. Whereas the West was flung into mourning over Sadat's passing, Egyptians seemed generally unshaken by the assassination. Nasser's death and funeral attracted over five million Egyptians and every major leader of the Arab world; Sadat's funeral, to contrast, was primarily attended by Western foreign leadership, including three former US presidents and Prime Minister Begin.⁹⁹

Nasser marketed himself as a man of the people; Sadat was a more blatant politician and knew the power to be gained with American money, as unpopular as it may have been. Sadat had abandoned the socialist hopes of Nasser's Egypt and embraced a globalized economy, sprinting into neoliberalism's future without looking back at the aftereffects of postcoloniality that continued to burden many Egyptians. As such, most Egyptians did not mourn Sadat's passing, which only further demonstrated their readiness for new leadership and hopes for a Nasser-like leader who would once again look inward to Egypt and its domestic needs. Hosni Mubarak's ascension to the presidency, however, changed very little. Upon appointment Mubarak quickly expanded the military industrial complex Egypt knew under Sadat, and the decades to follow saw intense political oppression and a reaffirmed alliance with the West. Change would take a much longer time than Egyptians had hoped.

Mubarak's Early Years

Holding the presidential office from 1981 until his ousting in 2011, Mubarak reigned for almost thirty years, achieving governmental stability with a heavy security apparatus. Vice President from 1975 until Sadat's assassination, Mubarak's presidency saw most of the previous administration's policies perpetuated, including a liberalized Egyptian economy and peace with Israel. Mubarak also reached out to the Arab League in an attempt for reconciliation, though it was clear that Egypt's loyalties lay with its greatest patron, the United States. American involvement with and courting of the Egyptian military only increased after Sadat's death. Shake-ups in the MENA region, which included the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Iran-Iraq War, led the US to invest even more in its military bases in Egypt.¹⁰⁰ As a result the

⁹⁶ "Egypt: Cracking Down," *Time*, September 14, 1981, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/oct-6-1981-egypt-president-anwar-sadat-is-killed/>.

⁹⁷ Pace

⁹⁸ William E. Farrell, "Sadat Assassinated at Army Parade as Men Amid Ranks Fire Into Stand; Vice President Affirms 'All Treaties'," *New York Times*, October 6, 1981, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/1006.html#headlines>.

⁹⁹ Michael Collins Dunn, "US Relations with Egypt: An Overview," in *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations*, ed. Robert Looney (New York: Routledge, 2009), 290.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 290.

Egyptian political landscape followed the money – foreign investment pouring into military budgets created an impenetrable industrial complex that dominated the government's economic and regulatory relationship to the public.

As a presidential figure, Mubarak early on displayed an inability to connect with the Egyptian people. Lacking much of the charisma of Nasser, and even Sadat, Mubarak ruled with detached authoritarianism, rarely masking his stringent policies with appeals to the public. Mubarak was exceptional, in the opinions of many critics, solely because of his long reign and ultimate demise. He was unable to appeal to the common Egyptian and though he was certainly a stable leader, the stability he provided did not impress or improve the lives of most Egyptians. Tarek Osman situates this separation between President and people rather aptly:

Detachment between ruler and society is a novel departure from a pattern whereby the tastes as well as the vision of Egyptian leaders have shaped the country's evolution...Nasser's morality and integrity inspired the grandeur and stateliness of the 1950s and 1960s. Sadat's piety and unpredictability triggered the waves of religiosity and the tumultuous changes that the society underwent in the 1970s. Mubarak's imprint is missing; while Nasserism and Sadat-ism evoke impassioned feelings (whether of endorsement and admiration or rejection and denunciation), their successor never found a 'following'. Despite the millions of words and images that the state-controlled Egyptian media has devoted to Mubarak's deeds and presence since 1981, Egyptians do not know him.¹⁰¹

Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak all emerged from strong military backgrounds – Mubarak had trained in both Egyptian Military Academy and the USSR, served in and commanded the Egyptian Air Force, and become a national hero following Egyptian success in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.¹⁰² His path toward the presidency did not differ too drastically from that of his predecessors. Yet Mubarak was the only democratically elected leader to be forced from office. In my opinion, this results from Mubarak's blatant economic reliance on the military and the intensified policing he maintained throughout his presidency.

The Military Pervades: a State of Emergency

Due in large part to American support and the pervasive reach of the IMF, the military became a major player in the Egyptian economy, seen in four primary sectors: military industries, civilian industries, agriculture, and national infrastructure.¹⁰³ In his analysis of Mubarak's economy, Robert Springborg terms this domination of industry "horizontal military expansion." In essence, horizontal expansion meant that the military controlled industries relating to its own purposes, such as arms manufacturing. The

¹⁰¹ Osman, 183-184.

¹⁰² CNN Library, "Hosni Mubarak Fast Facts," *CNN*, January 14, 2015, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/07/world/meast/hosni-mubarak---fast-facts/>.

¹⁰³ LTC Stephen H. Gotowicki, U.S. Army, "The Role of the Egyptian Military in Domestic Society," (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 1997), accessed March 26, 2015, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/egypt/egypt.htm>.

influence, however, did not stop there. Egyptian military also had a hand in more civilian industries like tourism, which ultimately took incoming profits from smaller business owners and instead placed that money directly into the pockets of the military elite.

Springborg ultimately argues that horizontal military expansion led to greater cooperation between the military and civilian sector.¹⁰⁴ I contend, however, that this disregard for civilian Egyptian entrepreneurship only helped perpetuate Mubarak's oppressive military state. With the military not only providing all major cabinet leaders but also most of the monetary strength of an unstable economy, Egypt was swiftly living up to its authoritarian trends. In order to maintain his blatantly undemocratic governance, Mubarak reinstated and heightened the emergency state that had been in place since the 1967. This ultimately led to a drastic loss of rights for the average Egyptian, particularly any who criticized this new administration.

Mubarak's Emergency Law came under sharpest criticism and media attention during the years of the Arab Spring, but organizations such as Human Rights Watch have reported on these violations of basic human rights since the law's inception.¹⁰⁵ The Egyptian Emergency Law, *Law No. 162 of 1958*, was first implemented in 1958, but it appeared most drastically after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. The law was lifted for a brief eighteen months during Sadat's presidency, only to be reinstated after Sadat's assassination in 1981.¹⁰⁶ The law states that a state of emergency warrants the extension of police powers, the suspension of constitutional rights, and the abolishment of *habeas corpus*.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the emergency law legalized censorship, which drastically restricted the liberties of Egypt's once progressive artistic and performative culture. State radio and television soon featured only the artists that fell in line with the views of the Mubarak administration – any voices critical of said government were quietly suppressed.

Alongside the already detested policies of the administration, Mubarak's emergency state only further fed the rising discontent left over from Sadat's presidency. Because he swayed little from Sadat's politics, Mubarak's intensified police state can be read as the catalyst for the exceptional anti-government sentiment now associated with his legacy. As early as 1986 Mubarak felt the wrath of angry civilians and military in public riots. The uprisings include the violent 1992 occupation of Imbaba by followers of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, the *Kefaya* movement of 2005, and the most recent Tahrir Square demonstrations of 2011.¹⁰⁸ Mubarak's presidency was not the first time Egyptians had expressed discontent with their leaders – even beloved Nasser faced criticism, particularly in his later years in office – but it was certainly the most tumultuous. As we observe next, the music coming from this era reflected this roiling environment.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 107, 117.

¹⁰⁵ "World Report: Egypt," *Human Rights Watch*, January 2010, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010/egypt>.

¹⁰⁶ Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, "Egypt and the Impact of 27 years of Emergency on Human Rights," May 28, 2008, accessed March 26, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110201013303/http://en.eohr.org/2008/05/28/%E2%80%9CEgypt-and-the-impact-of-27-years-of-emergency-on-human-rights%E2%80%9D/#more-22>.

¹⁰⁷ "The Emergency Law in Egypt," *FIDH*, November 17, 2001, accessed March 26, 2015, <https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/north-africa-middle-east/egypt/THE-EMERGENCY-LAW-IN-EGYPT>.

¹⁰⁸ Dan Tschirgi, *Turning Point: The Arab World's Marginalization and International Security After 9/11*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 106.

The '90s and Dissident Musics of Arab Communities

When listening to the music of Sadat's later years in office, the dissidence heard is generally more social than political. Ahmad Adawiya may have caused waves with his promiscuity and appeals to the lower class but he was certainly not calling for governmental overthrow. Resistance music came much later, beginning in other areas of the Arab world that were also growing disenchanted with the authoritarianism that followed their decolonization. Taking notes from the subversive genres appearing in the oppressed areas of larger Western countries, particularly the hip-hop of New York, the Arab world began to communicate its rage through new media. The emotionalism of now-ancient *tarab* and the classical Arabic *takht* was suddenly reinvigorated and utterly transformed. The Arab world had a new sentiment to sing, and it was ready to be heard.

Moroccan *Nayda*

Among the other Arab countries developing new genres to express frustration with totalitarian governments, Morocco was the first to bring transgressive hip-hop to North Africa. Termed the *Nayda* movement, Moroccan artists reappropriated and redefined American hip-hop shortly after the death of the late king Hassan II in 1999. *Nayda* began as a festival movement in the 1990s with Casablanca's *L'Boulevard*, the largest annual music festival for young local musicians in Morocco. According to Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine, *Nayda* resulted from "outbursts of violence" from Casablanca's disenchanted youth population of the time. From this group of new activists came burgeoning hip-hop artists who began to "position their narrative space on the margins of society, disseminating their lyrics through cyberspace."¹⁰⁹

During these festivals, "the modern state allowed *L'Boulevard* to be a space of free speech with limited government censorship." The festival atmosphere allowed for the dissolution of normal social relationships, religious rules and structural hierarchies by providing a large crowd format for public dissent.¹¹⁰ In a concert setting, criticism is allowed under the guise of artistic expression, men and women intermingle in crowds largely unmonitored, and attendees largely outnumber security and police forces. Created in the wake of *L'Boulevard* was a new public area in which artists and non-artists alike could speak out against the government with relatively little impunity. By testing the boundaries of permitted public gatherings, particularly in its open criticism of Morocco's monarchy, the *Nayda* movement can be credited as the first of its kind in North Africa.

Palestinian Rap

On the other side of Mediterranean, Palestinian resistance rap erupted out of the Levant in the early 2000s, formally beginning with the rap crew DAM and its 2001 single "*Meen Irhabi?*" (or "Who Is the Terrorist?"). Rapping in Arabic and Hebrew, DAM combined Arabic instrumentation and melodies with sampled speeches by Nasser and

¹⁰⁹ Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine, *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 170-171.

¹¹⁰ See the following documentary for more on Moroccan hip-hop festival culture in the early 2000s: Jennifer Needleman and Joshua Asen, *I [heart] hip-hop in Morocco: Peace, love, hip-hop*, Motion Picture, (CA: Rizz Productions, 2008).

works by poets such as Israeli Arab Tawfiq Zayyad.¹¹¹ In doing so, the group created a new platform for critiquing the Israeli government and engendered a unique hip-hop sound. Following in DAM's footsteps have been PR (Palestinian Rapperz), NWR, the Ramallah Underground, and DJ Lethal Skillz, performers spread across the Levant who promote unity across the Palestinian diaspora with politically charged rap in multiple dialects.¹¹²

When considering the appropriation of American hip-hop within the Arab activist context, we must realize the interflows of resistance between marginalized regions and people of this time. As Nouri Gana makes clear in his analysis of Arab rap, the global spread of hip hop and rap comes from an "emergence of a transnational vision of emancipation that has invariably resonated with oppressed peoples across the world."¹¹³ It is this experience of resistance that enabled the flows of Arab hip-hop across national boundaries. As the old home of both Arab music and politics, Egypt was perfectly situated to receive this musical energy from its regional counterparts. Adopting the Arab hip-hop legacy and transforming *shaabi* into its more controversial partner, *mahraganat*, Egyptian musicians rallied against Mubarak's regime with styles all their own.

Egyptian *Mahraganat* Emerges

The aforementioned regional genres developing across the MENA region foreshadowed much of what would come for the Arab world in the next few years, both artistically and politically. Young people were pushing the boundaries, seeing just how far they could push their governments and censorship laws, and Egypt's youth was no exception. In the mid-2000s a new development in *shaabi* called *mahraganat* brought unexpected changes to popular music that arguably played out in Tahrir Square. Combining elements of hip-hop, Auto-tuned pop, and its predecessor *shaabi*, *mahraganat* sounds like a messy rave, yet some lyrics hit more saliently than expected from a pop genre. Broaching topics as broad as the price of a cellphone bill to the rampant drug use of Egypt's poor youth populations, *mahraganat* presents a startling reality. At the time of its inception, *mahraganat* artists were telling Mubarak, "This is what your policies have done to us," all over a highly processed techno beat.

A make-do type of music

The word *mahraganat* means festival in Arabic, but it can also refer to an extravagant or loud event, one that can be both immensely happy and messy.¹¹⁴ That is exactly the type of event in which *mahraganat* music thrives. *Mahraganat* has built upon the traditions of *shaabi* and infused it with stronger beats and even more Auto-tune. *Mahraganat* frequently draws upon Egyptian wedding music, snippets of American hip-

¹¹¹ Sunaina Maira, "'We Ain't Missing': Palestinian Hip Hop—A Transnational Youth Movement," from *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8 (2008) 2: 177-178, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41949598>.

¹¹² Ted Swedenburg, "Palestinian Rap," in *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook*, eds. Walid el Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman, (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹¹³ Nouri Gana, "Rap and Revolt in the Arab World," from *Social Text* 30 (2012) 4: 27, accessed March 26, 2015, doi: 10.1215/01642472-1725784.

¹¹⁴ Andeel, "You just got mahraganed: There's no getting away from the sound," *Mada Masr*, Blog, September 22, 2013, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/culture/you-just-got-mahraganed>.

hop, and “whatever else its creators can download for free online.”¹¹⁵ Much like its *shaabi* predecessor, the style also relies on local and street Arabic, with much of its earlier songs focused primarily on hashish, police brutality, and complicated, sexual relationships.

By this point in Egyptian musical history, these topics, though not approved of by upper crust and traditional audiences, were not uncommon. *Mahraganat*'s lyrical appeal, according to music studio founder Mahmoud Refaat, lies in its honesty; whereas *shaabi* artists of the 80s and 90s “just sang about love and hair,” *mahraganat* got to the issues plaguing average Egyptians.¹¹⁶ *Mahraganat* stands apart, in all aspects, by the ingenuity required to create it. Relying upon pirated music software and modest computers, *mahraganat* artists such as Amr Haha (stylized Amr 7a7a) created a completely new music with very little technology. It is this background of improvisation and touches of the local that have come to characterize the genre and the rebellious sentiments that have accompanied its rise.

Conceptualized by DJs Figo, Sadat, and Alaa 50 Cent in the outskirts of Cairo, *mahraganat* can be traced back to as early as 2007.¹¹⁷ This impromptu town, Medinat al-Salam, has been essential to the *mahraganat* identity. Medinat al-Salam was constructed by the Egyptian army to house over 50,000 Egyptians left homeless after a catastrophic earthquake in 1992, and has since become a home to Cairo's “underworld,” with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and crime.¹¹⁸ *Mahraganat* was first played mostly at *shaabi* weddings and street festivals in these types of informal neighborhoods. As one of Cairo's poorest neighborhoods, Medinat al-Salam exemplifies the socioeconomic discrepancies of Mubarak's Egypt. A disproportionately large youth population dominates the town and their concerns have been expressed through this new style in unprecedented fashion. The age-old idea of music as a force that unites across socioeconomic boundaries does not quite apply to Medinat. For Egypt's struggling neighborhoods, abstract concepts of love and religious devotion could not properly address their lived experiences. The broader themes of Egypt's classical music lose impact when scores of Egyptians cannot provide for themselves. Seen in the festival atmosphere and lyricisms of artists like DJ Figo and Sadat, *mahraganat* got down to the grit of the modern Egyptian experience.

¹¹⁵ Ben Hubbard, “Out of Egypt's Chaos, Musical Rebellion,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2013, accessed March 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/world/middleeast/egypts-chaos-stirs-musical-revolution.html?_r=0.

¹¹⁶ Patrick Kingsley, “Cairo's street music mahraganat both divides and unites,” *The Guardian*, May 9, 2014, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/09/egypt-cairo-street-music-mahraganat-grime>.

¹¹⁷ Maha El-Nabawi, “Egypt's Mahraganat Music Mania,” *British Council: Music*, March 20, 2014, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://music.britishcouncil.org/news-and-features/2014-03-20/egypts-mahraganat-music-mania-0>.

¹¹⁸ Mosa'ab Elshamy, “‘Mahraganat’: New Hybrid Music Wave Sweeps Egypt,” *Al-Monitor*, May 2013, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/egypt-new-music-mahraganat-sadat-electro-shaabi.html>.

Featured in a *New York Times* article covering the rising genre, *mahraganat* artists Okka and Ortega, represent in many ways the unconventional paths that lead to *mahraganat*. Starting out as rappers, the pair used to record their raps about their neighborhood on pay-by-the-hour Internet cafe computers. Recording their first *mahraganat* song as a joke, Okka and Ortega “were surprised when it spread: soon after, a cart blasting the song passed them on the street. They bought a computer for \$400 so they could record at home” and included their names in their following songs to avoid copyright infringement.¹¹⁹ These were not professionally trained musicians choosing to sing about a new angle of the Egyptian experience.

Mahraganat artists did not make music with a political agenda. To them, they were simply singing about their daily lives and the troubles surrounding them. Skepticisms toward “middle-class pieties, including even nationalism and the revolutionary tradition” were not tropes deployed for revolution but rather expressions of mistrust after years of manipulation by the government.¹²⁰ These issues, though, were predominantly overlooked by the Mubarak administration and struck a chord with many Egyptians. *Mahraganat*’s truth to the unglamorous Egyptian life soon appealed to audiences outside of Medinat el-Salam and provided the discontent young masses with another weapon of expression against Mubarak.

¹¹⁹ Hubbard.

¹²⁰ Ted Swedenburg, “Egypt’s Music of Protest: From Sayyid Darwish to DJ Haha,” in *Middle East Research and Information Project* 258 (2015), 3, accessed March 26, 2015, http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-music-protest?ip_login_no_cache=f2a8eb4ad1bc6a893e858f25493a52d0.

Chapter 5 – Rebellion Rings Out

President Mubarak reigned over Egypt without public contest for almost twenty years. Smaller and more extremist groups occasionally challenged his administration, but Mubarak's firm handle on most critical discourse kept the average Egyptian silent, at least in public. The eve of his fifth election, however, young Egyptians began to voice their frustrations with Mubarak's state of emergency and domination of all "democratic" elections. Though technically elected democratically to his four previous six-year terms, Mubarak ruled with no contest thanks to the system of Parliamentary nomination and confirmation by referendum. Credited by some as the beginning of the Arab Spring that soon after overcame the Middle East, the *Kefaya* movement broke the seemingly impenetrable silence around Mubarak's regime. Young Egyptians, united under the movement title "*Kefaya*" (or "Enough" in Arabic), aimed to change this.¹²¹

***Kefaya* Calls for Change**

Also known as "Youth For Change," *Kefaya* was a "coalition of political parties united by their demand for shift in the balance of power" that brought together communist, nationalist, and Islamist members.¹²² Unprecedented in its appeal to all types of Egyptians, *Kefaya* signaled a change for Egyptian politics.¹²³ Diverse as the country may be, differences would be put aside to guarantee fair elections and an end to Mubarak's tyranny. Mobilizing through online information technology, *Kefaya* focused its dissemination strategy first on bloggers, then the general public, and lastly on local and international media.¹²⁴ By utilizing new forms of communication and maintaining a simple, appealing message – enough of the regime – *Kefaya* eventually succeeded in obtaining a constitutional referendum on election laws. This 2005 amendment came into effect just before Mubarak's fifth election, allowing for the first multi-party race in postcolonial Egyptian history.¹²⁵ The *Kefaya* demonstrations brought down the wrath of the Mubarak government with constant threats and public attacks on the protestors.¹²⁶ Leading up to the election, the government harassed Mubarak's opposing candidate, Ayman Nour, and jailed political dissenters.¹²⁷ Fraudulent election tactics, as well the retribution anticipated from a vote against the President, ultimately garnered Mubarak his fifth reelection.

¹²¹ Heather Sharp, "Egypt's Young Call for Change," *BBC News*, August 3, 2005, accessed March 27, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4709011.stm.

¹²² Nadia Oweidat, *The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, National Defense Research Institute, 2008), 11.

¹²³ For a full analysis of the rise and trajectory of the movement, see Manar Shorbagy, "Understanding Kefaya: The New Politics in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 29 (2007) 1, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41859016>.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁵ Neil Macfarquhar, "Egypt Approves Election Law That Critics Say Favors Mubarak," *New York Times*, May 10, 2005, accessed March 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/10/international/africa/10cnd-egypt.html?_r=0.

¹²⁶ "Egypt: Calls for Reform Met with Brutality," *Human Rights Watch*, May 26, 2005, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2005/05/25/egypt-calls-reform-met-brutality>.

¹²⁷ "Elections in Egypt: State of Permanent Emergency Incompatible with Free and Fair Vote," *Human Rights Watch*, December 2010, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt1110WebforPosting.pdf>.

The *Kefaya* movement eventually faded out of the international spotlight, primarily due to inter-organizational disputes, but the impact of the movement persisted. Though changes did not occur as drastically or effectively as *Kefaya*'s leaders may have wanted, the Egyptian public saw now that they could organize and produce results. Challenging the regime, terrifying though it must have been, was finally an option after years of democratic oppression. The sentiments of *Kefaya* remained in the collective Egyptian memory, and were only the beginning of Mubarak's long and turbulent downfall.

A Spring Erupts

On December 17, 2010, Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest his mistreatment by a municipal official and the larger injustices of unemployment under then-President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. His name now known all over the world, Bouazizi's controversial self-immolation is seen as one of the primary catalysts of the Arab Spring.^{128, 129} A revolutionary movement that spread across the Arab world in demand of democracy and socioeconomic reform, the Arab Spring protests captured global attention.¹³⁰ Throughout the course of the movement, rulers were deposed in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia; Bahrain and Syria exploded in civil uprisings; and major protests were seen in seven countries, including Morocco, Jordan, and Iraq. Tunisian activists were the first to overthrow their dictator, with Ben Ali fleeing to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011.^{131, 132} Egypt, however, was next to follow.

Entire volumes of literature can and have been devoted to the Arab Spring and its impacts. I seek to present the events of Tahrir Square through their musical narrative. This chapter breaks down the different musics of this moment in time to better understand how Egyptians were mobilized against such a long-standing and powerful military regime. There were many paths and motivations that led to Mubarak's downfall. By focusing on Tahrir Square's music, I aim to explore just one of the countless ways in which revolution was ultimately achieved. Tahrir Square played host to the transition of *mahraganat* to the political sphere and a renaissance and repurposing of nationalist folk music; Tahrir's musicians exemplified the attitude of the Revolution. In producing a music that was finally accessible to the average Egyptian, these artists achieved an emotional effect not too distant from the *tarab* with which we began.

¹²⁸ Salman Shaikh, "Mohamed Bouazizi: A fruit seller's legacy to the Arab people," *CNN*, December 17, 2011, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/16/world/meast/bouazizi-arab-spring-tunisia/>.

¹²⁹ Peter Beaumont, "Mohammed Bouazizi: the dutiful son whose death changed Tunisia's fate," *The Guardian*, January 20, 2011, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/20/tunisian-fruit-seller-mohammed-bouazizi>.

¹³⁰ Roger Hardy, "Egypt protests: an Arab spring as old order crumbles?" *BBC News*, February 2, 2011, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12339521>.

¹³¹ "A Dictator Deposed," *The Economist Online*, January 15, 2011, accessed March 26, 2015, http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2011/01/tunisias_troubles.

¹³² Angelique Chrisafis and Ian Black, "Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali forced to flee Tunisia as protesters claim victory," *The Guardian*, January 15, 2011, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/14/tunisian-president-flees-country-protests>.

The protest timeline

Known now as the Day of Revolt, Tuesday January 25, 2011 marked Egypt's first day of reckoning. Protests erupted in Alexandria, Suez, Ismailia, and most famously, Cairo's Tahrir Square.¹³³ Political activist groups ranging from the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood to liberal grassroots campaigns like *Kefaya* organized the protests to coincide with National Police Day in a show against police brutality. Used as a vehicle for expressing a multiplicity of frustrations with Mubarak's administration, the protests showed signs early in its first twenty-four hours that the gathering would not be a peaceful demonstration. Three were found dead from clashes with the police, and the next day brought with it the police's introduction of rubber bullets, tear gas, and concussion grenades against the people.¹³⁴ By the "Friday of Anger," tens of thousands of protesting Egyptians filled the Cairene streets.¹³⁵

Interactions between police and protestors escalated to looting and police vehicles set afire, which ultimately led Mubarak to deploy the military and suspend national public internet.¹³⁶ Mubarak announced police-enforced curfews, but this did not hinder the public. At that point over 50,000 protestors occupied Tahrir Square.¹³⁷ By January 30, the police were permitted to use live ammunition against the protestors; they refused the order, however, out of a sense of duty to protect their intended charges, the 250,000 Egyptians who now owned the Square.¹³⁸

The following week garnered more violence, more international attention, more protestors.¹³⁹ Over two million protestors gathered in Tahrir Square on February 10, 2011 in expectation of an announcement of Mubarak's departure. Yet Mubarak responded with a plan to step down only at the end of his term.¹⁴⁰ Egypt erupted in anger and frustration at Mubarak's refusal to leave office, storming his palace as well as state radio and news stations.¹⁴¹ That evening, Vice President Suleiman announced Mubarak's resignation and

¹³³ "Egypt protests: Three killed in 'day of revolt'," *BBC News*, January 26, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12272836>.

¹³⁴ Kareem Fahim and Mona el-Naggar, "Violent Clashes Mark Protests Against Mubarak's Rule," *New York Times*, January 25, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/world/middleeast/26egypt.html>.

¹³⁵ "Fresh protests erupt in Egypt," *Al-Jazeera English*, January 28, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112810059478272.html>.

¹³⁶ "Military out in Cairo," *Al-Jazeera English*, January 28, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/2011128151048463975.html>.

¹³⁷ "Live blog 29/1 – Egypt protests," *Al-Jazeera English*, January 29, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/middle-east/live-blog-291-egypt-protests>.

¹³⁸ "Egypt unrest: Protesters hold huge Cairo demonstration," *BBC News*, February 1, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12331520>.

¹³⁹ "Egypt protesters increase pressure," *Al-Jazeera English*, January 31, 2015, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/20111316148317175.html>.

¹⁴⁰ CNN Wire Staff, "Mubarak's refusal to step down enrages protesters," *CNN News*, February 11, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/02/10/egypt.protests/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

¹⁴¹ Robert Mackey, "Updates on Day 18 of Egypt Protests," *New York Times*, February 11, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/latest-updates-on-day-18-of-egypt-protests/?hp&_r=0.

officially conceded governance powers to the army council.¹⁴² Tahrir Square rang out with celebration, ready to see a new Egypt take shape.¹⁴³

Tahrir's Collective Culture

The hundreds of thousands of Egyptians who gathered during these eighteen days gained overwhelming power not only through their demands but also in their presence as an indivisible unit. One does not need to be a scholar of Middle Eastern politics, or politics at all, to revel in the phenomenon of two million people agreeing on anything. Protestors came from myriad identities: bourgeois kids who ideologically opposed Mubarak's military industrial complex, activists who called for total anarchy, Islamists who wanted *sharia* law imposed. Some thought the regime needed to provide more equitable rights for women; others wanted food subsidies and more government aid. The solutions offered differed depending on the protestor, but all agreed that something had to change.

As such, Tahrir Square was "elevated from a rally site to a model for an alternative society," where a "spirit of mutual aid prevailed," with food, blankets, and first aid clinics open to anyone in need.¹⁴⁴ The Square attracted Egyptians from every walk of life and created a unique umbrella under which a new national identity could be constructed. After years of socioeconomic divisions imposed by Sadat's and Mubarak's neoliberalism, Egyptians found common ground again, even if only for a few weeks. Decades of fear and silence gave way to a collective, ecstatic shout.

It is this expression of self that I examine here, focusing on just a few of the countless works of art that were manifested in and after Tahrir Square. The music of Tahrir may first appear to be an over-consideration of minutia, especially in comparison to the politics, violence, and international diplomacy surrounding those tense days. When examining the trajectory of Egypt's national identity, however, no medium gives quite the same perspective as music. Consider any gathering of people, may it be a party, a ceremony, a rally. In almost every instance, there is shared music. The collective is drawn by the literal union of voices, including those that otherwise may not feel their perspectives heard in the larger group. Tahrir's music allowed each Egyptian to feel a part of the rebellion, and consequently a part of a new Egypt. Below I investigate the types of the musics made in Tahrir and the ways in which this sense of the collective continued into the idyllic Egypt protestors were trying to create. Ted Swedenburg encapsulates the power of this protest music quite adeptly:

The protest music at Tahrir was not a soundtrack, not a reflection, not a commentary or a report on events, but something integrally tied to and embedded within the social movement. Musicians on the square for the most part performed a repertoire that the crowds could sing along with, a body of songs that connected the artists and their audience to a history of

¹⁴² "Hosni Mubarak resigns as president," *Al-Jazeera English*, February 11, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121125158705862.html>.

¹⁴³ David D. Kirkpatrick, "Egypt Erupts in Jubilation as Mubarak Steps Down," *New York Times*, February 11, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/world/middleeast/12egypt.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Ahmad Shokr, "The 18 Days of Tahrir," from *Middle East Report* 258 (2011): 15, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41408000>.

struggle. Or they composed ditties on the spot, in the heat of events. The purpose of musical performance at Tahrir was to move the crowds (and the musicians themselves) into a sentimental or affective state, such as anger, mourning, nostalgia or patience, or to unify the crowds in a state that Durkheim has called ‘collective effervescence.’ A song’s meanings therefore were not just already inherent in the lyrics and melody or in the associated memories and resonances, but they also forged in performance, at charged political moments.¹⁴⁵

The music of the square

The strength of Tahrir’s musical landscape during those days of occupation derived from both the sincerity and the variety of music performed. Groups ranging from folk collectives to one-man singer-songwriters to *mahraganat* DJs managed to create a cohesive, enchanting soundscape for Egyptians.¹⁴⁶ Though each style brought its own voice to the building frustrations against Mubarak, this coalition of Tahrir musicians all hit upon shared ideals for a better Egypt.

Hailing from Port Said, the traditional folk collective El Tanbura was among the most visible and influential musical groups camped in Tahrir Square. First formed in 1978 by Zakariyya Ahmad, El Tanbura plays in the *suhbagiyya* style, a genre unique to Port Said and its historical struggles that relies heavily on the *simsimiyya*, or lyre.¹⁴⁷ Port Said, a major city along the Suez Canal, is prominently remembered as the site of the 1956 Suez War, Nasser’s crowning military achievement.¹⁴⁸ Music coming from this region, and from this group more specifically, possesses a strong revolutionary heritage and for many Egyptians represents the power of a unified Egyptian spirit. Thus, when El Tanbura performed songs such as “Patriotic Port Said” on a makeshift stage for the Tahrir crowds, lyrics like “In patriotic Port Said / Youth of the popular resistance defended with virtue and virility / And fought the army of occupation / Congratulations, O Gamal” rang with historical pride and a deeply rebellious spirit.¹⁴⁹ During the occupation of Tahrir, many songs of this Port Said repertoire were revisited, invoking a patriotism linked with Nasser and the successes of his revolutionary spirit.¹⁵⁰

Additionally, the Square’s revisiting of old repertoire extended past folk music, as seen by the re-popularization of *shaabi* pop star Mohamed Mounir’s “Izzayy?” (or, “Why?”) during the revolution. Coming out of Mounir’s personal anger against the government, “Ezzai” speaks to what Mounir identifies as the “unrequited love between Egypt and its citizens.”¹⁵¹ Intended for an earlier December 2010 release, the song was

¹⁴⁵ Swedenburg, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Caspar Llewellyn Smith, “Soundtrack to the Arab revolutions,” *The Guardian*, February 27, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2011/feb/27/arab-revolutions-protest-music>.

¹⁴⁷ “El Tanbura,” *El-Mastaba Center for Egyptian Folk Music*, 2014, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.el-mastaba.org/el-tanbura.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Derek Varble, *The Suez Crisis 1956*, (London: Osprey, 2003).

¹⁴⁹ Translated lyrics from Swedenburg, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Mairi Mackay, “Tahrir Square musicians keep revolutionary spirit alive,” *CNN*, July 26, 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/07/26/egypt.revolution.music/>.

¹⁵¹ Banning Eyre and Sean Barlow, “Mohamed Mounir: Egyptian Pop Legend on The Revolution in Egypt,” *Afropop Worldwide*, July 2011, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.afropop.org/1976/mohamed-mounir/>.

originally banned by the government and was first broadcast on television during the protests. The music video immediately went viral and the song became a standard of Tahrir Square. Tahrir's resistance folk music did not, however, arrive only from older repertoires and performers, as shown by the rise of young singer-songwriter, Rami Essam.

Composing his music with lyrics compiled from Tahrir protest slogans, singer Rami Essam made a name for himself in the Square by leading Egyptians in songs that felt like their own. Set to a “catchy simply melody of unplugged, grunge-style guitar chords,” Essam's “Irhal” (or, “Leave”) exploded on YouTube and marked Essam as Egypt's singer of the revolution.¹⁵² Much of the art coming out of Tahrir Square was made by young musicians for young audiences, yet music like Essam's found an accepting crowd amongst all protestors. In an interview with CNN, Essam explains that, to his surprise, “everyone related to [his songs]” because they “were mocking the system and giving people a reason to laugh and get through time at Tahrir Square.”¹⁵³ Many critics have compared Essam and his music with the leftist folk music from Woodstock and other “hippie” movements of the 1960s. That alignment does not consider contextual differences, particularly in risk involved for the performer – artists like Joan Baez and Billy Bragg did not fall subject to official military torture as Essam did shortly following the premiere of “Irhal.”¹⁵⁴ These musicians certainly do, however, share an essence of communal criticism that grabs onto a national audience with infectious spirit.

The revolution carries on

Certain acoustic styles, such as those described above, lend themselves quite easily to impromptu public performances and adapt well to the needs of a changing audience. Not as mobile as folk styles, *mahraganat*, and even heavy metal, was not rewarded for its rebelliousness until after the gatherings of Tahrir dissipated and Mubarak left office.¹⁵⁵ The protests achieved one of Egyptians' primary goals – the ousting of Mubarak – but the heavy lifting of actual, concrete sociopolitical change had only begun.

Shortly after Mubarak's overthrow *mahraganat*'s DJ Sadat began releasing songs distinctly more political in nature. Titles including “The People and the Government,” “The People Demand Five Pounds of Phone-Credit,” and “Hit on Her, Yes. Harass Her, No.” addressed the movement itself and other hot-button topics including sexual harassment. “The People and the Government” resounds as a clear depiction of Tahrir Square and all its atrocities. Written during the protests, Sadat narrates the Square, offering to “talk about those standing, the survivors and the dead / I'll talk about the church, the mosque and the Brotherhood.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Ted Swedenburg, “Troubadours of Revolt,” from *Middle East Report* 258 (2011): 18, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41408000>.

¹⁵³ Mackay.

¹⁵⁴ Swedenburg, “Troubadours,” 18.

¹⁵⁵ For more on Egypt's burgeoning heavy metal scene, look to Mark LeVine's *Heavy Metal Islam*, or his interview with Afropop: Banning Eyre, “Mark LeVine on Music and the Egyptian Revolution,” January 2012, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.afropop.org/2313/mark-levine-on-music-and-the-egyptian-revolution/>.

¹⁵⁶ Kevin Perry, “Mahraganat Lets Egyptians Say the Unsayable,” *Vice*, January 27, 2014, accessed April 2, 2015, http://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/blog/youneedtohearthis-cairo-underground-dance-scene.

Other songs like, “The People Demand Five Pounds of Phone-Credit” speak to the reality of the aftermath of revolution. By adapting the “The People Demand...” slogan of Tahrir, Sadat criticizes both the movement itself and the government that promised change yet still does not economically support its people. This shifted focus on the state does not necessarily show a pandering to the revolutionary sentiment that many outside listeners have come to expect of Egyptian music. Rather, everything in Egypt became political once the people were mobilized and able to express themselves without fear of Mubarak’s censorship.

Conclusions

When the years, months, and days leading up to Tahrir Square ring of music both new and traditional, lascivious and pious, acoustic and highly manufactured, it can be difficult to understand where Egypt’s music scene will travel. Who and what is the voice of Egypt? The music of the Tahrir Square protests represents a country at a crossroads between a long history of military repression and hope of a freer, more livable democracy. In this moment of national panic, Egyptians played every song in their arsenal and in doing so achieved in many ways what *tarab* always promised but never quite delivered. Indeed, classical Arab music encouraged an outburst of feeling and expression, but only to the audiences that could access it, both economically and educationally. Tahrir Square in many ways invoked this old style of feeling for music but allowed all of Egypt to participate. In Egypt’s Arab Spring *tarab* was invited back into Egypt, not necessarily with all its *takhts* and Qur’anic verses but rather with the astounding emotionalism of a people united in wanting more for themselves. At Tahrir Square, Egypt found a moment of its Golden Era again.

Conclusion

From Umm Kulthum's timeless *tarab* to the pounding dance beats of *mahraganat*, this thesis has sought to unpack Egypt's postcolonial presidencies through the artists of their time. Nasser brought a socialist Golden Era, though more in sentiment than in action. Sadat propelled Egypt into a neoliberal, global economy and the country soon felt the aches of cosmopolitanism and bureaucratic corruption. Mubarak established a military empire that suppressed its people for three decades, inciting one of the Arab Spring's largest revolutions. Throughout each of these presidencies, artists have responded to the sentiments of the people, some capturing the joys of freedom, others the grim realities of inequality. In all instances, Egypt's musicians have sung the people's stories. Where history has been mediated by politics and nostalgia, Egyptian music has presented an honest narrative of postcoloniality.

This study stops history short, ending with Tahrir Square and Mubarak's downfall in 2011 – moments of hope after years of oppression and struggle. In my final chapter, I align Tahrir Square with the Golden Era of Nasser's long-gone socialism. Hindsight, however, tells us that while Tahrir's energies achieved some change, most was devastatingly ephemeral. After multiple popular protests and overthrows, Egypt seems to have settled back into its old ways. The military apparatus so solid, the hold of capitalist investment so strong, the Egypt of present-day looks all too familiar. Little has changed under President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, and the idea of revolution becomes increasingly obsolete with every passing day. Tahrir, it seems, was only a Golden moment.

When I first chose to spend a year writing about Egyptian music, I expected to use music as a vehicle for processing my own theories on nationalism and revolution. Throughout this process, however, I have come to realize how little we can speculate as to the future of the postcolonial state. The national process of moving forward after decades – centuries, even – of Western oppression is not so easily charted. An Adawiya tune or Abdel Wahhab lyric cannot foreshadow a future that countless countries are struggling every day to imagine for themselves. What these songs can offer, though, is a glimpse into the subtleties of postcoloniality, the fine print of nation-building. I have studied Egypt's music because it expresses the stories unwritten, the details unexamined. Moving forward, I hope to listen more closely to the music around me. May change come in a month or in a century, the songs of the people will lead the revolution.

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