

Song, State, Sawa

Music and Political Radio between the US and Syria

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a study of popular music and state-controlled radio broadcasting in the Arabic-speaking world, focusing on Syria and the Syrian radioscape, and a set of American stations named Radio Sawa. I examine American and Syrian politically directed broadcasts as multi-faceted objects around which broadcasters and listeners often differ not only in goals, operating assumptions, and political beliefs, but also in how they fundamentally conceptualize the practice of listening to the radio.

Beginning with the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East, I analyze the institutional theories under which music is employed as a tool of American and Syrian policy, the imagined youths to whom the musical messages are addressed, and the actual sonic content tasked with political persuasion.

At the reception side of the broadcaster-listener interaction, this dissertation addresses the auditory practices, histories of radio, and theories of music through which listeners in the sonic environment of Damascus, Syria create locally relevant meaning out of music and radio. Drawing on theories of listening and communication developed in historical musicology and ethnomusicology, science and technology studies, and recent transnational ethnographic and media studies, as well as on theories of listening developed in the Arabic public discourse about popular music, my dissertation outlines the intersection of the hypothetical listeners defined by the US and Syrian governments in their efforts to use music for political ends, and the actual people who turn on the radio to hear the music.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	ii
List of Tables.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Learning to Broadcast.....	52
Chapter 2: Damascus Radioscape.....	97
Chapter 3: Popular Music in Syrian Mass Media Discourse.....	153
Chapter 4: Radio Sawa, Sonic Consumerism, and Western Music in the Syrian Radioscape.....	232
Chapter 5: <i>Idhā 'at Sawa</i> and Asymmetric Music Politics.....	302
Chapter 6: Conclusion - Sound Shifts in the Syrian Uprisings.....	340
Epilogue.....	365
Bibliography.....	370
Glossary.....	400
Appendix 1.....	402
Appendix 2.....	404
Appendix 3.....	405

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 RCA advertisement “Freedom to Listen, Freedom to Look”	57
Figure 1.2 Hypothetical broadcast radii for powerful AM stations – US	61
Figure 1.3 Hypothetical broadcast radii for powerful AM stations – Europe	61
Figure 1.4 Arabic broadcasts by country of origin	69
Figure 1.5 Memorandum to the Deputy Director of the CIA regarding Radio Free Europe	90
Figure 1.6 Memorandum to the Deputy Director of the CIA regarding Radio Free Europe (cont.)	91
Figure 2.1 Makhlouf phone book cartoon (<i>Al Domari</i>)	117
Figure 2.2 Version FM Logo and Website Banner	138
Figure 2.3 Virgin FM Jordan Logo	139
Figure 2.4 Elissa, “ <i>A Bālī Ḥabībī</i> ” first phrase	149
Figure 3.1 Syrian Radio Song Contest 2011 (Arabic)	161
Figure 3.2 Syrian Radio Song Contest 2011 (translation)	163
Figure 3.3 Melodic Line from Ziad Rahbani’s “ <i>Talfan ‘Ayyāsh</i> ”	194
Figure 3.4 Doubled Line from Ziad Rahbani’s “ <i>Talfan ‘Ayyāsh</i> ”	194
Figure 3.5 Tripled Line from Ziad Rahbani’s “ <i>Talfan ‘Ayyāsh</i> ”	195
Figure 3.6 Full Chorus from Ziad Rahbani’s “ <i>Talfan ‘Ayyāsh</i> ”	195
Figure 3.7 Lena Chamamyān, “ <i>A-Rōsānā</i> ” First Chorus	210
Figure 3.8 Lena Chamamyān, “ <i>A-Rōsānā</i> ” Ending	212
Figure 3.9 “Tradition,” Randall Monroe, XKCD.com	219
Figure 3.10 Graphic representation of Version FM’s playlist	228
Figure 3.11 Graphic representation of Ṣawt Ash-Shabāb’s playlist	229
Figure 4.1 Unduplicated Weekly Reach of Radio Sawa (BBG Report)	242
Figure 4.2 Map of Middle East Broadcasting Network of target audience region and degree of press freedom.	243
Figure 4.3 Language Percentage by Song Frequency	262
Figure 4.4 Graphic Representation of Radio Sawa’s Levant playlist	265

Figure 4.5	<i>Org</i> introduction to Nancy Ajram’s “ <i>Saḥr ‘Uyūnu</i> ”	281
Figure 4.6	“Like a Virgin”, played on an electric keyboard as the underscoring for the Radio Damascus program “ <i>Tashri ‘at Jadīda</i> ”	283
Figure 4.7	Dabke rhythm in Tony Hanna’s “ <i>Ṭāl as-Sahir</i> ”	285
Figure 4.8	Straight eighth-note rhythm from the introduction to Hayek and Hanna’s “ <i>Ṭāl as-Sahir</i> ”	285
Figure 4.9	Syncopated rhythmic pattern of Nassif Zeytoun’s “ <i>Wenweit</i> ”	287
Figure 4.10	Rhythmic transcription from Lil Wayne’s “Up and Way”, produced by Timbaland	289
Figure 4.11	The lyrics from Brian Adams’ “Everything I Do” as heard by a listener with limited English	290
Figure 4.12	Elissa “ <i>A Bālī Ḥabībī</i> ” first phrase	291
Figure 4.13	Graphic Representation of Radio Sawa’s Levant playlist	296
Figure 4.14	Graphic Representation of a typical private station playlist in Syria	297
Figure 5.1	Kulna Sawa, “ <i>Ana Irhābī</i> ” melody	321
Figure 5.2	Ending guitar solo on “ <i>Ana Irhābī</i> ”	321
Figure 6.1	Screenshot of the “Top 5 Songs” Al-Madina FM website (English page). March 22, 2012	353
Figure 6.2	Screenshot of “Top 5 Songs” from the website of Al-Madina FM . June 5, 2012 (same five songs listed)	354
Figure 6.3	Graphic Representation of a typical pre-2011 playlist on Syrian private radio	358
Figure 6.4	Graphic Representation of a playlist on Syrian private radio in 2012	359

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Top 5 Songs on Rotana Style FM Syria, May 3 rd 2010.	113
Table 3.1 Weekly Program for Version FM, as of May 2012, Sunday-Tuesday	166
Table 3.2 Weekly program for Version Radio, as of May 2012, Wednesday-Saturday	167
Table 4.1 Radio Sawa broadcasting sites	241
Table 4.2 An hour of Radio Sawa programming, 11-12am Beirut time, 11 January 2012	253
Table 4.3 Description of an hour of Radio Sawa Programming	254
Table 4.4 Playlist Breakdown by Artist Country of Origin	260
Table 4.5 Twelve songs in the high-rotation “Superhit” category on Radio Sawa	264

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2007, I sat with a group of young Yemeni men in a small town outside of Sanaa, chewing qat and drinking soda. I was visiting my Arabic teacher Mabkhout's hometown, and before heading up to his family's farm we stopped in to see a few of his childhood friends, the group of us all in our twenties except for a few of their young sons sitting quietly at the edge of the room, occasionally hopping up to fetch something for one of the adults.

The men valiantly attempted to include me in the conversation, but at that time my novice Arabic meant that after a question was directed my way, I would usually turn to Mabkhout for a translation from the everyday Yemeni dialect into my limited vocabulary of Modern Standard Arabic. The questions I picked out on my own were generally those which I had come to anticipate when meeting new people, and I answered them haltingly.

"Where are you from?" "Are you married?" "Why are you studying Arabic?"

"California, but I live in New York. No, I'm not married. I study Arabic because I am a music student, and I am interested in music and politics...umm...and political music."

"Arabic music?"

"Arabic music, and American music in the Middle East."

Struck by an idea, Ahmad, the man to my right, grabbed his phone out of a pocket, leaned over the cushion between us and held it out so that I could see the screen. After a few taps to find a file, we were looking at a clip of Michael Jackson, dressed in white suit and hat, dancing to "Smooth Criminal."

“Eddie are you okay? Are you okay Eddie?”

I assured him that I liked both the singer and the song, though I had always wondered who Eddie was, and he moved on to another video.

With another tap we were watching an excerpt from a speech by Saddam Hussein. The language mostly went over my head, but it was clearly a speech from just before the Second Iraq War. He let the video play for a moment before asking what I thought of Saddam. (He liked Saddam and thought it was terrible that he was executed on a holiday.) With help from Mabkhout, I explained that while I didn't personally think much of Saddam, I was against execution in general, and agreed with him on that point, adding that I thought Michael Jackson was a better singer.

Laughing at that, Ahmad tapped his phone a third time, and with a mischievous smile held it out to me as it played a video of the second plane crashing into the World Trade Center Towers. I pushed his hand away and began to object, but the man sitting to his right was quicker, hitting Ahmed lightly on the shoulder and admonishing him that the video was an inappropriate thing to show an American. Ahmed immediately apologized, stating that he didn't agree with the terrorists, and only wanted my opinion of the video. After a moment, the conversation moved on as other people took over, asking what I knew about Yemeni singers.

This awkward interaction, occurring before I had formulated any solid idea of what would eventually become my dissertation project, presented three of the quintessential images of the interaction between the US and the Arab World, recurring popular tropes of globalization and politics. Michael Jackson, the symbol of the globalization of American popular culture; Saddam Hussein and Iraq, the dictator and

country which suffered the brunt of the US of response to the attacks of September 11th; and the attacks themselves, the lens through which much of America viewed the modern Arab and Islamic World.¹

In the context of that sitting room, the video of the 9/11 attacks was less a political or historical document than it was a tool for social evaluation, a blunt method for Ahmed to assess the personality and affinities of the newcomer sitting next to him, sidestepping the linguistic obstacles. I recall this scene not because I think it grants any specific insight into the political lives of the Yemeni men I was sitting with, or into their relationship with the US, but because I am interested in the intersection of three facets of the US-Arab relationship implied by the three video clips: global cultural production and consumption (Jackson), the policies that arise in the context of globalized economies and ideologies (the Iraq War), and the lenses through which nations and peoples view one another (9/11).

The literature on globalization, and specifically on musical globalization, has had to deal on a fundamental level with the ways in which transnational and translocal forms of expressive culture simultaneously serve as expressions of power.² In the example of globalization which received the most early study from music scholars, the “World Music” industry, scholars such as Steven Feld, Louise Meintjies, Veit Erlmann and Timothy Taylor have addressed the ways in which the social and economic interactions which create that industry are fraught with exploitation and resistance, collusion and

¹ The attacks of September 11th have become a quintessential example in the literature on globalization. For example, Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: a Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) begins with a discussion of the attacks.

² See Martin Stokes, “Music and the Global Order,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (October 2004): 47–72,

compromise, and flows and eddies of power.³ This complicated landscape of cultural globalization belies the “flat earth” theory of some popular articulations of the phenomenon.⁴

In the context of studies of music and expressive culture, the word “power” is typically used in a Foucauldian sense, based on the understanding that social actors are constantly negotiating and renegotiating the terms of control and the definitions of reality in which that social life takes place.⁵ While this conception of power as the politics of everyday life is vital to the modern study of social practice, the literature on music and globalization has spent less time examining music in the context of the traditional sources of power: governments, political groups, and their organs of popular communication and control.

More specifically, the narratives of post-national, hybrid cultures emphasized by globalization studies sometimes miss the ways that state-run or state-influenced media remain central to the experience of news, entertainment, and music audiences across broad areas of the world. This is especially true in older media such as radio, where governments still exercise an enormous amount of control over the content of radio

³ See, for example, Steven Feld, “A Sweet Lullaby for World Music,” *Globalization* (2001): 189–216; Steven Feld, “From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: The Discourses and Practices of World Music and World Beat,” in *The Traffic in Culture* George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 96–126; Timothy Dean Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Timothy Dean Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World*, Refiguring American Music (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Louise Meintjes, “Paul Simon’s Graceland, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 1 (1990): 37–73; Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Veit Erlmann, “The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s,” *Public Culture* 8, (1996): 467–87.

⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: a Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

broadcasts. The US, for example, through the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), finances “one of the largest media organizations in the world” broadcasting radio and television in 59 languages to 100 countries. Although the BBG claims a weekly audience of 187 million listeners, the American public is almost entirely unaware of the content, and in some cases even the existence, of these overseas stations.⁶ Despite the lack of attention within the US to this outpouring of international media, together these outlets form a central aspect of what international relations scholars refer to as American “soft power.”⁷

This dissertation is a study of the use of music in politically motivated radio broadcasts in the Arabic-speaking world, focusing primarily on a set of American stations named Radio Sawa. Beginning with the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East, I analyze the content of the broadcasts and the institutional theories of music within which that content is employed. On the listening side, I situate these broadcasts in the Syrian radioscope, and specifically within the sonic environment of Damascus, Syria, examining the larger mediascape, listening practices, and public discourse about popular music within which political broadcasts are heard.⁸

⁶ Broadcasting Board of Governors, *Fiscal Year 2011 Performance and Accountability Report* (Washington, DC, 2012), 2.

⁷ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

⁸ The language of “scapes” is drawn from Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32. I discuss this concept in further detail below.

Radio Sawa and Musical Meaning

In 2002, the Bush administration replaced the Voice of America's 51-year-old Arabic-language service to the Middle East and North Africa with a new set of stations called *Radio Sawa* (Radio Together). Developed by the former CEO of the Westwood One radio corporation, and modeled on the American Top-40 radio format, the stations mix Arabic and English-language pop music with short news segments as part of an increased outreach to young people in the Arabic-speaking world following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Sawa, along with its sister satellite television station *Al Hurra*, was billed by its originators in the US Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) as a departure from the "ineffective" practices of the VOA Arabic service, and a way for the US to break through what then-BBG Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson called the "distorting filter of radio and television stations controlled by those hostile to the United States."⁹

Radio Sawa's dual mandate -- to capture the attention of Arab youth through music, and to move the needle of public opinion towards the United States and its policies -- requires both the conception of an imagined Arab listener as a receptive listening subject who is capable of being convinced or influenced in specific ways, and a utilitarian view of music that ascribes to it, at least in some limited sense, the power to convince that listener. In this way, the question of music's political utility rests on the communicative power of music, which raises the basic question of musical meaning, and the degree to which that meaning is the same for people on different ends of a mediated and asymmetrical act of musical communication. An examination of music broadcasting as political communication should then take into account the production, context and the

⁹ Testimony of Kenneth Y. Tomlinson. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *American Public Diplomacy and Islam*. 108th Congress, 1st session, February 27, 2003.

reception of a communicative act, while remaining cognizant that the meaning, and the political force, of that act may not play out for listeners as it is envisioned by broadcasters.

In describing the local media context for Radio Sawa, I examine American and Syrian politically directed broadcasts as multi-faceted objects around which broadcasters and listeners often differ not only in goals, operating assumptions, and political beliefs, but also in how they fundamentally conceptualize the practice of listening to the radio. On the production side of the interaction, my examination of political broadcasting is focused on the historically conditioned conception of music under which it has come to be utilized as a tool of American and Syrian policy, the imagined “Arab Youth” to which the music and news is addressed, and the musical and sonic content tasked with political persuasion.¹⁰ At the other end of the broadcaster-listener interaction, the dissertation addresses the auditory practices, theories of music, and technologies of listening by which radio listeners in Syria create locally relevant meaning out of music and radio. Drawing on theories of listening and communication developed in historical musicology and ethnomusicology, science and technology studies, and recent transnational ethnographic studies, as well as on the numerous theories of listening developed in the Arabic literature around music, poetry, media and religion, my dissertation attempts to outline the intersection of the hypothetical listeners defined by the U.S. government in its efforts to use music for political ends, and the actual people who turn on the radio to hear the music.

¹⁰ Ted Swedenburg has written about the “Imagined Youths” constructed in Western media analysis of the Middle East in “Imagined Youths,” *Middle East Report* 37, no. 245 (2007): 4–11.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 - Learning to Broadcast

This chapter traces the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East, focusing on the Cold War as the pivotal period for the development of American radio and cultural diplomacy. Here I argue that Radio Sawa is not an unprecedented departure from the history of US broadcasting, nor is the attitude presented by Radio Sawa a direct or subconscious projection of American capitalist values. Rather it is a learned posture towards radio broadcasting and music over the radio, one that grew out of the American narrative of the Cold War and the domestic history of American radio. Some of the US government's operating assumptions about the power of radio are contingent on the particular history of American radio as it contrasts with European or Middle Eastern radio, and the first section of this chapter addresses the reasons for that distinction and its significance for US radio culture. The second section describes the general history of international radio in the Middle East and the significance of the Cold War to the development of American international broadcasting. I focus particularly on 1956, the year of the Suez Crisis and a vital year in the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East, in order to describe the radio landscape and the position of US broadcasting within it.

Within that history, I read two basic theories of music's utility as a tool in politically directed media. The first theory views music as a communicative medium that includes semiotic content beyond its lyrics. In this framework, music is thought to illustrate, advocate, and instantiate the values and culture of the broadcasters, creating an

affinity between the listener and the broadcasting country. The second theory, which becomes more significant during and after the Cold War, conceives of music primarily as a medium of exchange, the currency with which listeners are induced to become audiences for non-musical content, whether that content is commercial, in the case of corporations, or public diplomacy and propaganda, in the case of states.

Chapter 2 - Damascus Radioscape

This chapter describes a 24-hour period in the radio life of Damascus, Syria. Employing Arjun Appadurai's terminology of interlocking and overlapping "scapes", I use this chapter to describe some of the ways in which radio and mass-mediated music inhabits the sound of the city, i.e. the points of conjuncture between the radioscape and the soundscape of Damascus.¹¹ As a modern metropolis of two and a half million people, the greater Damascene soundscape is heard and voiced in innumerable contrasting and contradictory ways by the city's inhabitants.¹² Given the specific focus of this dissertation on mass-distributed music radio broadcasts, this chapter takes a broad view of Damascus, pointing out a few points of intersection between the radioscape and the sonic practices of daily life, rather than describing the soundscape of a single group of people, physical locus or daily practice. This chapter, based on time spent in Syria in 2009 and 2010, is the dissertation's most ethnographic in nature, and draws on the fields of sound studies and the work of ethnomusicologists like Steven Feld to describe a few of the many listening

¹¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 32.

¹² Damascus population via CIA World Factbook - Syria <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html> (accessed March 3, 2012).

practices which define the sound of Damascus, and the way that people in Damascus might hear and understand radio.

Chapter 3 – Popular Music in Syrian Mass Media Discourse

This chapter outlines some of the categories used to market and define mass-mediated music in Syria in order to explore counterpropositions and alternate theories of music and music listening that exist within the local media discourse in the target markets for Radio Sawa. I differentiate between the discourses of state-controlled, state-sanctioned, and cross-border Arab commercial media, and pose the following questions: how might these discourses differ from the musical discourses employed by non-Arab international political broadcasters? Are there alternative theories of music and radio in play in addition to the alternative political viewpoints, and alternative versions of reality espoused by politically directed broadcasts? Towards answering these questions, this chapter describes elements of musical mass media discourses both within Syria and in the pan-Arab mediascape of satellite television, newspapers and radio. The sources that I draw on for this chapter include:

- Hundreds of hours of radio broadcasts, and language used by radio DJs and station administrators and programmers to describe their playlists, both on the air and on station websites, and via published and personal interviews.
- Journalistic and scholarly literary descriptions of popular music, in both the Syrian and the pan-Arab press
- Televised commentary on music, including comedic references to music in the Syrian sketch comedy *Spotlight (Buq 'at Dau')*

- Ethnographic encounters around popular music listening in Syria, especially public listening practices in Damascus cafes
- Syrian state radio discourse about music, focusing especially on state-sponsored song contests

More generally, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a context within which to position the music and institutional theories of musical communication broadcast by Radio Sawa, and in particular to allow the possibility of pitting Radio Sawa's use of music against the institutional theories of music espoused by Syrian private and public state-controlled media outlets.

Chapter 4 – Radio Sawa, Sonic Consumerism, and Western Music in the Syrian Radioscape

Chapter 4 conducts an in-depth analysis of Radio Sawa's musical playlist and formatting, based on hundreds of hours of listening, and a closer reading of a 24-hour period on the station's Levant stream. Building on the theories of music's political utility outlined in Chapter 1, I categorize the music and formatting on Radio Sawa as defined by the second, transactional theory of international broadcasting. Sawa does not primarily attempt, as is often portrayed in the press, to inculcate familiarity with and appreciation for American culture while demonstrating respect for local culture. Instead it can be viewed as an effort to develop a pattern of radio listening based on a consumer capitalist relationship between listeners and radio, in which music is purely currency used to entice listeners to become members of audiences. Far from an ancillary effect of the programming, this type of listening practice and relationship to music becomes an end in

itself. The fundamental idea communicated by the music and formatting of Radio Sawa, apart from any news content, is exactly that transactional, consumerist nature of listening that the station's format engenders.

Although I argue here that Radio Sawa is organized around a theory of music typified by exchange value rather than musical meaning, I don't believe *listeners* necessarily perceive the music and musical choices as bereft of meaning. Rather, individuals use patterns of listening shaped by the practices of daily life, local discourses about popular music, and decisions about aesthetic preferences and personal identification, in order to make sense out of foreign music, and integrate it into existing categories of listening. To explore this aspect of music reception, the second half of this chapter shifts away from the direct content analysis of Radio Sawa to describe some of the ways in which Western music is integrated into the Syrian radioscape, relying on the discursive categories established in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 – *Idhā'at Sawa* and Asymmetric Music Politics

In this chapter, I examine the types of asymmetries involved in the relationship between a mass-mediated broadcast of a super-power state, and the musical and political ideas of the people to which that broadcast is directed. As a counterpoint to the musical discourse of Radio Sawa, I analyze a 2009 album entitled *Idhā'at Sawa* (Radio Together) by the Damascus band *Kulna Sawa* (All of Us Together), a rock group from what some writers have referred to as Syria's new wave (*al-mawja al-jadīda*) or alternative music (*al-mūsīqā al-badīla*) scenes.¹³ This chapter explores the asymmetrical relationship of

¹³ Rama Qanawati, "khaṭwa lil-baḥṭh 'an mūsīqā jadīda mawja musīqiyya 'ālamīyya jadīda" *Shorufat* Vol. 55 June 15, 2009, <http://www.shorufat.com/read.php?sid=1799&id=13> (accessed February 12, 2012)

the band's brand of rock music to the US in the context of a local environment, and the implications of these efforts for the political project of Radio Sawa.

The pan-Arab youth radio station imagined in *Idhā'at Sawa* is certainly an example of a resistance to Western narratives about political justice and just force, but it is more than simply an inversion of the Radio Sawa and America's political positions. I argue that, in contrast to Radio Sawa's attempt to use a musical frame to move listeners to consider an alternate political reality, *Idhā'at Sawa* uses a political frame to posit a new musical reality. In this difference not just of political content, but of theorization of the power of radio, I posit what may be the clearest demonstration of the essential differences between American and Syrian historical conceptions of the radio. Where Americans tend to imagine radio as fundamentally musical, and only occasionally political, in the penetrated system of Middle Eastern politics, radio is fundamentally political and often, simultaneously, musical.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion: Sound Shifts and the Syrian Uprising

In Chapter 6 I describe the changes which have taken place in the Damascus radioscope between December 2010 and August 2012, since the beginning of the Uprisings. In the regime's new state of vulnerability, the basic format of Radio Sawa -- Arabic and English language music plus periodic news breaks -- has been adopted by Syrian private stations which for the first time are allowed (and required) to report on politics, albeit with a single perspective. With reduced public spending on advertising in the failing Syrian economy, the private stations have come to mirror Radio Sawa, almost

Hoda Qadour, "kulnā sawā... wa mawja al-mūsiqā al-sūriyya al-jadīda " *Tishreen* 20 September 2009, <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/239891> (accessed May 15, 2012).

parodying consumer capitalism in the face of economic crisis by aspiring to the status of commercialism, but without the necessary commercials or income. Musically, the percentage of foreign language songs on Syrian radio has slightly decreased in relation to the playlists that were used when I was in Syria in 2010, as the regime's rhetoric against foreign instigators and conspirators has increased. There has also been something of a shift within the foreign language playlist, conforming to the process of Syrian genre assimilation described earlier. Though foreign song prevalence has decreased only slightly, the number of foreign songs which are fully *Ajnabiyya* (foreign), and do not fit in with Syrian genres, has decreased more dramatically. That is, while continuing to program non-Arabic songs, the playlists have managed to sound less foreign.

Syrians, growing up in what L. Carl Brown calls the “penetrated system” of Middle Eastern politics, in which all entities have a presumed political affiliation, are more accustomed than most audiences to listening ‘between the notes’ and assuming that political motivations lie behind all media.¹⁴ In the context of a repressive regime which controls locally produced media, though not anywhere near all locally consumed media, Syrians have mastered a practice of what I call skeptical listening.¹⁵ Finally I posit that as the playlists, discourses, and meanings of radio music have shifted, the way that Radio Sawa’s “musical diplomacy” creates meaning in a local context has shifted as well.

¹⁴ L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 5.

¹⁵ The most significant work on Syrian public culture in relation to the state is Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Methodology and Literature

With each chapter devoted to a different aspect of the broadcasting relationship between US and Syria and the larger Arab World, this dissertation employs several different methodological and theoretical approaches drawn from a range of disciplines including historical musicology and political science, ethnomusicology and sound studies, media studies, science and technology studies and popular music and genre studies. I draw on a number of theories of listening from recent Western scholarship as well as Arabic-language sources. From Western scholarship, I work from theories of listening that describe the creation of musical meaning as an active process by which the listener applies a specific set of cultural technologies to a given set of sounds and musical experiences in order to create locally and personally relevant meaning. These descriptions of the act of listening come in a variety of forms. Steven Feld describes a set of “interpretive moves” (locational, categorical, associational, reflective, evaluative) which “we employ to situate, entangle, and untangle this engagement/recognition [with music] and turn it into a kind of practical consumption.”¹⁶ Jonathan Sterne’s *The Audible Past* explores a history of “audible techniques” and the way that they interact with and are shaped by technologies of sonic mediation.¹⁷ Suzanne Cusick, in her essay “On a Lesbian Relationship With Music,” describes the process of listening “on your back” as a

¹⁶ Steven Feld, “Communication, Music, and Speech About Music,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16 (January 1, 1984): 12.

¹⁷ Steven Feld, “Sound Structure as Social Structure.” *Ethnomusicology* 28, 3(1984): 383-409; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

kind of psychological, physical, and emotional posture which allows certain interpretive subjectivities.¹⁸

While most of the literature around these types of conceptions of listening draws on examples from single cultural areas, the study of mass mediated forms of music that cross political, social, and economic boundaries has necessarily foregrounded the wide range of interpretive possibilities that arise when music is produced and consumed in vastly different contexts. In fact, the development of theories of active listening has always been engaged with the question of cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural comparison. For example, although Feld is most well-known for work that is profoundly embedded in the context of a single group (the Kaluli), it is worth noting that his classic “Sound Structure as Social Structure” grows out of an engagement with Alan Lomax’s fundamentally comparative process of “cantometrics”, and reflects his desire to initiate a “qualitative and intensive comparative sociomusicology.”¹⁹ In more recent scholarship, a number of transnational and cross-cultural studies like those by Marwan Kraidy, David Novak, Andrew Jones, and Amanda Weidman have described local active listening and practices that redefine music in ways that would have been impossible to predict at the point of production.²⁰

¹⁸ Suzanne G. Cusick, “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 67-84.

¹⁹ Feld, “Sound Structure as Social Structure,” 385; see also Alan Lomax, *Cantometrics: An Approach to the Anthropology of Music: Audiocassettes and a Handbook* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Extension Media Center, 1978); Alan Lomax et al., *Folk Song Style and Culture*, (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968).

²⁰ Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, Or The Cultural Logic Of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005); Marwan Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Novak, “Japannoise: global media circulation and the transpacific circuits of experimental music” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006); Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham,

However, despite the large body of literature that considers the active interpretive moves and culturally specific practices of listeners as fundamental to the creation of musical meaning, these theories of listening have rarely made their way into discussion of transnational cultural diplomacy and political broadcasting efforts.²¹ The literature on cultural diplomacy is enormous, and a good overview of this literature is available in Osgood and Etheridge's introduction to *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History*.²² Though not specifically music focused, Pinkerton and Dodd's 2009 article "Radio geopolitics: broadcasting, listening and the struggle for acoustic spaces," presents a broad overview of the scholarship on the role of radio in international politics.²³ While varied in terms of its approaches and disciplinary affiliations, this literature has historically tended to focus on the broadcasting side of international political communication, investigating political rationale and theories of propaganda rather than the specific manner in which that power is articulated in cultural products or understood by the people on the receiving end. One of my goals

NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Andrew Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

²¹ Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2004); David W. Samuels et al., "Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010): 329–345; Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Feld, "Communication, Music, and Speech About Music."

²² Kenneth Osgood and Brian C. Etheridge, "Introduction: The New International History Meets the New Cultural History: Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Relations," in *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Brian C. Etheridge (Leiden, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 2010), 1–25.

Other significant general studies of cultural diplomacy include: Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Richard Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005); Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

²³ Alasdair Pinkerton and Klaus Dodds, "Radio geopolitics: broadcasting, listening and the struggle for acoustic spaces," *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 1 (February 2009): 10–27.

is to employ the discussion around active listening in ethnomusicology and historical musicology to strengthen the work on international broadcasting taking place in the fields of history, political science, and media studies, areas in which explanations of the role of music in public diplomacy and propaganda have tended to rely on relatively structural explanations of musical meaning.

If the literature on public and cultural diplomacy is somewhat lacking in its aural sophistication, a welcome exception comes from a group of scholars writing historical studies of musical diplomacy, largely focusing on live concert tours. Penny von Eschen's studies of the State Department sponsored jazz tours of the 1950s and 1960s have described how the political and personal goals of the musicians sometimes overrode official goals of "perception management."²⁴ Emily Ansari's work on Aaron Copland has described both the composer's participation as a cultural diplomat and the way that his political goals manifested themselves in his composition.²⁵ Danielle Fosler-Lussier places the significance of musical diplomacy in the power of live performances to strengthen the interpersonal connections which constitute global flows.²⁶ Jennifer Cambell has investigated how the early 1940s efforts of the Office of Inter-American

²⁴ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); "Enduring Public Diplomacy," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2005): 335-343.

²⁵ Emily A. Ansari, "Aaron Copland and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5, no. 3 (2011): 335-364.

²⁶ Danielle Fosler-Lussier, "Music Pushed, Music Pulled: Cultural Diplomacy, Globalization, and Imperialism," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (2012): 53-64; "Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization: The University of Michigan Jazz Band in Latin America," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 59-93.

Affairs Music Committee help shape the paradigms by which the music in musical diplomacy was selected.²⁷

Although the literature on music and international radio is comparatively small, there is a significant amount of discussion to be found outside of musicology in studies of Cold War broadcasting, and I address this literature in Chapter 1. There is relatively little work on radio music in the Arab World, and Salwa Castelo-Branco's "Radio and musical life in Egypt" is one of the only articles to deal exclusively with radio music.²⁸ Virginia Danielson's work on Umm Kulthum discusses her significance for the Voice of the Arabs, a pan-Arab radio station broadcast during the Nasser era, and Laura Lohman has documented the singer's continued presence on Egyptian radio since her death.²⁹ Christopher Stone's work on Fairuz and the Rahbani Brothers touches on their work for Radio Lebanon and Radio Sharq al-Ādnā.³⁰ A forthcoming edited volume (to which I contributed one chapter) entitled *The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and Conflict Situations*, which grew out of a 2011 conference in Göttingen, Germany, will contribute a number of essays on the subject of music and political broadcasting.

²⁷ Jennifer L. Campbell, "Creating Something Out of Nothing: The Office of Inter-American Affairs Music Committee (1940–1941) and the Inception of a Policy for Musical Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (2012): 29–39.

²⁸ Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, "Radio and Musical Life in Egypt," *Revista De Musicología* 16, no. 3 (1993): 1229–1239.

²⁹ Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthūm, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1997); "New Nightingales of the Nile: Popular Music in Egypt Since the 1970s," *Popular Music* 15, no. 03 (1996): 299–312; Laura Lohman, *Umm Kulthum: Artistic Agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend, 1967–2007* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010); Laura Lohman, "Preservation and Politicization: Umm Kulthūm's National and International Legacy," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 1 (February 2010): 45–60.

³⁰ Christopher Reed Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008).

Radio Sawa itself has been the subject of little scholarly attention ten years into its existence. A few scholars have investigated its news credibility: Thomas Christie and Andrew Clark in the UAE, and Mohammed el-Nawawy for audiences in Jordan and the Gulf, and McCullough, Laura McGinnis, and Perszyk in Iraq.³¹ A number of scholars have critiqued the station in passing as part of the larger US diplomatic media effort in the Arab World.³² The online journal *Arab Media and Society* (formerly *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*) has published several articles on the station by current or former US broadcasters and BBG officials.³³ There have been any number of short profiles of the station in the press, and I discuss some of these in Chapter 4, but while the fact that pop music is being used in the context of American public diplomacy efforts is usually the lede of the article, analysis of the music on Radio Sawa typically stops at joking headlines (“Britney vs. the Terrorists”).³⁴ Douglas Boyd, the scholar of communication and media who has done a great deal for the study of international broadcasting in Arabic, consulted on the founding of Radio Sawa, and wrote an article contextualizing

³¹ Mohammed El-Nawawy, “US Public Diplomacy in the Arab World: The news credibility of Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra in Five Countries”. *Global Media and Communication*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2006): 183-203; Thomas B. Christie and Andrew M. Clark, “Believe It or Not: Understanding the Credibility and Effectiveness of Radio Sawa in the UAE,” *International Communication Gazette* 73, no. 4 (June 1, 2011): 359–371; Leanne McCullough, Laura McGinnis, and Simone Perszyk, “U.S. Radio Broadcasting in Iraq and Afghanistan: A Grand Soliloquy?” *Journal of International Service*, 20, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 65–84.

³² Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007); Klaus Dodds and Lina Khatib, “Geopolitics, Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 2, no. 1 (2009): 5–12.

³³ Sam Hilmy, “Radio Sawa: America’s New Adventure in Radio Broadcasting,” *Arab Media & Society*, no. 2 (Summer 2007), <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/index.php?article=187&p=0> (accessed November 1, 2011); Kenneth Tomlinson, “Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa: Advancing Freedom in the Arab World,” *Arab Media & Society*, no. 2 (Summer 2007) <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=185> (accessed November 1, 2011); Laurie Kassman, “Voice of America Versus Radio Sawa in the Middle East: A Personal Perspective,” *Arab Media and Society* (Summer 2007) <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=184> (accessed November 1, 2012).

³⁴ Robert Reilly, ‘Britney vs. the Terrorists.’ *The Washington Post* (February 9, 2007), A19.

the station within the history of international broadcasting in the Arab World.³⁵ Among the only writers to give the musical side of Radio Sawa any consideration is Sam Hilmy, a former Voice of America official who is strongly critical of the decision to end the VOA Arabic service. Hilmy stated of Sawa's musical playlist that:

[A]fter listening to endless hours of alternating Arabic and so-called "Western" pop songs, and trying to deduce some coherent, professional whole, we discover what a neglected, drifting wasteland all this airtime is... The music portions have no detectable character, personality or identity.³⁶

This critique has the virtue of being based on actual time spent listening to the station, seemingly unlike the vast majority of the articles written about Sawa. There are no extended examinations of the station's musical selections, its relationship to competing stations, nor attempts to theorize the relationship between the sonic and political goals of the station from a musicological perspective.

The best-known theorist of music radio and propaganda is Theodor Adorno, whose work with the Princeton Radio Research Project led to a number of essays on the

³⁵ Douglas Boyd, "Radio Sawa: The Creation of a New U.S. Government Arabic Service," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Marriott Hotel, San Diego, CA, (May 27, 2003), 5.

http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/1/2/2/7/pages112275/p112275-1.php

(accessed January 5, 2012). Other significant works by Boyd include: *Broadcasting in the Arab World: a Survey of Radio and Television in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); "Sharq Al-Adna/The Voice of Britain," *Gazette* 65, no. 6 (2003): 443; "International Radio Broadcasting in Arabic," *International Communication Gazette* 59, no. 6 (1997): 445-472; "Hebrew-language Clandestine Radio Broadcasting During the British Palestine Mandate," *Journal of Radio Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 101-115.

³⁶ Hilmy, "Radio Sawa: America's New Adventure in Radio Broadcasting", 11.

topic of radio, popular music, and politics, including most significantly “A Social Critique of Radio Music.”³⁷ For Adorno, the meaning communicated by music was bound up with the medium and type of listening with which it is apprehended, and he argued that “the commodity character of music tends to radically alter it.”³⁸ Some aspects of my analysis of the music of Radio Sawa echo Adorno’s critique of radio music, and in Chapter 4 I argue at length that Radio Sawa attempts to create a kind of consumerist relationship to music in listeners. However, despite the fact that the “sonic consumerism” which I identify in Radio Sawa resembles the Adornian language of “commodity listening,” I avoid using a primarily Adornian framework for my analysis of either US or Syrian broadcasting. While I am interested in attempts to use musical commodities to create audiences amenable to certain political and economic structures, for the most part I find Adorno’s concept of “commodity listening” unhelpful for examining the diversity of meanings and practices around radio listening.³⁹

Much of the language I use to describe the context for these acts of reception and interpretation comes from globalization studies, most specifically from Arjun Appadurai’s language of “scapes.” In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai outlines five dimensions of cultural flow that serve as the building blocks for “imagined worlds” which he describes (in an extension of Benedict Anderson’s work) as “the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups

³⁷ Theodor Adorno, “A Social Critique of Radio Music,” *The Kenyon Review* 7, no. 2 (1945): 208–217.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁹ Commodity listening is defined by Adorno as “A listening whose ideal it is to dispense as far as possible with any effort on the part of the recipient – even if such an effort on the part of the recipient is the necessary condition of grasping the sense of the music”. in “A Social Critique of Radio Music”, 211.

spread around the world.”⁴⁰ These five “scapes” are: “ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes.” While all of these dimensions of cultural flow are significant to the way that politically directed media is received and understood, for my purposes the most significant aspects of Appadurai’s framework are the *mediascapes* which “provide large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed,” and *ideoscapes*, “concatenations of images...often directly political and frequently hav[ing] to do with the ideologies of states and counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it.”⁴¹

In an effort to focus on the radio medium, I use the narrower construction of the *radioscape* to refer to a variety of aspects of radio: the array of sonic possibilities confronting a listener as she tunes in, the set of practices and technologies that condition radio listening locally, and the historical and cultural memories by which the medium is defined in popular discourse.⁴² Appadurai’s five scapes are in constant interaction with one another, overlapping and conflicting to create the imagined worlds which he describes, and this is similarly true for the radioscape. In Chapter 1 for example, I discuss some of the ways in which the topography of the Middle Eastern radioscape

⁴⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

⁴¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*. 35-36.

⁴² The “radioscape” extension from Appadurai has also been used by Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga, and Dumisani Moyo in the introduction to *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011).

differs from that of the American one to the contingencies of political history (and ideoscapes) and the development of broadcasting technology (technoscapes).

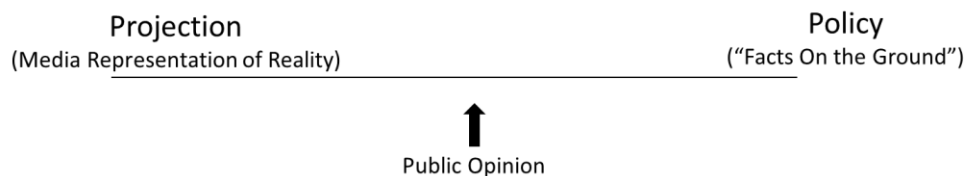
One way in which my research has been influenced by ethnographic studies of listening and studies of mass media and globalization is in the choice to focus on a specific context for the reception of American Arabic-language radio broadcasts. Radio Sawa's various programming streams are broadcast from Morocco to Iraq, across a geographic expanse encompassing an incredible ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural diversity, and produce an equivalent diversity of listening practices and contexts. This variety reinforces over and over again the notion that the globalization of mass media does not necessarily lead to a unification of social practices around media consumption, or to a unified understanding of what a cultural object means to different people. A Michael Jackson song does not mean the same thing to an American musicologist that it does to a Yemeni construction worker, and neither does it mean the same thing to that construction worker and a Lebanese 16-year-old studying in a French school, or a banker in Dubai, despite the fact that all of these listeners can tune in to hear Michael Jackson on the radio. A song can be a point of connection across cultures, but a song only achieves musical meaning, like a radio wave only achieves sound, when it achieves contact with a receiver.

Against the setting of the globalized musical flows of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the debate of how producers and listeners create and understand musical meaning in mass media has been fundamentally bound up with power and the asymmetries of power. Scholars of globalization and music have argued over musical meaning in the context of a series of binaries: hegemony vs. hybridity, a global music

industry vs. local listeners and performers, domination vs. resistance, techno-determinism vs. social practice, etc. In each case the question of musical meaning is not simply one of hermeneutic interpretation, but contestation over whose reality provides the context in which meaning can be defined. Ensuing scholarship on globalization and music has served to collapse these binaries and describe the ways in which musical meaning is constantly engaged with both sides of each pair. Hybrid forms can serve as resistance to the hegemonic flows or, to quote Appadurai, play “havoc with the hegemony of Eurochronology”, but as globalization and media scholar Marwan Kraidy has stated, at times “hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of dominant societal sectors.”⁴³ Similarly, social practice is not forced inexorably into a single mold based on the structure of technology; rather, social practice evolves and develops in conjunction with technology.

There is an analogy here between debates over the articulation of power and the creation of meaning in global media, and arguments over what exactly determines foreign opinion towards the United States, or any government attempting to exert influence outside of its borders. Within the discourse around American international broadcasting one of the fundamental arguments is over the extent to which politically directed media (propaganda or public diplomacy) is able to “move the needle” of public opinion towards the US, especially in relation to actual government policies and their local outcomes (often referred by the military/journalistic trope the “facts on the ground”). Constructed as a spectrum, the debate is over where public opinion lies in relation to the effects of policy and the public projection of that policy.

⁴³ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 30; Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, Or The Cultural Logic Of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 68.



In American political discourse in the mass media, this often becomes an ideological question, in that politicians who view the international policies of the United States as fundamentally good or well-meaning (if occasionally imperfect) tend to assume that antipathy towards those policies must be based largely on ignorance, misunderstanding, or ideological disagreement, problems which in theory can be addressed through communication and education correcting the misunderstandings. In the words of President George W. Bush:

I'm amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about that people would hate us. I, like most Americans, I just can't believe it, because I know how good we are.⁴⁴

In contrast, public critics of American foreign policy tend to understand negative opinions of the United States as the logical response to those policies, and fall towards the other end of the spectrum, assuming that efforts at positively influencing the reception of US policy can be successful only in the extent to which they obscure political realities. The more subtle analyses of politically directed communication fall somewhere between

⁴⁴ George W. Bush press conference, October 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011011-7.html#status-war> (accessed August 10, 2012). Quoted in Scott Lucas and Liam Kennedy, "Enduring Freedom: Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Policy," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2005), 309.

these two poles, synthesizing the “media representation” and the “facts on the ground” explanations for public opinion. Predicated on the idea that political reality is constructed, contingent on the media presentation and social construction of events, this synthesis also acknowledges that public representation of policy is limited by the real effects of that policy, and by an audience’s existing set of affiliations, beliefs, and incentives, which can override even the most unified media presentation.

In the use of popular music as tool in political radio, we are confronted by both of sets of debates described above: those around cultural globalization and the creation of local meaning, and those around the efficacy of mass-media political communication in creating or altering public opinion. This is where the theories of active listening drawn from music and sound studies become important for the scholars of public diplomacy and propaganda. The active listener, practicing a culturally specific mode of listening, interpreting, and understanding music that is of personal, local value, is also a political listener and actor, not simply in the sense that every act of culture is a political act, but in a more specific formulation of media consumption’s relationship to political opinion. The “imagined world” created by the listener’s interaction with the global flows of culture determines the affinities and relationships that define attitudes towards foreign peoples and governments.

Much of this dissertation is concerned with the social contexts that define political radio: the institutional theories of music and politics under which broadcasts are created, the social realities and listening technologies through which listeners derive meaning from music, and the public mass-media discourse around popular music. Nevertheless, as a musicologist, I remain dedicated to sound, and to listening, and it is the act of

listening which more than anything else has defined the process of completing this project.

Radio is inherently ephemeral as a medium, and broadcasts are designed to be disposable. Specific segments or isolated programs may have a longer life, reappearing as a recurring feature with relevance beyond the initial airing, and songs are heard over and over, but the product that a radio station creates exists by and large only in the act of listening. The sonic object that is the fully structured broadcast – the stations IDs and song bumpers, the transitions and sequencing of music, the startling juxtaposition of a horrifying news report with an upbeat love song – these exist only in the moment of listening. A transmission does not sound without a receiver. Within the ever dissipating radius of radio waves, producers and listeners experience broad tendencies and flows rather than the attributes of a fixed set of sounds.

In the course of conducting research for this dissertation I have listened to thousands of hours of radio, in an enormous number of contexts, locations, and formats. For a researcher (especially one working in a second language), the ability to record radio broadcasts for closer study out of real time is invaluable, but this experience of listening to recorded radio has fundamental differences from the experience of simply turning on a radio to listen, even setting aside the differences between the ears of a foreign musicologist and those of a station's targeted audience. Any analysis of radio must be grounded in the experiences and practices of actual listeners, but I also begin with the presumption that the actual music and sonic content of radio is important. In constructing a map of the Syrian (and to some extent the larger Levantine) radioscape and the place of Radio Sawa within it, I attempt to analyze this content using a set of categories and

definitions drawn from local mass-media discourse about music, and my conversations and interactions with Syrian listeners. An important precursor to my take on radio reception is Charles Hamm's essay "Privileging the moment of reception: Music and radio in South Africa", in which he constructs a "socio-historical analysis" of a single moment of reception of the song "All Night Long" by Lionel Ritchie as heard by two women on Radio Zulu.⁴⁵

The primary body of radio broadcasts that I discuss in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 come from several hundred hours of radio recorded in Damascus, and smaller chunks of radio recorded in Beirut, Amman, Cairo and Ramallah between 2009 and 2012, as well as streaming radio recorded from the internet and satellite radio channels. In total I spent approximately one year in the Middle East during the course of this project, with the longest of these research trips consisting of six months in 2010 conducting media and archival research, and observing public music listening practices in Damascus. This research, as well as my informal interviews and daily interactions with Syrians, was facilitated by languages skills acquired through several years of study in Modern Standard Arabic at Columbia University, a summer in Sana'a, Yemen on a fellowship from the American Institute for Yemeni Studies, and courses at the University of Damascus and with private tutors in Syrian colloquial Arabic during the early months of my stay in 2010.

In the initial stages of this project, I imagined that my dissertation would discuss American political broadcasting in several countries, contrasting the radioscapes and media systems of several target locations for US Arabic broadcasting. However, as I

⁴⁵Charles Hamm, "Privileging the Moment of Reception: Music and Radio in South Africa," in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 21-37.

spent time in Syria, I became more and more fascinated with the country and the particular relationships between radio broadcasting, public culture, and political power that occur within the context of the totalitarian state. In future work on music and political broadcasting I hope to contrast the Syrian radioscape with that of other Arab countries (specifically on Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt), but for the present study the need to substantively address a local context for American broadcasts required a more sustained level of engagement with the media, politics and culture of a single locale than I could accomplish in a single chapter. This dissertation then is as much about Syria as it is about American broadcasting.

Syrian music has been severely understudied in the English-language music literature, despite the work of a small number of excellent scholars. The most significant work in English to deal specifically with Syrian music is Jonathan Shannon's *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria*, and his discussion of the multiple, sometimes conflicting understandings of modernity and authenticity in Syrian musical culture has been vital to my understanding of the country.⁴⁶ Shayna Silverstein's recently completed dissertation on *dabke* is an invaluable addition to the study of expressive culture in Syria.⁴⁷ Kay Shelemay's work on Syrian Jews in America, in addition to serving as a fascinating study of music, memory and diaspora, is an important document for the history of Jewish musical culture in Syria.⁴⁸ There is a slightly larger amount of scholarship engaging with Syrian music and culture in French

⁴⁶ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ Shayna Silverstein, "Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012).

⁴⁸ Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

and Arabic, but across the board very little scholarly work exists in English, French, or Arabic on recent popular mass-mediated music to Syria.⁴⁹

Contemporary critical writing on musical composition and performance in the Syrian state-controlled, Arabic-language press is largely devoted to art music (see for example the Syrian art weekly *Shorufat*), but even in this area one frequently sees articles bemoaning the lack of sustained, Syria-focused music criticism.⁵⁰ While the broader pan-Arab media includes a thriving industry of entertainment news and gossip about performers, popular music criticism in the sense of music reviews and style discussion is relatively scarce, and the literature on popular mass-mediated music tends towards the biographical. Books on the older generations of Egyptian and pan-Arab stars (Umm Kulthum, Muhammed ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, ‘Abd al-Ḥalim Ḥāfiẓ, Asmahān, etc.) are available in most bookstores in Damascus, and usually pair a story of the musician’s life with collections of their song lyrics. These books deal primarily with biographical details and, assuming a knowledge of their subject’s music on the part of readers, describe distinguishing stylistic features or musical trends mainly through invocations of well-

⁴⁹ In Arabic see for example, Samīm Al-Sharīf, *al-mūsīqā fī sūriyya: ‘i’lām wa tārikh* (Damascus: Syrian Ministry of Culture, 1991); Adnān bin Dhurayl, *al-mūsīqā fī sūriyya: al-baḥth al-mūsīqī wa- funūn al-mūsīqiyya, 1887-1987* (Damascus: Dar Talass, 1987). Majdī al-Aqili, *al-Samā’ ind al-‘arab 5 vols.* (Damascus, Syria, 1979). French sources include Christian Poché, *Musiques Du Monde Arabe Et Musulman: Bibliographie Et Discographie* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste P. Geuthner, 2000); Christian Poché, *La Musique Arabo-andalouse*, (Arles: Cité de la musique ; Actes sud, 1995); *Les Danses Dans Le Monde Arabe, Ou, L’héritage Des Almées* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

⁵⁰ Zulaikha Aburisha, “fī naqd al-mūsīqā.” (On Music Criticism) *Al-Ghad*, 4/5/2010
http://www.alghad.com/f.php/afkar_wamawaqef/article/17282.html. (accessed June 12, 2012).

“azmat al-mūsīqā fī sūriyya kamā yurāhā al-mūsīqī Andrea M’aluli” (The Crisis of Music in Syria as Seen by Musician Andrea Maluli) *Shorufat* vol. 79, June 21, 2010,
<http://www.shorufat.com/read.php?sid=2831&id=13>

Ghazwan al-Zarkely “mā al-‘aml? - kitāba naqdiyya ‘an wāqi’at wa mustaqbal al-ḥayāt al-mūsīqiyya fī sūriyya” (What to do? Critical writing about the Reality and the Future of Musical Life in Syria) *Shorufat* Vol. 64 (November 16, 2009) <http://www.shorufat.com/read.php?sid=2141&id=13>

known songs or genealogies of musical influences.⁵¹ Although there may not be a large field of popular music studies in Arabic, this does not imply the lack of a public discourse around popular music, and Chapter 3 addresses this discourse using newspapers, television, and radio broadcasts. One example of the liveliness of this discourse can be seen in a collection of essays by the Lebanese journalist Ḥāzīm Ṣāghīyah, whose cultural criticism references a wide variety of Arab and western popular singers including Sabah, Edith Piaf, Abdel Halim Hafiz, Amr Diab, Elvis, Fairuz and Madonna.⁵² Entitled “Nancy Is Not Karl Marx” (*Nansī Laysat Karl Marks*) in a reference to Nancy Ajram, the Lebanese pop star and sex symbol, the book begins with a rebuttal to another cultural critic, who provocatively proclaimed that “*mu’akhira Nansy ‘Ajram aṣbaḥat ahem min muqadima Ibn Khuldun*” (Nancy Ajram’s rear has become more important than Ibn Khuldun’s Introduction [or front]).⁵³

Given the historical and cultural connections between Syria and the surrounding countries of the Levant or historical *bilad ash-Sham* (Greater Syria), much of the scholarship on Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan also engages with issues of great importance to mass media and musical life in Syria. Ali Jihad Racy’s work, especially his foundational study of *ṭarab*, is an invaluable resource to scholars working around the

⁵¹To give an example, in *Fairuz: Her Life and Songs*, authors Majeed Tarad and Rabee’ Mohammed Khalifa describe the singer’s collaborations with famous composers (the Rahbani Brothers, Sayyid Darwish, Mohammed Abd al Wahab, Philemon Wehbi) by giving brief biographical sketches of the composers and listing the songs each wrote for Fairuz, rather than describing the different styles employed. Majid Tarad and Rabee’ Mohammed Khalifa, *Fairuz: Hayātha wa Aghānīhā*. (Beirut: al-mu’assasa al-ḥadītha lil-kitāb, 2002).

⁵² Ḥāzīm Ṣāghīyah, *Nansī Laysat Karl Marx* (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Sāqī, 2010).

⁵³ The “Muqadimma” of Ibn Khuldun is a considered one of the earliest and most significant works in the philosophy of history.

Arab world.⁵⁴ This is also the case with Christopher Reed Stone's *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairuz and Rahbani Nation*, which is of vital interest to scholars of popular culture in Syria, where Fairuz has been adopted as a national symbol in ways which illustrate the complicated relationship between Syrian and Lebanese nationalism and identity.⁵⁵ The permeability of national borders to cultural products is especially true in the case of radio, where the already contested borders of the region become illusory, and it is often more accurate to discuss a joint Syrian/Lebanese radio market than to attempt to divide the two countries. Work by Elizabeth Cestor on music and broadcasting in Lebanon, and Thomas Burkhalter on the "Sound Memory" of the Lebanese Civil War in Beirut, are similarly useful for an understanding of popular music and broadcasting in Syria.⁵⁶ Marwan Kraidy's work on reality television singing contests does a masterful job of integrating media analysis into the political context of Syria and Lebanon.⁵⁷ Additionally, the work on Umm Kulthum by Virginia Danielson and Laura Lohman, though centered on Egypt, is of vital significance to the rest of the Arab World.⁵⁸

The most useful overview of recent scholarship on mass-mediated music in the larger Arab world comes in the recent volume *Music and Media in the Arab World*,

⁵⁴ Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Ṭarab* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*.

⁵⁶ Elisabeth Cestor, "Music and Television in Lebanon," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 97–110; Thomas Burkhalter, "Mapping Out the Sound Memory of Beirut. A survey of the music of a war generation" in *Itinéraires Esthétiques et Scènes Culturelles Au Proche-Orient*. ed. Franck Mermier. (Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2007): 103–125, <http://ifpo.revues.org/550>.

⁵⁷ Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics*.

⁵⁸ Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*; Lohman, *Umm Kulthum: Artistic Agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend, 1967-2007*.

edited by Michael Frishkopf. Although none of the essays in the collection deal exclusively with radio, the contributions by Zein Nassar and Laith Ulaby both touch on the medium, and collectively the essays in this volume, some written in English and some translated from Arabic, form an excellent survey of the discourse around music and especially music videos. The volume is heavily weighted towards Egypt, as Frishkopf acknowledges.⁵⁹ More generally, as the longtime center of Arabic music and film production, Egypt remains the most studied country in the region, and the study of Arab popular music genres, figures, and cultures is especially dominated by the country. Although the Egypt-central focus of Western scholarship can be problematic when discussing the musical cultures in the rest of the Arab World, much of this work has been invaluable in the face of the extreme paucity of work on mass-mediated music in Syria. Building on a foundation of scholarship on Egypt's traditional musical genres, Arabic music theory, golden age singers like Umm Kulthum and Asmahān, and work on religious expressive practices, scholars have recently begun to address pop and mass-mediated music in ways which move beyond the tendency (still common in the literature) to dismiss popular music.⁶⁰ James Grippo has addressed the differences between the *shabābī* music that grew up in Egypt in the 1980s and is associated with the most popular pan-Arab stars like 'Amr Diab, and the working class *sha'bi* popular music of urban Egypt.⁶¹ Jennifer Peterson has described the introduction of musical elements from Sufi

⁵⁹ Michael Frishkopf, "Introduction: Music and Media in the Arab World and 'Music and Media in the Arab World' as Music and Media in the Arab World: A Metadiscourse," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 49.

⁶⁰ Sherifa Zuhur, *Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

⁶¹ James R. Grippo, "What's Not on Egyptian Television and Radio! Locating the 'Popular' in Egyptian Sha'bi," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 137–162.

inshād religious chants into Egyptian dance music.⁶² Michael Frishkopf has explored a variety of explanatory theories around the “Spanish Tinge” in Egyptian popular music.⁶³ I address this growing literature in Chapters 3 and 4. There is a significant and growing body of films, academic literature, and journalism which deals with Arab musicians in Western genres, with the documentaries *Heavy Metal in Bagdad*, *Slingshot Hip-Hop*, and books including Mark LeVine’s *Heavy Metal Islam*.⁶⁴

Regional music form outside the Arab world has had an abiding influence on both Arab art music and popular music, and the work of scholars like Martin Stokes and Walter Feldman on Turkey, and Stephen Blum on Iran and Central Asia, is essential for the study of Arabic music.⁶⁵

Much of the most significant scholarship on mass-media in the Arab World, such as the work of Lila Abu-Lughod and Charles Hirshkind in Egypt, W. Flagg Miller in Yemen, or Christa Salamanda in Syria, combines media studies and analysis with ethnographic methodology, and these studies have had a great influence on my own

⁶² Jennifer Peterson, “Sampling Folklore: The ‘Re-popularization’ of Sufi liltan in Egyptian Dance Music,” *Arab Media & Society* no. 4 (Winter 2008), <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=580>.

⁶³ Michael Frishkopf, “Some Meanings of the Spanish Tinge in Contemporary Egyptian Music,” *Mediterranean Mosaic: Popular Music and Global Sounds*. (New York, London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶⁴ Mark LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008); *Slingshot Hip hop*, Directed by Jackie Salloum, (Fresh Booza Production, 2009), DVD.; *Heavy Metal in Baghdad* Directed by Eddy Moretti and Suroosh Alvi. (Arts Alliance America, 2008), DVD.

⁶⁵ See for example: Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Oxford : New York: Clarendon ; Oxford University Press, 1992); Walter Feldman, *Music of the Ottoman Court: Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire* (Berlin: VWB-Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1996); Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour, “‘The Morning of Freedom Rose up’: Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival,” *Popular Music* 15, no. 3 (October 1, 1996): 325–343.

work.⁶⁶ This dissertation will not, however, take a primarily site-based ethnographic approach, though Chapter 2, especially, is informed and guided by the many hours I spent listening in cafes, shops, and homes in Syria.

On the American side, US broadcasters have been extremely reluctant to allow access to their operations and employees. Although I have put in countless interview requests over the past three years, I am still waiting for official permission to conduct interviews with Middle East Broadcasting/BBG employees. Other areas of the American public diplomacy apparatus have been more amenable to my inquiries, and I have conducted interviews with State Department employees who run musical tours to the Middle East, and several of the musicians involved in these overseas tours. Without access to Radio Sawa employees, my limited knowledge of the internal workings and procedures of the station comes from the public statements of BBG officials, government mandated reports, and a few unofficial conversations with a few reporters. While I believe that an institutional ethnography of the BBG and American broadcasting, in the style of Georgina Born's work on the BBC or IRCAM, would be of great scholarly value, such a study is not likely to be completed any time soon.⁶⁷ In contrast, meeting with people involved with Syrian broadcasting was, until recently, comparatively easy, though the recent political situation has of course completely changed the Syrian landscape. In

⁶⁶ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Christa Salamandra, "Creative Compromise: Syrian Television Makers Between Secularism and Islamism," *Contemporary Islam* 2, no. 3 (2008): 177–189.

⁶⁷ Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004); Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

2010 I met with several people involved with radio production, and I had planned to return to Syria in the summer of 2011 to conduct interviews with programming managers, but my visa request in May 2011 was denied by the Syrian embassy (I was able to conduct a few relevant interviews in Lebanon during the summer of 2011 while waiting in hopes of getting a Syrian visa.)

One issue which renders the study of Syrian radio listeners and their relationships with politically motivated broadcasting problematic is the vulnerability of potential informants. The Syrian government does not generally allow any research on contemporary Syria which might have a political dimension, and I was wary about advertising my interests in politically motivated broadcasting for fear that doing so would cause problems either for me, or (much more likely) for the Syrians with whom I interacted.

Although 2009 and 2010 was possibly the easiest period in the past several decades for Americans wishing to travel Syria, the oppressive ubiquity of the Syrian security state was an unavoidable fact of life. Due to obvious safety concerns, I did not conduct surveys, interview listeners, or ask Syrians their views on foreign public diplomacy and propaganda broadcasts, even in the context of music. Friends were certainly more familiar with my project, and knew that I was interested in music and state-sponsored radio and in Radio Sawa, but I never pressed them for opinions on even remotely political topics, though inevitably the “red line” topics of politics come up behind closed doors.

In many ways, foreign visitors to Syria in the period immediately before the Arab Uprisings enjoyed a position of privileged blindness, able to ignore the presence of the

surveillance state and let it fade into the colorful background of the country. Although I was made aware of the mechanisms of state control in countless ways, as a foreigner I experienced this as a temporary and surreal if occasionally inconvenient layer of Damascus' architecture, rather than a structuring force in everyday life. Additionally, I frequently (though not exclusively) socialized, ate, drank, played, and watched sports with groups of Syrians who have as a class benefited from the regime's control of the economy and especially its semi-liberalization in the decade before the Arab Uprisings. Among the elite classes of Damascus which I had access to as an educated foreigner, the ubiquity of the security state was mitigated by the feeling, however tenuous it turned out to be, that a phone call could always reach a cousin or uncle with the connections to fix the problems one might encounter with the bureaucracy.⁶⁸ Moving outside of this social class however, or into any part of the city and country not usually frequented by foreign tourists and students, carries the constant, though slight, potential to arouse the attention of the state security apparatus. While meeting a radio broadcaster or well-known musician to discuss their work might be acceptable for an American student, even casual interactions with people from social groups who do not typically interact with tourists and foreigners can on some occasions draw the attention of Syria's ubiquitous secret police.

To some extent, these kinds of risks are inevitable while living under the authoritarian Syrian state, and as an American, the only way to completely eliminate risk would be not to interact with anyone. Certainly there have been and continue to be a number of excellent ethnographic studies of modern Syria conducted by foreign scholars.

⁶⁸ For two ethnographic studies of the Damascus elite, see Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus*; and Amanda Patricia Terc, "Syria's New Neoliberal Elite: English Usage, Linguistic Practices and Group Boundaries" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011).

However, my feeling was that an examination of mass-media discourse around pop music, grounded in descriptions of listening practices in everyday life, can provide a rich framework for a discussion of state-sponsored music broadcasting without necessitating the kinds of interactions which might put people at risk. Becoming known as the foreigner who asks questions about the reception of American propaganda radio would, in 2010 Syria at least, have constituted an unacceptable level of risk to the people around me.

With these many issues in mind, I limited my ethnographic engagement to the observation of public listening practices, and informal interviews and discussions of music and radio. As it is, despite the fact that I articulated no special interest in the politics, on at least two occasions that I know of, friends were visited by the *mukhabarāt*, simply based on my presence in their homes. Given the presence of any potential risk, however slight, I have avoided quoting individuals by name with the exception of a few public figures.⁶⁹

The current situation in Syria, which at this point that I write this can only be described as a civil war, has changed the thrust of this dissertation in countless ways. While I have not been in Syria since June of 2010, I have followed events in Syria through constant radio listening over the internet, obsessive review of newspapers and social media in English, Arabic and French, and occasional correspondence with friends in the country. During this time, as events have reshaped the region and the country, the state of the radioscapes that I attempt to describe in this dissertation has changed, and I describe some of these changes in the Chapter 6.

⁶⁹ This is not out of a fear of exposing politically risky statements; rather it is because in the age of search engine optimization, I am sure that none of my Syrian informants want a Google search for their name to return links with the words “American” and “propaganda” featured prominently.

Radical changes in the Arab world have also changed my relationship to the time that I spent there. It is impossible, even in the moments during the course of these chapters when I resort to my own observations and experience, to maintain the fiction of an ethnographic present when it comes to Syria. It is always the case that any description of the present immediately becomes a historical document, but in the case of Syria it is clear that the country I visited and lived in from 2009 to 2010 does not currently exist, and will probably never exist again. With that in mind, unless otherwise noted, the descriptions of the Syrian radioscope in this dissertation refer to the period between 2009 and 2011, immediately before the Syrian uprising.

Syria is at a particularly unique moment historically, not just because of the potential for radical change, but because that change has been preceded by 40 years political stagnation under the rules of Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad. This political continuity does not mean that Syria has remained changeless during this period, and Bassam Haddad has detailed the multiple and rapid changes in Syrian economy life under the Asad rule.⁷⁰ However, there are probably few places in the world where the public discourse, the range of ideas it is possible to express -- what Stuart Hall has called "horizon of the taken-for-granted" -- has been more tightly controlled by the state than in modern Syria.⁷¹ For many people, both Syrians and outside observers, the possibility of change was until recently hidden beyond that horizon. In the age of satellite television and growing if still limited internet access, the mediascape in Syria is a blend of local, regional, pan-Arab, and global international sources, and the burgeoning literature on

⁷⁰ Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁷¹ Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 44.

satellite television and pan-Arab media is vital to an understanding of the Syrian mediascape and the presence of politically directed media within it.⁷² Nevertheless, Syria remains a totalitarian state which maintains tight control over all domestic media, and only allowed privately owned media outlets to operate at all within the last ten years. Although a number of scholars have described a variety of methods for resisting and asserting personhood in the face of a “culture of fear,” and despite a dramatic explosion on media options available to Syrians in recent years, the Syrian state still controls the boundaries of acceptable public discourse.⁷³

In his two studies of Arab news media (1987 and 2004), former US Ambassador William Rugh (to Yemen and the UAE, as well as Deputy Chief of Mission to Syria between 1981-1985) divided the Arab world’s national media into four categories: Mobilization Media, Loyalist Media, Diverse Media, and Transitional Media.⁷⁴ Within this taxonomy Syria was grouped in the Mobilization media along with pre-2011-revolution Libya, the Sudan (before the independence of Southern Sudan in 2011), and

⁷² For an overview of the literature on Arab satellite television see: Tawil-Souri, H. “Arab Television in Academic Scholarship.” *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008): 1400–1415; Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2001); Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskander, *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2002); Marwan Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁷³ See Panagiotis Geros, “Doing Fieldwork Within Fear and Silences,” in *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics, and Fieldwork in Anthropology*, ed. Heidi Armbruster and Anna Laerke (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 89–115; George Weyman, “Empowering Youth Or Reshaping Compliance? Star Magazine, Symbolic Production, and Competing Visions of Shabab in Syria” (M.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2006), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~metheses/WeymanThesis.htm>; Paulo G. Pinto, “The Limits of the Public: Sufism and the Religious Debate in Syria,” in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. D. Eickelman and A. Salvatore (Boston: Brill, 2004), 181–204; Paulo G. Pinto et al. “Dangerous Liaisons: Sufism and the State in Syria,” *Crossing Boundaries: From Syria to Slovakia, Vienna, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows’ Conferences* 14 (2003); Rasha Salti ed. *Insights into Syrian Cinema: Essays and Conversations with Contemporary Filmmakers*, (New York: ArteEast/AIC Film Editions/Rattapallax Press, 2006); Salamandra, “Creative Compromise.”

⁷⁴ William A. Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

pre-2003 Iraq.⁷⁵ In these works Rugh characterized the state-dominated mobilization media by a set of journalistic norms which included a general assumption of “no criticism of policy”, a public maintenance of the “sanctity of leaders”, a “non-diverse” set of opinions, and use as a “mobilization tool” to encourage adherence with state positions.

This set of categories has met with some criticism, and in his overview of scholarly theories and taxonomies of Arab media, Adel Iskandar points out a series of objections to Rugh’s taxonomy from several media scholars, on grounds including the “possibility that the region’s media have been shaped by the specific social and cultural history of the Arabic-Islamic World” and a failure to adequately represent the interrelated nature of Western and Arab press in light of the post-colonial interpenetration of the two systems.⁷⁶ Given the complex and shifting state of the modern Arab World, Iskandar argues that the construction of overarching taxonomies of “Arab Media” may at this point in history be an exercise of limited use, akin to drawing “lines in the sand.”⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Rugh’s concept of “Mobilization Media” is useful to a discussion of international media in that it situates foreign propaganda or public diplomacy broadcasts in the context of an already politically-focused domestic mediascape, thus highlighting a point of similarity between Syrian and outside media, rather than a point of disjunction. The reality of Syrian newspapers, domestic television, and radio as tools deployed to mobilize and shape the populace makes Syria a uniquely interesting site within which to situate American musical broadcasting.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Adel Iskandar, “Lines in the Sand: Problematizing Arab Media in the Post-taxonomic Era,” *Arab Media and Society* (2007), 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

The work that most strongly influenced my understanding of the relationship between state power, public culture, and individual agency in Syria is Lisa Wedeen's *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*.⁷⁸ This study of the public cult of Hafez al-Asad in Syria is both the defining work of social science on the cult of personality in totalitarian regimes and an important contribution to the study of politics and public culture more generally. As Wedeen describes it, the goal of Syrian regime in propagating the Asad cult of personality was not necessarily to inculcate belief or "legitimacy." Rather citizens are required to "act as if", observing the public forms of loyal citizenship and belief even in the face of state rhetoric which is patently unconvincing or ridiculous. This model holds a great deal of significance for the discussion of listening and political influence later in this dissertation.

Terminology – Propaganda, Public Diplomacy, or *al- 'i 'lām al-Muwajah*

Radio Sawa is an example of the kind of mass media political project described by critics as propaganda and by proponents as "public diplomacy." According to scholar Nicholas Cull of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, the modern use of the term is traced to Edward Gullion, the ex-foreign service officer who established the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy at Tufts University. Cull cites a brochure for the Murrow Center for an early definition:

Public diplomacy... deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of

⁷⁸ Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications.⁷⁹

Cull describes the origins of this use of the term in the need to develop a discourse untainted by the stigma associated with the word propaganda, despite the fact that Gullion himself preferred the unambiguous ‘propaganda’ even while conceding that the term was too tainted to be useful.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the basic practice of mass media public diplomacy, the act of attempting to influence a foreign public, falls within the traditional definition of propaganda, and scholars generally agree that this distinction is in the eye of the beholder.

Within the frame of propaganda, scholars of media and international relations use finer definitions, such as the distinctions between white, grey, and black propaganda, wherein “white propaganda” refers to media that identifies its source, “black propaganda” falsely portrays its source, and “grey propaganda” does not directly identify its source. Even this kind of taxonomy, however, becomes more complicated when we analyze a

⁷⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, “Public Diplomacy before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase,” p. 1 http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/pdblog_detail/060418_public_diplomacy_before_gullion_the_evolution_of_a_phrase/. (accessed August 8, 2012).

⁸⁰ Robert F. Delaney and John S. Gibson, ed. *American Public Diplomacy: The Perspective of Fifty Years* (Medford Mass: The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy/Lincoln Filene Center for Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1967), 31. As cited in John Brown, ‘The Anti-Propaganda Tradition in the United States,’ *Bulletin Board for Peace*, 29 June 2003. <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/19.htm> (accessed August 7, 2012).

specific station taking listeners into account. In the case of Radio Sawa, the station directly identifies its source both on its broadcasts and on its website, and makes no attempt to conceal the fact that it is funded by the U.S. Congress.⁸¹ Nevertheless, during my research in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan I met some listeners who, to my surprise, professed both to listen to the station and to be unaware that it is funded by the American government. There are several possible explanations for this: Sawa's Lebanon/Syria stream frequently advertises that it is broadcast "from Mount Lebanon", and the most common acknowledgement of Radio Sawa's source on the actual station, the occasional station ID bumpers which identify the station as "*khidmat min Washington*" (a service from Washington) might be confusing given that the large satellite television news networks frequently feature reports "from Washington" as well. While Radio Sawa undoubtedly falls under the heading of "white" propaganda, what is white to one listener might have shades of grey to another.

For much of the discussion of American broadcasting in this dissertation, I use the terms public diplomacy or politically directed media rather than propaganda. I do this not because I think that public diplomacy and propaganda are always meaningfully different in an analytic sense, but because at least when addressing institutional theories of the political utility of music and radio, it can be useful to employ the terminology used by the broadcasting government. Additionally, I should note that I do not believe the broadcasters at the Middle East Broadcasting Network (MEBN) conceive of their jobs as propaganda; Radio Sawa and Al Hurra have a large number of reporters around the Arab World engaged in journalistic endeavors, sometimes at the risk of their own lives,

⁸¹ Admittedly there are reasons why a person who acknowledged listening to the station might want to maintain that they were not aware of its source.

motivated by a variety of interests not least of which is the sincere desire to convey accurate information to their audiences. Veterans of international broadcasting (who have written much of the literature on the subject in both the American and British cases) tend to argue that the best advertisement for the broadcasting country is an accurate, impartial news service.⁸² MEBN spokeswoman Deirdre Kline, discussing Radio Sawa's sister satellite television news station Al Hurra, states:

Alhurra's mission is journalistic. Alhurra is required, by law, to be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism; and include news which is consistently reliable and accurate, objective and comprehensive.⁸³

One doesn't need to agree with their assessment of impartiality, or even with the concept of journalistic objectivity itself, to acknowledge that broadcasters do not in most cases consider themselves propagandists in the classic sense of WWII disinformation campaigns. When writing about the production side of these broadcasts, that terminology can sometimes obscure the subtler ways that power is articulated.

When discussing the listener side of the equation, I find the "public diplomacy" terminology of the US government less useful, and less reflective of the way that political broadcasts are understood by critics and listeners. In Arabic as in English, the choice of terminology used by critics and analysts generally conveys an author's attitude towards

⁸² See for example, Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003).

⁸³ Deirdre Kline, Letter to the editor in response to "Foreign Television Broadcasters in Arabic, Waving the Flag in Arab Living Rooms," *Qantara.de* <http://en.qantara.de/Letters-to-the-Editors/708b241/?page=3>

the media in question rather than any objective categorization. In reading direct criticism of Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra in the Arabic-language press, the word I have encountered most frequently is the borrowed *broboganda* (propaganda), with all of its negative associations, but one also sees a variety of other terms in frequent usage by journalists and scholars. In a 2007 article in *Arab Media and Society*, Adel Iskandar describes several of the terms used in the Arabic media for government sponsored media.

Three expressions are used commonly throughout the Arab media to refer to “public diplomacy.” The most neutral of these is a direct translation of the same term, [*al-diblūmasiyya al-sha‘biyya*.] The second, [*al-‘i‘lām al-muwajjah*], translates to “directional media.” The third term, [*al-‘ikhtirāq*], is the most common, and also the most subversive. The term translates as “penetration.” In a Freudian reading of the term, it signifies the violation and dispossession of the body and mind, especially when stated as [*al-‘ikhtirāq al-dhihnī*] (penetration of the mind).⁸⁴

Among these terms, “directional media”, or the close “politically directed media,” is most useful for the purposes of this dissertation in that it is broad enough to include the range of media types addressed in the following pages: the government broadcasts directed to a general Arab public, Syrian state-sponsored and state-sanctioned broadcasts to the Syrian public, and *Idhā‘at Sawa*’s conceptual broadcast directed to Arab and American publics.

⁸⁴ Adel Iskandar, “Lines in the Sand: Problematizing Arab Media in the Post-taxonomic Era,” *Arab Media and Society* (May 2007), 18 http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20070523153324_ams2_adel_iskandar.pdf (accessed November 1, 2011). Transliterations here have been altered to conform with the IJMES system in use in this dissertation.

The third term described by Iskandar, *al-ʾ ikhtirāq*, is the most violent iteration of the concept, and reflects by some definitions the attempt to influence public opinion inside a foreign country is fundamentally outside of the definition of diplomacy, veering instead into the realm of direct conflict. According to British diplomat Charles Webster, “diplomacy sometimes attempts to obtain results by influencing the public opinion on which governments depend. In the cold war it is one of the principal weapons on either side. But this is war, not diplomacy.”⁸⁵

The relationship of music to war, and specifically to the “global war on terror” and the US’s military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan (not to mention Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya etc.) has become a small subfield of contemporary music studies. A number of articles, including those in recent edited volumes *Music and Conflict*, *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, and *The Soundtrack of Conflict* (mentioned above), have dealt with music in the context of these conflicts.⁸⁶ There has also been a great deal of attention to the use of music as a weapon and tool of war, with scholars such as Suzanne Cusick and Moustafa Bayoumi writing on the use of music as an instrument of torture, and Jonathan

⁸⁵ Sir Charles K. Webster, “The Art and Practice of Diplomacy: Oration Delivered at the London School of Economics and Political Science on Friday, 7 December 1951” (London, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1952), 3.

Webster’s conflation of public diplomacy with war is certainly not a generally accepted definition. At the other end of the spectrum, advocates of “coercive diplomacy” see the use of military threats, and occasionally even actual force, as fundamental aspects of diplomacy. See Alexander George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991).

⁸⁶ John Morgan O’Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, eds., *Music and Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry, eds., *Music in the Post-9/11 World* (New York: Routledge, 2007); MJ Grant, ed. *Soundtrack to Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and Conflict Situations* (Olms Verlag; Göttingen, Germany) forthcoming. See also: John Morgan O’Connell, “Music in War, Music for Peace: A Review Article,” *Ethnomusicology* 55, no. 1 (2011): 112–127.

Pieslak writing on music in the lives of active duty soldiers in Iraq.⁸⁷ While the multiplicity of meanings in music allows the possibility that even the same song can be used as both a tool of violence and a tool for diplomacy, and political history is full of the simultaneity of diplomacy and war, there is a conflict embedded in the idea of “public diplomacy” as a tool in a “war on terror.” It is a dark irony that some of the same songs used to torture Arab inmates at Guantanamo Bay were simultaneously being broadcast to the Arab audiences as part of an effort to improve the public opinion the US.⁸⁸

Echoing the idea that "All diplomacy is a continuation of war by other means" - Chou En-Lai's inversion of Clausewitz's famous dictum about war as a continuation of politics - American public diplomacy has often been described in the terminology of war.⁸⁹ It is not just as a tool, but a “weapon” in the minds of many advocates in the US and critics on the receiving end in the Arab World.⁹⁰ In contrast to the sonic and psychological violence at Guantanamo Bay described by Cusick, it can feel myopic to use the metaphors of “cultural violence” in reference to radio at a time when the people of Syria are experiencing a terrifying explosion of real, physical violence. For some

⁸⁷ Suzanne G. Cusick and B.W. Joseph, “Across an Invisible Line: A Conversation About Music and Torture,” *Grey Room* (2011): 6–21; Suzanne G. Cusick, " 'You are in a place that is out of the world...': Music in the Detention Camps of the 'Global War on Terror.'" *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 2 (2008): 1-26; Suzanne G. Cusick, "Music as Torture/Music as Weapon." *Transcultural Music Review*. 10 (2006):1-18; Mustafa Bayoumi. "Disco Inferno." *The Nation*, (December 26, 2005); Jonathan Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁸⁸ For example, Christina Aguilera was cited by prisoners as a performer they were forced to hear in Cusick, “You are in a place...”, 12.

⁸⁹ Interview with Edgar Snow, *Saturday Evening Post*. March 27, 1954. Quoted in Robert Tarbell Oliver, *Leadership in Asia: Persuasive Communication in the Making of Nations, 1850-1950* (Newark; University of Delaware Press, 1989), 88.

⁹⁰ See for example, Matthew Fraser, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Soft Power and American Empire* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2005); Donald Lambro, “Tuning in on a broadcast weapon,” *Washington Times* (Washington, D.C., United States, April 8, 2002); N. O’Shaughnessy, “Weapons of Mass Seduction,” *Journal of Political Marketing* 3, no. 4 (2004): 79–104; J. J. Smith et al., “Communicating for Effect: Operationalizing and Analyzing Weapons of Mass Influence” (Master’s thesis, Air University: CADRE/AR–Air Force Fellows, 2008).

readers the metaphor will seem more fitting when applied to state-sponsored media of Syria, where state-controlled radio has served as an instrument for the regulation of the public, and is at the moment documenting and even anticipating attacks on huge segments of that same population, interspersed with speech and songs that obliquely and sometimes directly advocate violence.⁹¹ However, in both cases I find that the metaphor of the “radio as weapon” or “music as weapon” is inadequate to the task of analyzing either the production or the reception of political broadcasting.

As a weapon that doesn't fire directly towards its targets, the Radio Sawa is not primarily designed to deter active members of terrorist groups who see themselves as fighting the US, the ostensible enemies in the global war on terror, though the US also engages in propaganda projects aimed at that group. Rather American broadcasting is supposed to improve attitudes towards the US amongst the neutral parties (the imagined listeners) who form the vast majority of the societies from which a tiny number of dedicated anti-American fanatics spring, to change the attitudes of the general population, and in the most optimistic views of American broadcasters, serve as a kind of societal anti-extremist inoculation. Despite the disturbing presence of “Islam vs. the West” rhetoric amidst many segments of the American bureaucracy, the majority of the people engaged in the prosecution of the GWOT, and certainly in Arabic language broadcasting, acknowledge that the direct enemies in that conflict are miniscule minorities of the population wherever they are to be found.⁹²

⁹¹ I discuss this further in Chapter 6, but for a sampling of this music see the “Aghani wataniyya Sūriyya” page at <http://www.sawtelghadsyria.com/> (accessed August 12, 2012).

⁹² For an especially egregious example of the Islamophobic rhetoric present in some segments of the US government, see Spencer Ackerman, “FBI Teaches Agents: ‘Mainstream’ Muslims Are ‘Violent, Radical,’” *Wired* (September 14, 2011). <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/09/fbi-muslims-radical/> (accessed September 14, 2011).

Even without employing language that explicitly identifies public diplomacy with warfare, the link remains inevitable. As Penny Von Eschen states in her essay “Enduring Public Diplomacy”:

First, one might suggest that the fundamental problem with public diplomacy is the same as the problem of any U.S. diplomacy: there has been so little of it. Instead, at least since the end of World War II, the United States has relied more heavily on covert action, bombs, and war, and "going directly to the people" has most often been a screen for, or at the very least deeply entangled with, such actions.⁹³

Despite the spectre of political violence that looms over the relationship between the US and the Arab world, and over any writing on Syria at present, this dissertation will not primarily examine music through the lense of violence described above. Although I address the broad issues of music and political radio in the following chapters, the central focus of this dissertation will be on the the ways in which the meanings of these large-scale efforts at political broadcasting and musical diplomacy are contingent on the local radio environments, sounds, and practices which define popular music in the soundscape of Damascus, Syria. This dissertation argues that whether broadcasters conceive of music as a weapon or an enticement, a tool or a conversation, the study of that transnational music’s social, political, and personal relevance requires an engagement with sound, and the ways in which the sound of popular music is understood in local contexts.

⁹³ Von Eschen, “Enduring Public Diplomacy,” 336.

Chapter 1: Learning to Broadcast

When the Bush administration closed the Voice of America's Arabic language service in 2002 and replaced it with the 24-hour pop-music-focused Radio Sawa, the move was described by both critics and advocates of the station as a sharp break with the historical precedent of the VOA Arabic Services. Former employees for the VOA Arabic service, scholars of Arabic-language media, and the stations founders have, for varying reasons, described the station as fundamentally different from its predecessor.

Alan Heil Jr, former deputy director of VOA, stated in *Voice of America: A History* that in contrast to the "in-depth programming" of the VOA, "even relatively sophisticated youth in much of the Arab world may listen to Radio Sawa more to be entertained than to be informed."⁹⁴ Mamoun Fandy, a strong critic of the station, stated:

Radio Sawa does not resemble VOA in any way. When a veteran director of VOA's Arabic service met with the newly appointed Radio Sawa director to discuss the lessons he had learned from the years he spent in international broadcasting, the new director called him an "interesting man," told him to forget his experience, and sent him on his way. Radio Sawa has a new name, a new strategy, and a new target audience.

Therefore, management felt the station could not benefit from the lessons learned through previous American broadcasting initiatives to the Middle East.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 433.

⁹⁵ Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 107.

According to Radio Sawa founder Norman Pattiz, the new station "sounded so different and it was so appealing—because it really sounds like a Western contemporary music station, a pop station."⁹⁶

In this Chapter I argue that Radio Sawa is not an unprecedented departure from the history of US broadcasting. Nor is the attitude presented by Radio Sawa a direct or subconscious projection of American capitalist values; rather it is a learned posture towards radio broadcasting and music over the radio, one that grew out of the American narrative of the Cold War and the domestic history of American radio. Within that history, I read two basic theories of music's utility as a tool in politically directed media. The first theory views music as a communicative medium that includes semiotic content beyond its lyrics. Within this framework music is thought to illustrate, advocate, and instantiate the values and culture of the broadcasters, creating an affinity between the listener and the broadcasting country. The second theory, which becomes more significant during and after the Cold War, conceives of music primarily as a medium of exchange, the currency with which listeners are induced to become audiences for non-musical content, whether that content is commercial, in the case of corporations, or public diplomacy and propaganda, in the case of states. These theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they are both employed in attempts to 'move the needle' of public opinion towards the US, but they express profoundly different views about what music is and what it can do.

This chapter addresses the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East in order to discuss the development of the operating assumptions which guide America's

⁹⁶ Quoted in Sam Hilmy, "Radio Sawa: America's New Adventure in Radio Broadcasting," *Arab Media & Society*, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 2.

current propaganda or public diplomacy (the latter being the preferred term of the State Department and Broadcasting Board of Governors). Some of the particular characteristics of Radio Sawa that I trace back through the historical record are as follows:

- The commercial format for a governmental station.
- The basic emphasis on advertising the American brand.
- The employment of foreign nationals as announcers.
- The development of a long broadcast day.
- The use of Arab and Western music.
- The use of pop and rock music.
- The targeting of youth.

Some of the U.S. government's operating assumptions about the political utility of radio come from the particular nature of American radio history as it contrasts with European or Middle Eastern radio. The first section of this chapter addresses the reasons for that distinction and its significance for US broadcasting culture. The second section describes the general history of international radio in the Middle East, and the significance of the Cold War to the development of American international broadcasting. For this section I focus particularly on broadcasts from 1956, the year of the Suez Crisis and a vital year in the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East, in order to describe the radio landscape and the position of US broadcasting within it.

This examination of the history of international radio broadcasting in Arabic, the immediate precursors to Radio Sawa and today's "public diplomacy" broadcasts, and the governing principles employed by these stations in regards to their use of music, will serve as the background for subsequent chapters.

The Concept of Radio in America versus Europe

The history of radio broadcasting in the Middle East serves as a perfect example of what L. Carl Brown calls the “penetrated system” of the region, where local politics is inextricably linked to regional and global actors.⁹⁷ Radio respects no border, and the interpenetration and overlap of various national broadcasting systems is inevitable in any region which includes multiple nations in a small area, but the particularly penetrated airwaves of the Middle East have been disproportionately dominated by the broadcasts of foreign powers. While some regional powers (Egypt most dramatically) were able to mount early and successful broadcasting systems, media scholar Douglas A. Boyd states that “[i]t has only been since the mid-1960s that some Middle Eastern countries have provided their citizens with adequate internal radio so that they do not have to rely on outside broadcasts for information and entertainment.”⁹⁸

The penetrated nature of the Middle East has confounded American officials for decades, and American broadcasters are no exception to this rule. There exists any number of obstacles rendering the delivery of an effective international broadcast extremely difficult for the US (in addition to a long-running argument over what constitutes an effective broadcast). One of the fundamental obstacles to American broadcasting efforts which has gone relatively unexamined in the scholarly literature has to do with how radio is understood within the American context, and the ways in which this understanding fails to acknowledge the realities of radio’s history in the Middle East. If, as I argue, American institutional understanding about the possibilities of international

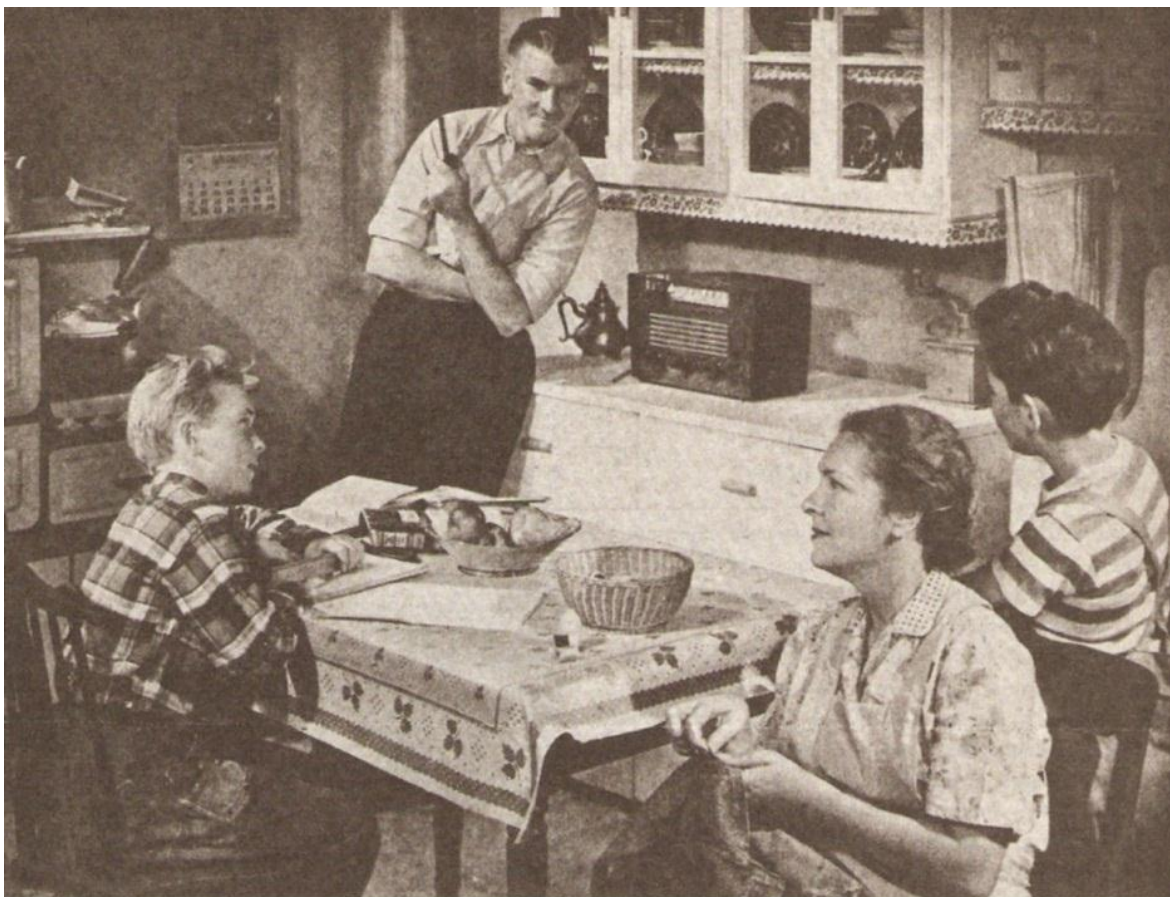
⁹⁷ L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 5.

⁹⁸ Douglas A. Boyd, “International Broadcasting in Arabic to the Middle East and North Africa,” *International Communication Gazette*, v. 22 (1976): 183.

broadcasting (and the use of music in these broadcasts) comes out of the dual histories of domestic commercial radio and Cold War propaganda, the way that American broadcasts are understood on the receiving end is equally shaped by the local histories of radio.

While there is a great deal of scholarship on radio as pertains to international broadcasting and propaganda, especially dealing with Germany and the Soviet Bloc countries in the post-WWII era, most of the academic literature on the cultural history of radio has been written with a bias towards the perspective of American broadcasting history. Despite the fact that much of the oft-cited theorizing about radio and other mass media comes from Europeans, especially European emigrants to the US, the specific and somewhat unique history of American broadcasting tends to influence the way in which scholars in the humanistic fields, as well as American policymakers, conceive of radio as a medium. Scholars who study the impact of radio on smaller units of society, often writing from anthropology, have done an admirable job of describing local radio culture in their particularities, but this work has not yet made its way into the popular historiography of radio as a medium, and certainly not to an extent that would influence American policymakers.⁹⁹ Given the lack of a body of comparative scholarship on American radio versus radio in other parts of the world, the following section focuses on that disjuncture.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000); and Stephen Blum, "Conclusion: Music in an Age of Cultural Confrontation" in *Music-Cultures in Contact: Convergences and Collisions*, ed. Margaret J. Kartomi and Stephen Blum (Basel: Gordon and Breach, 1994): 250-271.



"Our American concept of radio is that it is of the people and for the people"

Freedom to LISTEN – Freedom to LOOK

As the world grows smaller, the question of international communications and world understanding grows larger. The most important phase of this problem is *Freedom to Listen* and *Freedom to Look*—for all peoples of the world.

Radio, by its very nature, is a medium of mass communication; it is a carrier of intelligence. It delivers ideas with an impact that is powerful... Its essence is freedom—liberty of thought and of speech.

Radio should make a prisoner of no man and it should make no man its slave. No one should

be forced to listen and no one compelled to refrain from listening. Always and everywhere, it should be the prerogative of every listener to turn his receiver off, of his own free will.

The principle of *Freedom to Listen* should be established for all peoples without restriction or fear. This is as important as *Freedom of Speech* and *Freedom of the Press*.

Television is on the way and moving steadily forward. Television fires the imagination, and the day is foreseen when we shall look around the earth from city to city, and nation to nation,

as easily as we now listen to global broadcasts. Therefore, *Freedom to Look* is as important as *Freedom to Listen*, for the combination of these will be the radio of the future.

The "Voice of Peace" must speak around this planet and be heard by all people everywhere, no matter what their race, or creed, or political philosophies.*

David Sarnoff

President and Chairman of the Board,
Radio Corporation of America.

*Excerpts from an address before the United States National Commission for UNESCO.



RADIO CORPORATION of AMERICA

FREEDOM IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

Figure 1.1: Radio Corporation of America (RCA) advertisement "Freedom to Listen, Freedom to Look." The caption beneath the image reads "Our American concept of radio is that it is of the people and for the people."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ By Radio Corporation of America [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

American Radio Culture

The classic radio advertising image above brings to mind a set of associations that define for many Americans a specific kind of radio content and set of meanings for the medium. In the United States early radio (approximately 1920-1950) is associated with soap operas and other sponsored radio plays, music, and newscasts from corporations like GE and Westinghouse.¹⁰¹ These were often the same corporations which manufactured and sold the radio sets themselves. Though the history of public and non-profit radio in the US goes back to the 1910s, American broadcasting was and still is dominated by commercial stations. American radio history is a fundamentally capitalist one, and moreover the American style of consumer capitalism was developed concurrently with the radio; the fields of advertising, market research, and brand identification, born in the newspaper field, came to their full fruition in radio broadcasts. Even the newscasts of early radio, which were initially conceived of as public service rather than a profit center for radio broadcasts, were part of a market exchange; they were the way in which corporations paid for broadcasting rights on a given frequency, as the airwaves themselves were conceived of initially as publicly shared property held in trust by the government and leased to corporations.

While the conception of radio as a capitalist endeavor is historically relevant for the United States, the early history of radio in the rest of the world was largely dominated by state-sponsored broadcasts to an extent that may be difficult for Americans to fathom. To be sure, this distinction is one of degree rather than kind, as commercial radio in Europe started not long after it began in the US in 1920, but the differences are hardly

¹⁰¹ For an examination of the broadcaster-listener relationship in the US during this period, see, Elena Razlogova, "The voice of the listener: Americans and the radio industry, 1920--1950" (PhD dissertation: George Mason University, 2004).

subtle.¹⁰² For example, there was no national public radio network in the US until the advent of NPR in 1970.¹⁰³ The relative dominance of commercial radio in the US does not come from the inherently capitalist nature of American society, though capitalist ideology undoubtedly plays a role in the development of American broadcasting. Rather the reasons behind this distinction between American and foreign broadcasting rest in part on the physical properties of radio itself, and the way in which these properties interact with political geography.

The development of radio broadcasting technology has followed a counterintuitive path as it progressed throughout the first half of the twentieth century in that the effective range of broadcasts shrank rather than grew as new technologies were adopted. As the most popular medium for radio broadcasting moved from shortwave to medium wave (both based on amplitude modulation) to FM (frequency modulation) due to the increased fidelity available through FM technology, the potential range of a broadcasting antenna shrank to the FM radius of as little as a few miles depending on signal strength. Because the frequencies used for FM radio propagate by line of sight, FM signals cannot travel around obstacles or the curvature of the earth no matter how much wattage is applied to the transmitter. Medium wave broadcasts in contrast can travel hundreds of miles, especially at night when electromagnetic distortion from the sun dies down and radio waves can travel higher into the atmosphere before bouncing back to earth. Shortwave broadcasts can travel thousands in the right conditions, due to the

¹⁰² Werner Severin, "Commercial vs. Non-Commercial Radio during Broadcasting's Early Years," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* Vol. 22 (1978): 496.

¹⁰³ John Witherspoon et al., *A History of Public Broadcasting* (Washington DC: Current, 2000).

ability of these frequencies to bounce off of the ionosphere and around the curvature of the earth.

Because AM broadcasts in the short or medium wave are more prone to static than FM broadcasts due to the type of carrier wave used, music broadcasting has gradually shifted heavily to FM since 1940s, despite its much smaller broadcast radius. The solution to AM static is to raise the wattage of the transmission, but the second consequence of this is the tendency of high wattage AM transmissions to travel farther, such that a station trying to achieve broadcast clarity will necessarily increase its range. The necessarily wide propagation range of short and medium wave radio was one of the benefits of the technology, but this technology had different effects in Europe and the US.

Europe vs American Radio Histories

The map of the United States displayed below (Figure 1.2) is overlaid with the nighttime broadcast radii of hypothetical AM band radio stations centered on major population centers, all broadcasting at the same frequency.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ The map does not reflect the actual propagation ranges of any radio stations, which in reality would vary due to any number of factors.



Figure 1.2: Hypothetical broadcast radii for powerful AM stations

The following map shows the same hypothetical broadcast radii overlaid on Western Europe.



Figure 1.3: Hypothetical broadcast radii for powerful AM stations

As the above maps make clear, while AM stations in the United States are potentially subject to some interference from stations on the same frequency in other cities, the use of the same AM frequency by multiple stations in Europe would result in a cacophony of overlapping broadcasts. Additionally, while American stations are

competing for airspace principally with English language stations from other American cities, European stations are competing with stations broadcasting in other languages from outside of the legal jurisdiction of their state.¹⁰⁵

The historical result of this interaction between geography and technology was that the competition for usable radio frequencies was much more intense in Europe than in the US. While the apportioning of radio frequencies to various purposes in the US was primarily a domestic matter handled by Congress through domestic legislation, with some exceptions like the 1941 North American Regional Broadcast Agreement,¹⁰⁶ in Europe it was a complex international process which required a series of treaties during the teens, twenties and thirties.¹⁰⁷ AM radio in Europe is to this day allotted in smaller frequency bands than in the US (a station every 9hz as opposed to every 10hz in the US), but the squeeze was even tighter in the early days of radio, when the imprecision of transmitters and receivers required stations to employ wider frequency bands.

In an environment where nations had to compete with each other for access to broadcast frequencies, European governments were much more likely to reserve broadcasting rights for state agencies rather than apportion them out to private corporations. Thus, where in the US the state was only a minor presence on the radio dial, in Europe a very high percentage of radio stations were initially state-funded or

¹⁰⁵ American listeners in the Southwest have some familiarity with this phenomenon through “border-blaster” stations broadcasting from Mexico in order to avoid US power regulations. In southern California the famous XERB, which appeared in the film *American Graffiti*, serves as the prototypical example.

¹⁰⁶ Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 216.

¹⁰⁷ Howard S. LeRoy, “Treaty Regulation of International Radio and Short Wave Broadcasting,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Oct., 1938): 719-737.

operated.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Britain's introduction of a radio set license fee to fund the production of the BBC linked the government to both the transmission and reception side of radio in a way that was followed by countries across Europe (though the BBC's international broadcasts are not financed by the license fees).¹⁰⁹

The concept of a radio receiver license fee was considered in the US during the 1920 and 1930s when the idea of advertising aided by the use of a public resource still met with a significant amount of opposition, but it was never implemented, and the TV set license fee was similarly shot down.¹¹⁰ Instead something like the opposite of a license fee occurred, and American corporations offered radio sets at discounts in order to increase listenership for moneymaking commercials, selling audience to advertisers rather than selling content to audiences.

The basic American understanding of radio as a medium is thus significantly different from the European one. This idea that radio is best handled by for-profit corporations, or the alumni of commercial broadcasting, appears over and over again in American decision-making, where multiple government agencies have tried in various ways to emulate for-profit broadcasting. Sig Mickelson, former director of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, had previously worked as President of CBS News.¹¹¹ Frank Shakespeare, who was director of the USIA from 1969-1973 (United States Information Agency, then in charge of the Voice of America) , and later Chairman of the International

¹⁰⁸ Sydney W. Head, *World Broadcasting Systems: A Comparative Analysis* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company:1985).

¹⁰⁹ Douglas A. Boyd, "Sharq Al-Adna/The Voice of Britain: The UK's 'Secret' Arabic Station and Suez War Propaganda Disaster," *Gazette* 65 (2003): 443.

¹¹⁰ Robert Waterman McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹¹¹ Sig Mickelson, *America's Other Voice: The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York: Praeger, 1983), vii.

Broadcasting Bureau and Ambassador to Portugal, had been Vice-Chairman of RKO General, the famous radio and film production company.¹¹²

I have contrasted the U.S.'s history with Europe's here because the system of radio broadcasts in the Middle East was largely conditioned by European powers. England, France and Italy were especially dominant in the Middle East and North Africa in the pre-WWII era when international broadcasting began, and they applied the same set of rules for radio to their colonies in the Middle East as they did back home, dividing up the airwaves among themselves. In addition, the relative poverty of local populations meant that those broadcasts which did originate locally were at a disadvantage compared to large and well-funded Arabic-language stations broadcast by European governments. Given these factors, and the political geography of the region, the Middle East developed a radio landscape which is much closer to the state-led European than the American private model.

Indeed, many of the most famous voices in the Arabic-speaking world spent much of their careers performing and composing for state radio. Umm Kulthum's famous concerts on *Ṣawt al-ʿArab* are the best known example, but most of the greats of twentieth century Arabic music worked for state radio at some point. The Rahbani Brothers got their start at Radio Lebanon (formerly Radio ash-Sharq before the French pulled out of Lebanon in 1946), and Fairuz first sang their music on the British-owned *Idhāʿat Sharq al-ʿAdnā* (Near East Radio).¹¹³ Government sponsored radio performance and recording became such a central part of the music market that the Egyptian composer

¹¹² Frank Shakespeare, "International Broadcasting and US Political Realities" in *Western Broadcasting over the Iron Curtain*, ed. Kenneth RM Short (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 57.

¹¹³ Christopher Reed Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation*, vol. 18 (Taylor & Francis, 2008), 45.

Muhammed 'Abd al-Wahāb used an interview with the VOA in the 1970s as a chance to complain about the distorting effect of radio when asked why he composed fewer purely instrumental pieces than in his younger days:

Of course this is necessary, but you cannot blame us for the current situation. The radio is to be blamed for it. The radio should direct more attention to music....it is the problem of the government's routine itself, which gives a composer LE 150 or LE 200 for a song but give a musician LE 7 or LE 10 for an instrumental piece...¹¹⁴

It is telling here that 'Abd al-Wahāb traces the distorting effect of the radio on music composition directly to governmental actors. For a musician in the Arab World for most of the twentieth century, radio as a medium was necessarily associated with government, whether local or foreign governments, in a way it was not for American musicians and listeners.

Early History of International Radio

First Voices

International Radio in the ME and the VOA

The history of international broadcasting begins with the Soviet Union, where early optimism concerning the possibility of socialist revolution around the world caused party leaders to initiate sporadic foreign broadcasts in 1927. In 1929 the Soviet foreign language broadcasting department was founded, under whose auspices Radio Moscow was inaugurated in October of that year. The station began with French broadcasts, in addition to its native Russian, and soon expanded to English and German. Within the

¹¹⁴ Mohamed Abdel Wahab, *Bainee wa baineek* (Cairo: Voice of America, 2007), compact disc.

first few years of its existence, Radio Moscow was also broadcasting in Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Portuguese.¹¹⁵

In the same year that the USSR initiated its international broadcasts, the traditional colonial powers began broadcasting radio to the areas under their control. The Netherlands began transmission in Dutch to Indonesia in 1927, France and Belgium followed with broadcasts to their African colonies in 1931, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) began its English language Empire Service in 1932 (later to become the World Service).¹¹⁶

BBC founder Lord John Reith's ambitions for the early Empire Service were very limited:

Don't expect too much in the early days; for some time we shall transmit comparatively simple programmes, to give the best chance of intelligible reception and provide evidence as to the type of material most suitable for the service in each zone. The programmes will neither be very interesting nor very good.¹¹⁷

Despite the international audience of these programs, the first international broadcasters were not necessarily engaged in public diplomacy or propaganda operations of the type which we might envision today. The BBC Empire Service, for example, was initially directed towards the sizeable English population living abroad. Although British

¹¹⁵ Philo C. Wasburn, *Broadcasting Propaganda: International Radio Broadcasting and the Construction of Political Reality* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 5.

¹¹⁶ Wasburn, *Broadcasting Propaganda*, 5.

¹¹⁷ BBC, "75 Years"; available from http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1122_75_years/index.shtml; accessed December 3, 2009.

listeners in foreign countries were almost certainly a minority of the listenership wherever the Empire Service reached, the content was tailored to their interests, focusing almost entirely on news from back home in England. As Michael Nelson notes in *War of the Black Heavens*, in the BBC's first broadcast to Continental Europe the British Prime Minister referred to the Czechoslovak crisis as "a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing."¹¹⁸ Similarly to the Empire Service, early Soviet broadcasts were geared towards ideological sympathizers and ComIntern members outside of the Soviet Union, rather than attempting to address the general populations of foreign states. Although the US government was not directly broadcasting during this period, Fred Fejes has argued that American private shortwave radio broadcasts to Latin America in the 1930s facilitated political and economic goals of the Roosevelt administration, and set out "the foundation for the post-war development of the Voice of America."¹¹⁹

The first broadcasters to explicitly target the general populations of other countries with their international broadcasts were the Axis powers of Italy and Germany. Hitler expanded Germany's regular domestic broadcasts into international propaganda initiatives in 1935, under the direction of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels and chief of radio Eugene Hadamowski, whose musings on the subject mirror the enthusiasm the Nazi regime had for the prospects of international radio:

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 6.

¹¹⁹ Fred Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor: New Deal Foreign Policy and United States Shortwave Broadcasting to Latin America*, (Norwood, N.J: Ablex Pub. Corp, 1986), 5.

We spell radio with three exclamation marks because we are possessed in it of a miraculous power—the strongest weapon ever given to the spirit—that opens hearts and does not stop at the borders of cities and does not turn back before closed doors; that jumps rivers, mountains, and seas; that is able to force peoples under the spell of one powerful spirit.¹²⁰

Mussolini's Italy was beginning its own international broadcasts in 1935, and by 1937 Italy was broadcasting in 16 languages, in contrast to Germany's six.¹²¹

International Broadcasting to the Middle East

Arabic is “the world's most broadcast international radio language after English,” according to radio scholar Douglas Boyd.¹²² The following figure provides a list, compiled by Boyd, of the non-Arab countries which broadcast in Arabic at some point during the twentieth century.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹²¹ Ibid., 6.

¹²² Douglas Boyd, ‘Radio Sawa: The Creation of a New U.S. Government Arabic Service’. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Marriott Hotel, San Diego, CA*, (May 27, 2003), 5, http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/1/2/2/7/pages112275/p112275-1.php (accessed January 5, 2012).

¹²³ Boyd, “International Radio Broadcasting in Arabic”: 456-458.



Figure 1.4: Non-Arab Arabic broadcasts by country of origin (Source: Boyd.)

The rise of fascist parties in Germany and Italy changed the international broadcasting landscape in the Middle East just as it did in Europe. Italy began Arabic language broadcasts denouncing British policy in the Middle East in 1935 (Radio Bari), and it was in response to this propaganda offensive that the BBC established its first foreign language service, in Arabic, in 1938.¹²⁴ France also began broadcasting Radio Orient (*Idha 'at ash-Sharq*) to Lebanon and Syria in 1938.¹²⁵ Germany followed with its own Arabic broadcasts in 1939. These broadcasts were largely in the long-range but poor quality shortwave bands, and thus the BBC Empire service was able to broadcast to the Middle East directly from London.

The U.S. produced occasional news briefs in Arabic during World War II, broadcasting from Algiers after the Allied invasion of North Africa in November of 1942, but regular Voice of America Arabic service did not begin until January 1, 1950.¹²⁶ The signal originated from the *USS Courier*, a Navy ship stationed in the harbor at Rhodes, a position from which the VOA broadcast in sixteen languages.¹²⁷ The *Courier's* transmitter broadcast a shortwave signal with potential to reach a wide expanse of the Middle East.¹²⁸ Beginning with a half-hour per day of programming, VOA-Arabic

¹²⁴ Italy's Arabic broadcast got its name from the location of the transmitter in Bari in southern Italy.

Gary D. Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: The BBC and VOA in International Politics, 1956-64* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 7.

¹²⁵ Virginia Vacca, "« AR-RĀDYŌ ». Le Radio Arabe d'Europa e d'Oriente e le loro Pubblicazioni," *Oriente Moderno* 20, no. 9 (1940): 448.

¹²⁶ Robert William Pirsein, "The Voice of America: A History of the International Broadcasting Activities of the United States Government, 1940-1962" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1970), 76; Alan Heil Jr., "A History of VOA Arabic: A Half-Century of Service to the Nation and the Arab World" in *Engaging the Arab and Islamic Worlds Through Public Diplomacy: A Report and Action Recommendations*, ed. William A. Rugh (Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council, 2004), 51.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁸ According to former RFE director Sig Mickelson: "The most effective range for a shortwave signal is approximately 1500 miles. On leaving the sending antenna, the signal rises to the ionosphere and is

expanded by 1958 to six hours per day, and included cultural programming and English lessons in addition to the regular newscasts.¹²⁹

In a move emblematic of the VOA's general tendency to follow in the footsteps of the BBC, the first voice of the VOA Arabic news service was Isa Khalil Sabbagh, a former BBC commentator and analyst. Though the BBC was the model for the VOA's Arabic service, there were significant differences between the two. As a colonial power around the Middle East, the BBC had both a large stable of British Orientalists and military officers to draw on and a small but significant rotating population of Egyptian scholars like Taha Hussein who were available to give lectures from London. The BBC also regularly invited Egyptian singers and musicians to London to perform on the radio.¹³⁰ Italy's Radio Bari had a famous advantage over Britain, in that the combination of the Bari transmitter's relative proximity to North Africa and the Italian occupation of Libya allowed Italy to hire an entire ensemble of Arab musicians to work as the radio station's famous house band.¹³¹

Though the VOA was able to hire away some talent from the BBC or the Egyptian Home Service, the pool of Arabic specialists in government employ was extremely shallow. The US also lacked the infrastructure of the BBC's large newsgathering organization, comprised in part by reports from British embassies in the region. The VOA's relative weakness in terms of local capabilities was not seen as

reflected back to earth. The distance between antenna and target can be adjusted by raising or lowering the angle of fire (the higher the trajectory, the shorter the distance, and vice versa), but the 1500-mile range is considered optimum." Sig Mickelson, *America's Other Voice: The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1983), 4.

¹²⁹ Robert William Pirsein, "The Voice of America: A History of the International Broadcasting Activities of the United States Government, 1940-1962" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1970), 76.

¹³⁰ Peter Partner, *Arab Voices: The BBC Arabic Service 1938-1988* (London: BBC Books, 1988).

¹³¹ Partner, *Arab Voices*, 51.

completely damning to US broadcasters, partly because the purpose of the station was somewhat different from that of the BBC.

The three principles embedded in the VOA's congressional charter are as follows:

- (1) VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
- (2) VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of American thought and institutions.
- (3) VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussion and opinions on those policies.¹³²

The first principle has been subject to debate throughout the history of US broadcast. As recently as 2004 in a Congressional hearing on the subject of Al Hurra, Radio Sawa's satellite television sister station, Rep. José E. Serrano (D-N.Y.) implied that a station that was not propagandistic was not worth funding, stating: "Do not tell us it's not propaganda, because if it's not propaganda, then I think . . . we will have to look at what it is we are doing,"¹³³

¹³²Ibid, 52.

¹³³ Ellen McCarthy, "Va.-Based, U.S.-Financed Arabic Channel Finds Its Voice," *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2004, Page A01. The degree to which the VOA's newscasts truly served as an independent voice, outside of the control of Washington, is debatable. Former VOA employees usually bristle at the implication that they were being told what to report by Washington, and suggest that their diplomatic function was best served by functioning as an impartial news source, but there are a few documented occurrences of direct interference. Alan Heil has documented an incident when the State Department pressured the VOA's Arabic news team to withhold a story about Iraqi military posturing toward Kuwait, in the period before the first Gulf War, when the U.S. had not settled on an antagonistic stance towards Iraq.

Interestingly, some of the few documented uses of the Voice of America for clandestine purposes involved its music programming. In his book on international broadcasting during the Cold War, Michael Nelson relates the following story:

According to court documents, the order to broadcast the clandestine message came from Charles Wick, head of the VOA during the Reagan Administration. ABC claimed VOA

The second and third principles of the charter however, were never under dispute. The Voice of America has always been conceived primarily as an advertisement for America. Where the BBC's history of international broadcasting had begun with the Empire Service for Britons abroad and only later expanded its goals in order to address a primarily foreign audience, the US lacked Britain's imperial background, and the VOA was always meant for foreign audiences. Although the BBC World Service was the obvious model for the VOA, proponents of the service have traditionally tried to vouch for the quality of the broadcasts by comparing them to domestic commercial stations rather than to other national services.¹³⁴

The type and quantity of music used on the VOA's Arabic services changed over time, but the use of music was primarily based on this goal of advertising America. In contrast to the BBC, which began Arabic broadcasts with a reading from the Quran, and other foreign language broadcasts which began with local music, many VOA broadcasts opened with the beginning chords to "Yankee Doodle Dandy".¹³⁵ The use of jazz and rock music especially was initially proposed within this framework, as an advertisement for American popular culture. Leonard Feather's *Jazz Club USA*, begun in 1952, was the first regular jazz program on the Voice of America. Feather's stint was short-lived, but was followed by Willis Conover's *Music USA* in 1955, another jazz program that would

broadcast at least five covert messages during Wick's tenure. Alan Silverman, another broadcaster, was ordered to play a song at a specific time from the Rod Stewart album, "Foolish Behavior." Wick did not remember the Silverman incident, but said it would be appropriate under those conditions of national security and the U.S. national interest. Mary Bittermann, however, who ran the VOA under President Carter, said clandestine messages had no place there.

¹³⁴ See for example Kenneth L. Adelman, "Speaking of America: Public Diplomacy in Our Time," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Spring, 1981): 913-936.

¹³⁵ Ralph A. Uttaro, "The Voices of America in International Radio Propaganda," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Winter, 1982): 103-122.

continue for more than 30 years.¹³⁶ According to some commentators, during that period Conover was thought to be the “second-best-known American in the world, behind whoever was president at the time.”¹³⁷

Despite the primacy of American music on the VOA, local music was also fair game under the theory that music, as the “universal language,” has inherent communicative potential. Thus, in 1945, VOA music director Elizabeth Lomax advised programmers to:

sample every kind of music which is truly part of the American scene... as well as music of your target area... We can create a bond of friendship by telling our audience in effect: ‘We in America know your music as well as our own’.¹³⁸

The VOA Arabic service eventually began broadcasting a large percentage of Arabic music (usually Egyptian), but this change developed over time as the station realized that local music was more popular, and was necessary in order to compete with some of the other stations to be discussed shortly.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13.

¹³⁷ Sanford J. Ungar, “Pitch Imperfect: The Trouble at the Voice of America” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (May - Jun., 2005): 7-13.

¹³⁸ Alan Heil Jr., *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 288.

¹³⁹ The BBC has similarly had a mandate to “Project Britain” in its foreign language broadcasts, but accounts by BBC officials tend to discuss this as a secondary mission next to their basic utility as a reliable news source, which was itself seen as the process by which Britain would build goodwill.

See for example Andrew Walker, *A Skyful of Freedom: 60 Years of the BBC World Service* (London: Broadside Books, 1992), and Gerard Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

Of course, the idea of accurate news as the best advertisement for a state’s international broadcasts has become a nearly universal talking point among broadcasts. For American broadcasters, however, the concept of a free press at all is generally discussed as one of the core American values. Norman Pattiz for example described Radio Sawa as “an example of a free press in the American tradition.”

Hilmy, “Radio Sawa: America’s New Adventure in Radio Broadcasting,” 2.

The other side of international broadcasting, as opposed to the “broadcasting the home country” model, avoids national affiliation with radio stations that attempt to act as replacements for local media, or pass themselves off as local broadcasts. These replacement services can also be the so-called black or grey clandestine stations, using the terminology wherein “white propaganda” refers to media which identifies its source, “black propaganda” falsely portrays its source, and “grey propaganda” does not directly identify its source. Both Britain and America had very important clandestine presences around the world during the Cold War, though the US did not have a full clandestine broadcast in the Middle East on par with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, the US clandestine broadcasts to Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, these stations, as well as the British *Sharq Al-Ādnā*, were significant in the development of American music broadcasting in the region.

The Radio Landscape in the Middle East: Focus on 1956

The first decade of American Arabic-language broadcasting, the 1950s, saw the rise of a crowded radio landscape in the Middle East, with regional and external powers waging public battles over the airwaves. The traditional colonial powers of Britain and France saw their power weaken while the US and USSR increased their presence in the region, though all four steadily increased the number of hours of Arabic language news and entertainment to advance their goals in the Middle East.¹⁴⁰ An accurate feeling for the complex relationships between the various broadcasters and states actors behind them

¹⁴⁰ Douglas A. Boyd, “International Broadcasting to the Arab World: Cultural Economic and Political Motivations for Transnational Radio Communication” *International Broadcasting Gazette*, 44(2), (1989): 107-27.

can be gleaned by sampling a few broadcasts from the early days of the pivotal year of 1956.

On January 7, 1956, the Arabic language program on Radio Tel Aviv (eventually expanded into *Şawt Israel*), claimed that “The Syrian Government issued an order prohibiting the people from listening to this radio in public places directly after the time of the Arabic evening program had doubled.” Decrying the censorship of radio as a “grave moral and political wrong” the commentator went on to criticize Syrian broadcasts in Hebrew, saying:

In Israel where the people are free to listen to any radio, the Hebrew program broadcast by Damascus Radio is a source of entertainment and ridicule, not because of the grammatical mistakes, but because of the very strange and untrue news broadcast.¹⁴¹

Damascus did not take long to respond, denying the accusation of censorship in a broadcast two days later, and even more forcefully denying the accusation of poor grammar.

We know that the majority of the people in occupied Palestine listen to the Hebrew Radio program of Radio Damascus. As to the allegation that the school children listen to discuss with their teachers the mistakes made by the announcer of Radio Damascus, every person who really knows the Hebrew language realizes that this is a lie. The Hebrew teachers in occupied Palestine advise their pupils to listen to Radio Damascus to imitate the Hebrew announcer’s pronunciation and style. Hebrew is an Oriental language which Orientals alone can pronounce properly. The Hebrew language reached its highest development under the rule of Islam in Medieval Spain. We do not claim that our Hebrew

¹⁴¹ Anonymous, “Broadcasts in Arabic Barred to Syrians” – *Israeli Radio*, 7 January 1956. (in Arabic) trans. Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) Daily Report.

language is free from all faults, but our Hebrew is far better than the bad Hebrew of Radio Tel Aviv.¹⁴²

This kind of back and forth criticism of rival broadcasts in addition to criticism of the rival nation is typical of this period. Foreign broadcasters too were part of this inter-station criticism, as shown in this Soviet transmission from a few years earlier, broadcast in Kurdish to the Middle East.

It must be stated that the Kurdish program of Baghdad radio also broadcasts a lot of Kurdish and European music. This is to indicate that the Kurds of Iraq are very merry and well off, and they like to hear music. The Kurdish masses of Iraq have no means of living except through hard labor. The Kurds have no say in their country's affairs. Those Kurds who venture to talk about Kurdish freedom are immediately accused of being Communists. Thus they are handcuffed by the police of Nuri Said and thrown in prison.

...

The Kurdish program of Radio Baghdad, instead of talking about the great campaign of the Kurdish Nation for its freedom and independence, plays American jitterbug music and British foxtrots. Indeed they mean to indicate that the Kurds have everything they want in life and now their only necessity is to dance to imperialist music.¹⁴³

On January 6, 1956 in a commentary on Egypt's *Şawt al-Arab*, Ahmad Said accused the "imperialist powers" (i.e., Britain) of jamming the station in Jordan.¹⁴⁴ Regardless of whether the Jordanians were trying to jam the station, the Egyptians didn't seem to think that their jamming process was too successful, as two days later Nassar's *Voice of the Arabs* (*Şawt al-Arab*) broadcast a talk by the Jordanian-born Mohammed

¹⁴² Anonymous, "Damascus Denies Ban on Israeli Radio" – *Damascus Radio*, 9 January 1956 (in Arabic) trans by FBIS.

¹⁴³ Anonymous, "Music Instead of News" – *Azerbaijan Democratic Station - Clandestine Soviet Broadcast* (in Kurdish) trans. FBIS.

¹⁴⁴ Ahmed Said, "Imperialists Jam Arab Broadcasts to Jordan" *Voice of the Arabs*, 6 January 1956 (In Arabic) trans. by FBIS.

Mahmoud al-Khatib, calling on his fellow countrymen to oppose the imperialists, and assuring them of a high level of support among the Egyptian populace.¹⁴⁵

In response to the rising popularity of Nasser's broadcasts, King Hussein of Jordan began his own station on January 9, with the strong encouragement and backing of the British, who hoped that a pro-British Arab radio station coming from either Jordan or Iraq might be created to counter the rising power and popularity of *Ṣawt al-ʿArab* from Cairo.¹⁴⁶ Broadcasting from Amman, the station used the name "Radio Ramallah" for sympathetic effect, and King Hussein himself penned two of the first editorials (not attributed to him on the broadcasts), in which he referred to Egypt as a "stooge, an obedient tool" and the Saudis as a "primitive tribal party."¹⁴⁷ In their enthusiasm to counter Nasser's brand of bombast, the British imported Younis Bahri to Jordan, who began broadcasting for Radio Ramallah on January 26. Bahri, an Iraqi, had gained notoriety during World War II for radio commentaries across the Middle East. The fact that Bahri gained his fame as a rabidly pro-Nazi propagandist evidently did not deter the British in their efforts to find an Arab voice who would oppose Nasser.

Radio Ramallah was unsuccessful and short-lived, partially because King Hussein himself would not remain quite so friendly to the British for long -- by March he had dismissed the British General John Glubb from his post as head of the Arab Legion. In the early part of the year however, the British were so pleased with these commentaries

¹⁴⁵Mohammed Mahmoud al-Khatib, "Jordanian Issues Appeal to Countrymen" *Voice of the Arabs*, 6 January, 1956 (In Arabic) trans. by FBIS.

¹⁴⁶ James Vaughan, "Propaganda by Proxy?: Britain, America, And Arab Radio Broadcasting, 1953-1957," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22, 2, (2002): 162.

¹⁴⁷ United States National Archive, College Park, MD (USNA), RG 59, 574.85/1-1756, American Embassy Amman to State Department, No. 236, 17 January 1956.

that they rebroadcast them on their own nominally clandestine station, Sharq al-Ādnā.¹⁴⁸ Of course, all this did for the Egyptians was confirm the relationship between Jordan and Britain, as by this time the source of Sharq al-Ādnā was so well known that the station was referred to in Lebanese papers as the Cavalry of St. George, after the image on a British coin.¹⁴⁹

Sharq Al-Ādnā was simultaneously a failure for Britain in terms of its clandestine purpose (its British sponsorship was suspected or assumed in most places) and a great initial success in terms of its popularity and influence on international broadcasting. Founded in 1942 in Jaffa, the station continued broadcasting from Palestine until 1948 when the British withdrew, after which it moved to Cyprus. The station is described here by Peter Partner:

The Sharq al-Ādnā was amply financed, and it soon had a good supporting Arabic entertainment programme as well as a news programme. Its first Director was Squadron Leader A. H. Marsack, who had served in Egypt and the Sudan before the war, and had converted to Islam. The Egyptian State Broadcasting Corporation loaned experienced staff, and Sharq al-Ādnā rapidly got a reputation for slick and effective programmes: broadcasting on the short wave, it could still reach a mass audience throughout the Middle East and not just in Palestine. Its broadcasting hours were longer than those of any other Arabic-language station at that time: in February 1943 the BBC reckoned that Sharq al-Ādnā was

¹⁴⁸ Vaughan, "Propaganda by Proxy?...", 166.

¹⁴⁹ Julian Hale, *Radio Power: Propaganda and International Broadcasting* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press: 1975), 121.

transmitting between ten and twelve hours daily, at a time when the BBC Arabic Service was only on the air for 1¾ hours, and even Egyptian State Broadcasting at Cairo only for seven and a half.

Sharq was definitely a ‘light programme’: it transmitted news bulletins, but the proportion of music to other material was more than three times what it was in the BBC service.¹⁵⁰

Operating under the control of the Foreign Service, Sharq al-Ādnā employed primarily Christian Egyptians and Palestinians (thought to be less loyal to their home country) along with a few British specialists. The station was something of an odd mix of different sides. Primarily a music station, it was based closer to the action in the Middle East, and included more fluent speakers of Arabic. Sharq al-Ādnā thus was often able to address news much faster than the BBC Arabic from London, and with its much longer broadcast day, the Sharq al-Ādnā take on an event would be repeated more often than the BBC take.¹⁵¹ Funded through the Foreign Office and intended as a Mandate government propaganda outfit from its inception in Palestine, the station nevertheless often took editorial stances which tilted farther towards the pro-Arab side of things than the official line out of London, especially on issues of Israel and Palestine. Simultaneously it was “unique in the Arab World at this time in that it was – despite its affiliation with the British government – a commercial station.”¹⁵² Musically, the station featured in the early 1950s the work of Assi and Mansour Rahbani, the legendary

¹⁵⁰ Partner, *Arab Voices*, 53.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*, 48.

Lebanese composers and playwrights, who wrote songs, musical-theatre sketches, plays, and music for advertisements.¹⁵³

It is clear from CIA documents that American officials were wary of Britain's continued involvement in Jordan and Iraq,¹⁵⁴ and the American Embassy in Amman took some pleasure in noting that Bahri's Radio Ramallah broadcasts were generally received as laughable and crude, but the last few years had given the Americans radio problems of their own.¹⁵⁵ Following the coup by the Free Officers of Egypt in 1952, the Truman Administration was bullish on the new Egyptian regime. Yaya Abu Bakr, the head of the Egyptian News Department received advice and assistance from the United States Information Service and Voice of America on expanding Radio Cairo, and the CIA may have provided monetary and technical assistance for the radio project in 1953, which allowed Nasser to vastly expand the reach of Egyptian international broadcasts after taking power in 1954.¹⁵⁶ The Eisenhower administration hoped to eventually bring Egypt away from the USSR and into the American camp, and although CIA analysts predicted a strong reaction from Egypt, Nasser's reaction to the American withdrawal from the Aswan Dam project surprised them in its strength.

US officials found Nasser's oratorical style "crude and bombastic".¹⁵⁷ However, there is some degree of subtlety to Nasser's use of radio which does not come across in the English translations U.S. officials were reading in the CIA's Foreign Broadcast

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency Document, "Nassar and the Middle East Situation – Nationalization of the Suez Canal" 31 July 1956.

¹⁵⁵ Vaughan, "Propaganda by Proxy?...", 168.

¹⁵⁶ Wilbur Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's failure in the Middle East* (London: W.W. Norton, 1980), 103; Miles Copeland, *Game of Nations: The Amorality of Power Politics*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 53-60.

¹⁵⁷ Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*, 30.

Information Service dispatches. Nasser was extremely canny in the way that he used the medium of radio, including music. He famously made sure that the music of Umm Kulthum was returned to Egyptian airwaves after the revolution of 1952, and often timed his speeches to follow her usual radio concerts.¹⁵⁸ There was nuance even in his bombastic speeches, like the one he gave on July 25, 1956 denouncing the American “lies about the Egyptian economy” broadcast on the VOA:

If a shameful clamor rises in Washington and devoid of all principles of international usage announces by lies, deceit and delusion that the Egyptian economy is impotent and unstable, I shall look at them and tell them: Die in your rage, You shall not dominate or tyrannize us.

The phrase “Die in your rage” (*mūtū bi ghaiḏikum*), stands out from the speech, and indeed was adopted as a mantra by Ahmed Said and a number of other commentators on *Ṣawt al-‘Arab* in further broadcasts in the following days.¹⁵⁹

While a number of scholars have focused on this particular passage from the speech as an expression of Nasser’s anger towards Dulles, I would argue that it is a subtler rhetorical gesture.¹⁶⁰ The section is a reference to a well-known passage from the Quran, Sura 3:119, and a glance at the Sura from which the quote is taken actually illustrates a different attitude.

¹⁵⁸ See Virginia Danielson. *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁹ Ahmed Said, “U.S. and Britain Heading for Extinction” *Voice of the Arabs* 25 July, 1956 (in Arabic) trans. FBIS.

¹⁶⁰ Derek Hopwood, *Egypt, Politics and Society, 1945-1990* (London, Routledge: 1993), 42. Laura M. James, “When Did Nasser Expect War? The Suez Nationalization and its Aftermath in Egypt,” in *Reassessing Suez, 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath* ed. Simon C. Smith (New York: Ashgate, 2008), 153.

“Ah! ye are those who love them, but they love you not,- though ye believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you, they say, "We believe": But when they are alone, they bite off the very tips of their fingers at you in their rage. Say: "Perish in you rage; Allah knoweth well all the secrets of the heart.”¹⁶¹

هَتَأَنْتُمْ أَوْلَاءِ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ كُلِّهِ
وَإِذَا لَقُواكُمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمُ الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ قُلْ
مُوتُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾

In the context of the full passage, the allusion is to disappointment with another party’s duplicity and animosity rather than direct aggression. As a rhetorical gesture, Nasser gains not just the mantle of righteous indignation, but the aura of the generous but betrayed friend.

I focus on this point not to argue that Americans were somehow misinterpreting what Nasser’s stance toward America meant in policy terms. On the contrary, CIA internal documents projecting Nasser’s response to a possible British-French military action were fairly accurate.¹⁶² In reality, at the time Dulles and Eisenhower were less concerned with bombastic rhetoric than they were with dry dispatches like the following from July 23:

¹⁶¹ Translation from *Tafsīr Ma‘ānī Al-Qur‘ān Al-Karīm Bi-Al-Lughah Al-Injilīzīyah Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur‘ān in English Language with Comments from Tafsīr At-Tabari, Tafsīr Al-Qurtubi, and Tafsīr Ibn Kathir and Ahadith from Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim and Other Ahadith Books*, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), 3:119..

¹⁶² Central Intelligence Agency Document “Probably Repercussions of British-French Military Action in the Suez Crisis” 5 September 1956.

Authorities in Cairo have decided to send 20 cultural missions to Russia and People's China. Among these are 12 missions of atomic scientists to be sent to Russia in preparation for the large atomic unit that will be erected in Egypt in 1958. Eight missions will be sent to People's China in compliance with the cultural agreement between the two countries. In compliance with the same agreement, during the current year People's China will send similar missions in scientific, cultural, and agricultural fields.¹⁶³

The point about the shades of meaning in Nasser's July 25 speech illustrates the difficulty that US broadcasts had competing on the same rhetorical playing field as the Egyptians. It was strikingly difficult for American broadcasts to be perceived as anything other than tone-deaf in comparison. Nasser's appeal rested not just on policy, but on his authenticity, and his expert manipulation of media to portray it.¹⁶⁴

Suez and the Voice of Britain

The Suez Crisis itself was a central event in the development of radio in the Middle East, and is described very well by Daniel Boyd in his article on Sharq al-Adna. When Israel attacked Sinai, beginning the Suez War on October 30, Britain announced that it had "requisitioned" Sharq al-Ādnā, changed the name of the station to the "Voice of Britain", and began broadcasting anti-Nasserist propaganda as well as messages telling

¹⁶³ Anonymous, "Missions to Bloc" Egyptian Home Services, 23 July, 1956 (in Arabic) trans. by FBIS.

¹⁶⁴ At least in the 1950s, in the 1960s what had been triumphant and rebellions optimism becomes delusional in the face of military defeat.

civilians to avoid military targets. On November 1st the British Air Force bombed the Egyptian radio antennas, but failed to destroy all of Egyptian broadcasting capabilities, and Şawt al-Arab was brought back online, albeit with a lower powered transmitter.¹⁶⁵

The Egyptian radio itself fired back at the Voice of Britain with a much more effective attack, though they did so without the aid of an air force. According to Muhammad Abd al-Qadir Hatem: “while making it clear that active co-operation with those broadcasts was nothing short of treason, the Egyptian government wisely left the door open for the rehabilitation of announcers and others who ‘genuinely regretted their unpatriotic acts’.”¹⁶⁶ Nearly the entire staff of Sharq al-Ādnā resigned, including Ralph Poster, the British director of the station, who joined the Arab staff members in announcing on air their support for Egypt before leaving.¹⁶⁷ Composer Mansour Rahbani claims that it was actually he and his brother Assi who first quit and instigated the other employees to join them in protest.¹⁶⁸

A number of Arabs from the BBC service were flown in to operate the station, but their performance was by all accounts a disaster. According to Muhammed Heikal:

The broadcasts displayed a surprising ignorance of Egyptian affairs and thinking. In just one instance, when the propagandists suggested a list of eight names of Egyptians who would be acceptable to the British in a new government, two of the men they named, Hafez Ramadan and Aly Zaki el

¹⁶⁵ Boyd, “Sharq al-Adna...” , 451.

¹⁶⁶ Muhammed Hatem, *Information and the Arab Cause* (London: Longman, 1974).

¹⁶⁷ Boyd, “Sharq al-Adna...” , 451.

¹⁶⁸ Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*, 77.

Oraby, were already dead. The broadcasts served only to increase Nasser's popularity.¹⁶⁹

The Voice of Britain broadcasts often directly conflicted with the BBC's Arabic Service, and the former was eventually scrapped entirely and its transmitter reassigned to the BBC. Despite its disastrous ending, according to Boyd:

The programming of Sharq al-Ādnā, the first Middle East-based station that was not Arab government operated, did ultimately have a positive impact on Arab world radio. Its commercials for products such as pain relievers and washing detergent, along with popular music and credible news, provided a format later copied for the most part by France's Radio Monte Carlo Middle East, and several Arab government commercial radio services, including Egypt's The Middle East Program, a station that started in 1964 during Nasser's presidency.

Moving back to the American broadcasters, the VOA Arabic service was in a difficult spot during the Suez War. This was due in part to the awkward position of not wanting to oppose either side too vociferously, but American propaganda goals were also complicated by developments on other fronts of the Cold War. As Salim Yaqub states:

The attack on Egypt was doubly objectionable to U.S. officials because it diverted international attention from dramatic events in Eastern Europe.

Earlier that October, encouraged by Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization

¹⁶⁹ Muhammed Heikal, *The Cairo Documents: The Inside Story of Nasser and his Relationship with World Leaders, Rebels, and Statesmen*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday: 1971), 110.

campaign and by recent reforms in Poland, Hungarian students had risen up in revolt against the Soviet military presence in Hungary.¹⁷⁰

Radio Free Europe

Those who wanted to see the U.S. take a hard line against the USSR and Soviet ideology had their moment when Radio Free Europe (RFE) was founded in 1950, with the explicit purpose of broadcasting anti-communist messages and regional news in local languages to Eastern bloc countries. RFE was the brain-child of John Foster Dulles and a group called the National Committee for a Free Europe, and operated publicly as an independent corporation until it was brought under the wing of the International Broadcasting Bureau in 1972. Publicly, it was an independent corporation similar to the front that Britain used for the *Sharq al-Ādnā*. Though RFE was in fact funded almost entirely by the CIA, this did not become public knowledge until 1968.¹⁷¹

Prior to this, RFE and its counterpart Radio Liberty were operated as private corporations, ostensibly funded by the largesse of the people of the United States.¹⁷² The National Committee for a Free Europe did in fact hold large “Crusades for Freedom”, fundraising campaigns which toured around the US with a replica of the Liberty Bell, encouraging citizens to sign “Freedom Scrolls” and donate “Truth Dollars” to the cause of Radio Free Europe. While the Crusades for Freedom never became a significant source of funding for RFE, they did allow the CIA to easily launder money and send it to

¹⁷⁰ Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Charlotte, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 52.

¹⁷¹ Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 5.

¹⁷² Radio Liberty was the separate but similarly based entity formed to broadcast in Russian directly into the USSR.

the group without suspicion. The slogan for the campaign was: “Help Truth Fight Communism.”

Fighting was central in the minds of early RFE broadcasters. Frank Atschul, the first head of Radio Free Europe, describes its goals in strong words:

We must gain the confidence of our friends – and we must constantly remind them that they are not forgotten and that while the ultimate date of their liberation is unpredictable, its coming is inevitable. At the same time we must undermine the Communist regime by exposing it for the vicious fraud that it is. As we are unhampered by the amenities of diplomatic intercourse, we enter this fight with bare fists... We identify Communist collaborators by name. We give their address and give an account of their misdeeds. And sometimes, using a formula for which I claim no personal credit, “This is the sort of man to whom an accident might happen on a dark night.”¹⁷³

While the primary focus of the VOA was international news and reporting about the workings of U.S. government and public life, the purpose of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty was entirely different. Staffed primarily by émigrés from Eastern Europe and Russia, Radio Free Europe stations attempted to become replacement services for domestic markets, with the explicit goals of overturning communist governments. In the modern parlance of the Broadcast Board of Governors, the group that oversees all U.S.

¹⁷³Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 14.

international broadcasting, RFE and RL are “surrogate” services, designed to replace non-existent or deficient local media structures.¹⁷⁴

In contrast to the carefully news- and U.S. focused Voice of America, the RFE/RL was described by Altschul as a “citizen’s adventure in the field of psychological warfare” that sought to “sow distrust and dissension among our enemies.”¹⁷⁵ Within the CIA, RFE was directed by a special Psychological Warfare Committee, which defined its goals in the following declassified internal document from November 22, 1950:¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office, “U.S. International Broadcasting: Challenges Facing the Broadcasting Board of Governors” *Testimony by Jess T. Ford, Director of International Affairs and Trade, Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate* April 29, 2004. Available: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04711t.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “Memorandum For: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Subject: Radio Free Europe” (Washington, DC, November 22, 1950): 1-2.
http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/va2/docs/doc14_19501122.pdf (accessed August 31, 2011) .

a. Essentially an instrument of psychological warfare, Radio Free Europe's purpose is to prevent, or at least to hinder, the cultural, political and economic integration of the satellite states with the Soviet Union.

b. Sponsored by a group of citizens, Radio Free Europe provides a channel over which individuals, both foreigners in exile and American citizens, can speak to the people behind the Iron Curtain. Unhampered by official status, Radio Free Europe supplements but takes care not to compete with or duplicate the Voice of America. Programs are sent out in intimate colloquial language on a far wider selection of subjects than the Voice as an agency of the government is in a position to use, and Radio Free Europe can move into the area of gray or even black propaganda should the situation warrant it.

c. To accomplish its purpose of bringing hope to our friends and confusion to our enemies, Radio Free Europe has been developing programs aimed at:

) (1) > 25 Yrs

(1) Keeping

)

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Figure 1.5: Memorandum to the Deputy Director of the CIA regarding Radio Free Europe

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(1) Keeping alive the hope of liberation in the satellite states and telling the various peoples that they are not forgotten by the free world;

(2) Stimulating and increasing the difficulties of the satellite regimes in their efforts to achieve full control of production and economic integration with the USSR;

(3) Creating doubts and fears among the quislings of the satellites by character assassination and talk of ultimate retribution, and at the same time drawing a distinction between Communist puppets and those who follow the party line in order to survive, thereby encouraging high level defections among the latter;

(4) Developing an atmosphere favorable to the growth of resistance movements, for ultimate exploitation in war, or, at a propitious moment, in peace time.

Figure 1.6: Memorandum to the Deputy Director of the CIA regarding Radio Free Europe (cont.)

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty are important precedents for Radio Sawa for a number of reasons. Organizationally, RFE/RL serve as the models for the Middle East Broadcasting Network (home of Radio Sawa), as well as Radio Marti (Cuba) and Radio Free Asia (East Asia). Though the Voice of America had its Arabic-language broadcasts cut in 2002 when Radio Sawa began broadcasting, RFE/RL Inc. continues to operate Radio Free Iraq, Radio Free Afghanistan, and Radio Farda (to Iran), with the mission of creating surrogate news services for these regions. Additionally, Radio Free

Europe was the home of the first pop music broadcasts on U.S. international broadcasting, and the ideological forefather of Radio Sawa.

While not usually directly linked to the events in the Middle East, the events in Hungary are very important to the use of music in US broadcasting. Above and beyond the relationship between Eastern Europe and the Middle East that Yaqub points out, the events of the 1950s in Hungary are vitally important to the development of American broadcasting.

One of the biggest debates in the history of U.S. international broadcasting concerns the conduct of Radio Free Hungary during the lead-up to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, a nationwide revolt that began as a student occupation of the Budapest radio building, and spread across the country before it was brutally put down by Soviet forces. In the weeks during and immediately before the student revolt of October 1956, a radio war took place between the Hungarian State radio station and the American-backed Radio Free Hungary. Party-run stations increased the number of talks and programs devoted to youth themes,¹⁷⁷ and, during the revolt itself, Hungarian state radio was flooded with “pleas for peace”, supposedly drawn from all segments of Hungarian society.¹⁷⁸ On the other side, some Hungarians and Soviets on both sides of the fighting have suggested that Radio Free Hungary helped initiate the revolt by implying that U.S. aid would be lent to the students and fighters if they were able to hold out long enough. Soviets commentators thus accused Radio Free Hungary of trying to entice impressionable youngsters into rebellion. While defenders of the RFH deny this charge, they acknowledge at the very least that RFH broadcasters read editorials from a

¹⁷⁷ Hungarian Youth Organizations – Radio Hungary 10/2/1956

¹⁷⁸ FBIS citation

London newspaper hypothesizing that Western powers would come to the aid of the revolt.¹⁷⁹ The trouble is, what the Soviets and angry Hungarians accused Radio Free Hungary of doing parallels the CIA's goals (as stated in the document in Figure 1.5-6) of "keeping alive the hope of liberation in the satellite states and telling various peoples that they are not forgotten by the free world." and "developing an atmosphere favorable to the growth of resistances movements, for ultimate exploitation in war."

Given the accusations leveled at RFH after 1956, it is somewhat ironic that Radio Free Hungary began to seriously target the teenage demographic two years later in 1958 with the inauguration of its first disc jockey program, Teenager Party. The brainchild of Hungarian service editor Charles Andras and reporter Géza Ekecs, Teenager Party initially aired the same thirty-five minute program three times a week.¹⁸⁰

According to RFE scholar Arch Puddington:

Ekecs borrowed the top-forty format popularized by American rock stations...his core audience wanted rock, and that is what he gave it. He kept his listeners informed about the shifts in the Billboard magazine ratings, explaining which songs were moving up and which were heading down.

As the sole Hungarian language rock program of the time, Ekecs' Teenager Party became extremely popular, expanding to more programs on RFH for Ekecs, and copycat programs on the other RFE stations. The Hungarian Communist authorities were very

¹⁷⁹ Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 105.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

disturbed by the popularity of Teenager Party, and what they called the “sandwich strategy” of surrounding news broadcasts with popular music, in order to entice young listeners.¹⁸¹ The lesson learned by the RFH during the student revolt was apparently the desirability of broadcasting to students with a combination of music and news. It was precisely this “sandwich strategy” which was expanded for Radio Sawa, where small news segments are surrounded by large blocks of music.

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the basic defining characteristics of Radio Sawa have significant precedents in the history of international broadcasting in Arabic and of American broadcasting around the world: the commercial format and long broadcast day (Sharq al-Ādnā), the use of Arab and Western music and the emphasis on advertising the American brand (VOA), the employment of foreign nationals as announcers, the use of pop and rock music, and targeting the youth (Radio Monte Carlo, Radio Free Hungary.) One of the aspects of this broadcasting history that will be most important for this dissertation, and to which I will return in the analysis of Radio Sawa in Chapter 4, is the use of music as an ideological tool against Communism.

The uses of music in conjunction with the anti-Communist broadcasts of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, and the accompanying notions of American music vs. communism, have been popularly lionized by American critics from Ronald Reagan to Tom Stoppard.¹⁸² Part of this has to do with the visibility of some former listeners and

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 140.

¹⁸² See Tom Stoppard, *Rock “n” Roll* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

their stories within the American press, as illustrated by Arch Puddington, describing the reaction received by Radio Free Europe following the fall of the Soviet Union:

Tributes poured in from the radios' loyal listeners. Some recalled the dangers of listening to foreign broadcasts during the Cold War's early days. Grigory Yavlinsky, a reformed and presidential candidate in Russia, recalled that his father and grandfather had been regular listeners to RL. "Because it was forbidden to listen to Radio Liberty, they used to tell me to warn them if someone was coming up the stairs of our apartment building. When I was a little older, they asked me not to say anything to my friends in school about what they did every evening." Andrei Codrescu, a Romanian émigré who attained some notoriety as a humorist on National Public Radio, recalled listening to RGE in his youth, "with the shades drawn, the lights off." He added, "If I walked down any darkened street at that hour, I would have seen the lowered shades and the furtive dark in which glowed the soft dial of the radio."¹⁸³

Without dismissing the importance of these experiences and stories to individuals who listened to American broadcasts and American music while living under Soviet control, I would argue that the story of music, blue jeans and popular culture bringing down the Iron Curtain is not resonant within the US primarily because of anything to do with the actual experiences of listeners under communism.¹⁸⁴ Rather this story persists because it fits in with two widespread American narratives.

The first is the narrative of jazz and rock music as forms of countercultural expression. These conceptions of rock music (as the sound of anti-authoritarian youth self-expression), and jazz music (as the sound of social justice and triumphant democratic ideals) remain relevant even long after the era when most listeners would make direct links between social movements and aesthetic movements in jazz or rock. It is probably

¹⁸³ Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 309.

¹⁸⁴ For a crystallized version of this myth of rock and roll freedom, see Jon Pareles "Rock 'n' Revolution," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2007.

unsurprising that hip-hop, a musical genre with a more recent anti-authoritarian pedigree, has taken a central place on today's public diplomacy programs like Rhythm Road, which embrace specifically American forms. This is the theory of music as expressing an emancipatory and fundamentally American set of ideals.

The second narrative, which has increased in currency in the years since the end of the Cold War as neoliberal and market-based approaches have come to dominate all aspects of American policy-making, holds that music, blue jeans and popular culture brought down the Berlin Wall because they were consumer products. The demand for free markets and the goods and lifestyles it allows would inevitably lure consumers away from Communism.¹⁸⁵

Although the Cold War has ended, the significance of this narrative, and the view of culture as an ideological tool for integrating consumers into the practices of Western, capitalist, and American life, remains in place. The major conflict of the post-Cold War era, the "Global War on Terror", has few commonalities with America's twentieth century competition with the USSR, yet the old cultural weapon in the battle of Capitalism vs. Communism has been redeployed in what has been described as by Benjamin Barber as the battle of "Jihad vs. McWorld", a very problematic formulation which assumes the comparison to past ideological conflict.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ The reality of the relationships that people in the USSR had towards the West and its products was of course much more complex than this narrative suggests. See for example: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Benjamin R Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld: How the Planet Is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together—and What This Means for Democracy*, 1st ed (New York: Times Books, 1995). I will address some of the problems with Barber's formulation in Chapter 4. For a more thorough discussion see "McJihad" in Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London ; New York: Verso Books, 2011).

Chapter 2 – Damascus Radioscape

Damascus, Before Dawn

Early in the morning, a few hours after midnight and well before the first call to prayer, Damascus is mostly quiet. From a vantage point on the road running up to the top of Mount Qassioun, one can look out over the whole city. Back to the mountain, Saḥat al-Umawiyyīn sits squarely in the right side of the tableau, surrounded by the opera house, the library, and a few government buildings. A trickle of nighttime traffic leaving the square crosses the scene to the left, past al-Merjeh and the gates of the old city. It weaves through the yellow and white streetlamps and fluorescent green lights of the mosques, up to the east, where the argon blue crosses of Bāb Tūmā and Abbāssiyyīn blend in to the green and white galaxy of the city.

At this point in the morning, few people are listening. Truck drivers with loads of vegetables enter the city on the road down from Aleppo, passing the big apartment buildings in Tijāra where the Russian families live. The voices of a few groups of revelers finishing late-night chats on apartment balconies mix with the ballads wafting out into the air from home, and the occasional thumping bass from a passing car. The big wholesale market where the trucks are unloaded, up northeast of Bab Sharqī, is still quiet.

Introduction

This chapter describes a 24-hour period in the radio life of Damascus, Syria. Employing Arjun Appadurai's terminology of interlocking and overlapping "scapes," this chapter examines the ways in which radio and mass-mediated music inhabits the sound of the city, and the points of

conjunction between the radioscapes and the soundscapes of Damascus.¹ As a modern metropolis of two and a half million people, the greater Damascene soundscape is heard and voiced in innumerable contrasting and contradictory ways by the city's inhabitants. Given the specific focus of this dissertation on mass-distributed music radio broadcasts, this chapter takes a broad view of Damascus, lingering on a few points of intersection between the radioscape and the sonic practices of daily life, rather than describing the soundscape of a specific group of people, physical locus or daily practice. This chapter, based on my research in Syria, is partially ethnographic in nature, and my understanding of soundscape as a social concept has been greatly influenced the work of anthropologists of sound including Steven Feld.²

The music and other radio content described below was all recorded during May 2010 at the times and frequencies stated, but in the interest of a more coherent narrative, I have compressed radio events which took place across a longer time frame into a single day.

Despite the economic and cultural dominance of satellite television for popular music, the primary experience of music is still a sonic one. Radios, car stereos, mp3 players, cell-phone ringtones, storefront speakers, and human voices, even as they often give voice to the same sounds heard on music television, compose a soundscape to the shifting and unpredictable visuals of daily life, rather than the carefully directed and managed ones of Rotana and Melody Music. According to the US Broadcasting Board of Governor's operating data, 71% of Syrians surveyed report using radio in a given week, compared to a 95% usage rate for televisions.³ Even when the proximate source of music in a given setting is a television, the sheer ubiquity of satellite music means that it

¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32.

² See especially, Steven Feld, "Waterfalls of song: An acoustemology of place resounding in Bosavi, Papua, New Guinea." in *Senses of Place*, Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds. (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996): 91-135.

³ BBG Annual Language Service Review Briefing Book 2010, 19.

is often consumed in social contexts where listening is somewhat divorced from the visual element of the broadcasts.

Interested in the practices of collective audition to mediated music, I spent much of my time in Damascus in public or public-private spaces where music was played, especially in a variety of cafes in different neighborhoods around the city. In these cafes, televisions playing music videos were nearly ubiquitous fixtures. One of the few cafes which did not have a television when I first patronized it in 2009 (and played music either from the radio or from a computer-less CD-R player) purchased a television in order to draw in an audience for the 2010 World Cup matches. On days without special events, these televisions did not tend to command a great deal of visual attention from patrons, who made little effort to sit in better viewing positions, and by and large preferred to socialize, play backgammon, smoke, or read the paper over watching the videos on the screen. One relatively working-class café I frequented had a large projection screen that was used for football matches or special events, but at most times would have only a smaller television playing, used as a sound source for a pair of speakers.

In homes that I visited in Damascus, television was often an accompaniment to any activity, but similarly it was not always focus of visual attention. Coming from the cultural assumptions of the sometimes ostentatiously anti-television island of Manhattan academics (“Oh no, I didn’t see that, I don’t even *own* a TV”) I was sometimes surprised when invited to friends’ homes in Damascus to find the television playing throughout my entire visit. It usually took a few moments of adjustment to realize that no one was expecting me to pay any concentrated attention to the TV, and thus to allow it to serve instead as both background music and background visual.

Part of the practice of distracted consumption of the visual element of music video clips is explained by the fact that while on many Western music channels the videos are primarily a vehicle

for the advertising spots that occurs between sets of videos, in most free-to-air Arab music video channels, the advertising takes place during the course of the video clips. According to Walter Armbrust:

...the ubiquity of video clips may overstate their popularity. Video clips are free content in an economically troubled business, paid for substantially not by the networks that broadcast them, but by mobile phone service providers and music producers. Mobile phone service companies underwrite the production of video clips because the text messages flowing constantly on the margins of the screen during songs advertise their business, and because they can sell ring tones. The same goes for music producers – video clips advertise cassettes and CDS, and they create stars who can command high fees for live performance. Because video clips are quasi-advertising for a limited set of businesses rather than a simple response to demand, their conspicuous presence among the free-to-air satellite channels is an unreliable gauge of how many people watch them.⁴

According to journalist Habib Battah, “SMS-related revenues make up to 70% or more of revenues for a number of music and/or gaming channels” and most of the SMS messages that populate the ribbons crawling along the bottom of video clips, and ringtone purchases that fund their creation, originate in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.⁵ These countries also finance the majority of pan-Arab music production, although the actual production tends to take place in Cairo and Lebanon.

Sitting in a café in Damascus as video clips play on a wall-mounted television and patrons largely disregard the screen, looking up only occasionally as a new song comes on, can feel like sitting the banks of a media stream rather than swimming in it. Up on the wall one observes a station owned by Saudis, with content created by the Lebanese and Egyptians, filled with SMS

⁴ Walter Armbrust, “What Would Sayyid Qutb Say? Some Reflections on Video Clips,” in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 231.

⁵ Habib Battah, “Arab Television and Mobile Phone: A True Interaction” in Mobile Telecommunications Co. *MENA Region- Mobility for One Language, Diverse Cultures: The socio-economic impact of mobile phones in the Arab World*. (Mobile Telecommunications Co. Report, February 2006), 61-65.

messages from Khaleeji (“Gulfie”) teenagers, a back-and-forth flow in which Syrian consumers participate, but do not have enough economic clout to direct the current.

Egyptian composer Mounir Al Wassimi complained in a 2010 article that “The visual aspect has therefore become increasingly prominent in Arab song, to the extent that if you close your eyes while hearing a televised song today, you may not feel anything at all.”⁶ However, the prevalence of video clip music in situations where the visual element is not the primary focus of attention calls that belief into question. Similarly, the lingering popularity of radio, and especially that radio which plays a repertoire of video stars, indicates that the sonic element of this kind of cultural product retains a great deal of significance.

92.3 – *Sham FM*⁷

*As a live recording of Umm Kulthum’s “Min Ajli ‘Eynayka” approaches the hour mark and begins to fade out, we change the channel, switching from one of the two staples of Syrian radio, Umm Kulthum, to the other, Fairuz. In the stillest section of the night, Fairuz is singing “Khalīk bil bayt” backed by a big jazz band. This is late Fairuz, the period when she was working with her son Ziad al-Rahbani whose arrangements famously integrated jazz, French pop, and Arabic vocal styles in a texture that numerous critics have compared to the cultural mixture of cosmopolitan Beirut. A piano and guitar lead the performance, followed by a large orchestra of strings and brass, as she nearly whispers into the microphone, “God bless you, and keep you at home.”*⁸

The station is Sham FM, referring to the traditional name for greater Damascus, and its

⁶ Mounir Al Wassimi, “Arab Music and Changes in the Arab Media,” in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 94.

⁷ The Arabic pronunciation for Damascus is Dimeshq, but Syrians use the word Sham, the traditional word for greater Damascus, or greater Syria (*bilād ash-shām*), almost interchangeably.

⁸ Cite http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NHT0F_zVuw

*playlist relies heavily on Fairuz at all hours of the day, but especially in the morning. While Fairuz can be heard on almost every Syrian station if you wait long enough, Sham FM specifically emphasizes “Fairuziyyāt” (songs by Fairuz) and the work of Ziad al-Rahbani in its mission statement.*⁹

Fairuz and Umm Kulthum

In his book *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* Jonathan Shannon describes the continuing popularity and prestige in Syria accorded to the “Big Three” of Arabic music: Umm Kulthūm, ‘Abd al-Ḥalim Ḥāfīz, and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, three Egyptian musicians who are beloved across the Arabic-speaking world. As far as radio in Damascus is concerned, however, we can concentrate even further on the two most significant singers who command dramatically more broadcast time than any others, Umm Kulthum and Fairuz.

The preeminence of these two vocalists is so self-evident to most Syrians that listing them among one’s favorite singers is often considered redundant or unnecessary. Indeed, Shannon describes the extent to which one must at the very least specify artistic periods in the career of Umm Kulthum in order to be taken seriously by musicians and aficionados, for whom merely listening to Umm Kulthum as a general practice is as fundamental as breathing.

Among the discriminating, however, to answer “Umm Kulthum” is not sufficient. At a listening session organized by a dramatist friend at the home of a well-known woman music teacher, my discrimination as a listener was put to the test early. “To whom do you enjoy listening?” asked the teacher. I replied, “Umm Kulthum,” and, with a look of resignation that suggested to me, “Is that all there is?” she asked,

⁹ “Limādha Nahnu” *Sham FM* (accessed February 2, 2011)
<http://www.shamfm.fm/new/Pages/Default.php?guide=ae7b728dc49f50dc32c103a6bf2b1129>

“From which era [of her career]?” I had just listened to a harangue by a local cassette vendor about how beautiful and pure the early Umm Kulthum was in comparison to her later work, so I replied, “Her early work, before she became well-known.” This elicited a nod of approval and the remark, “Her best recordings are from the period of about 1928 to 1930. Afterwards she became too repetitive and emotionally less sincere (*mufta’ala*),” she remarked.¹⁰

The extent to which these two singers form an essential part of the audio landscape is displayed by the common response that I received when asking Damascenes about what music they listen to: “*Fairuz bis-ṣabāḥ wa Umm Kulthum bil-masā’*” (Fairuz in the morning and Umm Kulthum in the evening). The association of Umm Kulthum with the evening dates to her monthly performances on Egyptian radio and *Ṣawt al-‘Arab*, detailed by Virginia Danielson in “The Voice of Egypt”.¹¹ Fairuz, on the other hand, is nearly universally associated with the morning. With the two singers thus bookending the day, any radio station in Syria that gears its programming towards either high art or older popular sensibilities has both Fairuz and Umm Kulthum in heavy rotation. In Damascus, Fairuz is clearly the dominant of the two, and Sham FM plays on the common figuration with an ad spot for “Fairuz in the morning, and *Fairuziāt* in the evening, brought to you by Syriatel”, entreating listeners to “[e]lectrify your evening with Fairuz.”¹²

Fairuz (née Nuhād al-Haddād), the most revered singer from Lebanon, holds almost mythical status in her home country but is perhaps even more ubiquitous in Syria.¹³ In 2007 *al-*

¹⁰ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 46.

¹¹ Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Michal Goldman, Director, *Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt*, 1997.

¹² Here *Fairuziāt* might be translated to “Fairuzes”, where normally it is used to mean “the songs of Fairuz.”

¹³ Christopher Reed Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: Fairuz and the Rahbani Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Hayat printed a story about a regulation in the Syrian city of Tartous, where a city ordinance was supposedly put in place requiring that street vendors cease to call out to sell their wares, and instead replace this constant yelling with boomboxes and Fairuz cassettes, a musical sign that would alert potential customers while replacing the usual din with something more pleasant.¹⁴ In Damascus I heard this story from both ardent fans and non-fans, like one *Tishreen* columnist who wrote an article titled “*Ana Akrah Fairuz*” [I Hate Fairuz], would happily never listen to her again.¹⁵ The ubiquity of her voice on in the morning in Syria, even more than in Lebanon, has become socialized into a functional necessity, on par with the delivery of a public utility.¹⁶ This is echoed by the description of the morning playlist on the Version FM’s website: “Can we image a radio station in the whole world able to capture the interest of listeners, and to command their respect and interest, without the existence of Lady Fairuz?”¹⁷

¹⁴ Leena al-Abd, “Nizām jadīd yufrad gharamāt ‘alā al-mukhalifin” *Dar al-Hayat* (accessed December 12, 2011) <http://international.daralhayat.com/archivearticle/156139>

¹⁵ Anisa ‘Ayud, “Ana Akrah Fairuz” *Tishreen*, September 17, 2007. <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/121954>

¹⁶ Nancy E. Currey describes the dominance of Fairuz and Umm Kulthum in Syrian broadcasting and public life in “History in Contemporary Practice: Syria’s Musical Canon,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 36(1): 9-19.

¹⁷ “Jadal al Barāmi” VersionFM.com <http://www.versionfm.net/ar/whatison/5/1/%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AC> (accessed March 20, 2012).

In honor of Fairuz’s 70th birthday, Syrian columnist and poet Luqman Derky wrote a short story entitled “Ummat Fairuz” (Fairuz Nation).¹⁷ The story takes place at a Fairuz concert in 1985, during the Lebanese civil war, a period when Fairuz avoided performing in Lebanon, to my knowledge her last performance in Syria until 2008.¹⁷ In the story, he describes a group of his friends, students of drama and literature from Aleppo, who traveled down to *Tadmor* (Palmyra) in 1985 to hear Fairuz perform. The students have received tickets in exchange for participating as extras in a film, but when they arrive they find the stadium and its surroundings flooded by thousands of ticketless fans trying to find their way in.

The doors closed, and more than thirty thousand entered the stadium, which could not even hold fifteen. Outside, eighty thousand members of the infinitely vast Fairuz Nation satisfied themselves with hearing her voice through the external speakers.¹⁷

The actual performance only takes a few paragraphs of the story, but Derky’s beautiful description of the moment when Fairuz walks onstage crystallizes the Syrian reverence for the singer.

Fairuz was late. Then she appeared. White...White...White. She lacked nothing from perfection, but nothing completes her. A secret from perfection, a secret from beyond, a terrible void...

.Spinning the dial around through the stations, the air filled with the same voice. On Radio Damascus, Sham FM, Radio Fann, Fairuz rules the airwaves in the early morning.

Two young men sit on the curb with a blanket laid out in front of them on the street, covered in shoes for sale. The street was lively late into the night, but at this point all of the food carts and customers have headed home. The teenagers sit chatting behind their shoes, hoping to entice the last few stragglers with a deal.

A car speeds around the corner, and three cops jump out, two in blue uniforms, and one outfitted in equally recognizable attire: a leather jacket and a big pair of sunglasses pushed up onto his head. As soon as they see the car, one of the guys sitting on the curb bolts immediately; his friend makes a grab for one of the blankets, wrapping up a few pairs of shoes before the cops chase after him. Everyone runs for a few moments, the police not really trying too hard to catch the kids after that first burst of energy. They walk back to the abandoned blanket to look over the remaining shoes, and each of the uniformed officers snatches a pair of high-tops, before hopping back in the car and moving off into the night.

frightening... affectionate... infinite beauty in front of me, but so far away. . . . A child was crawling, looking at the ground, then raised his head suddenly as the crowd froze. We all froze together, fell silent together, even the beating of our hearts, and Fairuz sang. No one believed that he saw and heard, no one believed that he was present in this place, in this time. I felt my body...I put my hand on my faces so Lubaba wouldn't see my tears, then I stole a look, and saw every hand covering every face.

Later in the story one of the narrator's friends, who decided to sell his ticket and try to sneak into the concert along with the crowd, is arrested when the crowd rushes the gates. In her guise as benevolent leader of her nation, Fairuz appears in the story to intervene with the police and manages have him released.

87.6- Radio Damascus

*Switching over to Radio Damascus, the final words of Sabah Fakhri's "ya Naḥīf al-Qawām" fade out, moving into a boisterous, and slightly out of tune, brass band rendition of the Syrian national anthem, "Ḥomat ad-Diyār" (Guardians of the Homeland). Like most of the national anthems in this part of the world, it is a musical remnant of colonialism. The arrangement sounds like a French march from the turn of the twentieth century.*¹⁸

State and Private Syrian Radio

Government-run radio makes up a significant portion of the dial in Syria, where privately owned media were outlawed for most of the country's modern history, and private radio was generally synonymous with Lebanese stations transmitting across the border. In 2001, Legislative decree No. 50 allowed for the creation of privately owned print publications, and in 2002 this was expanded to radio stations, though exclusively for the purpose of broadcasting music, with no provision for political news content on private radio.¹⁹ The government slowly began to grant broadcasting licenses in 2002, and the first private radio station to appear, in 2005, was Al-Madina FM, a Damascus-based station which continues to advertise itself as Syria's first private station.²⁰ According to an August 2009 *Syria Post* interview with Nabil Shinar, the head of Syrian Broadcasting, there were by that time 14 private radio stations in Syria, a number that has increased

¹⁸ The Syrian national anthem was adopted in 1936. See Karen A. Cerulo, "Symbols and the World System: National Anthems and Flags," *Sociological Forum* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp. 243-271.

¹⁹ "Syria to Allow Private Radio Broadcasts," *BBC News*, January 30, 2002 (accessed February 2, 2011) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1789905.stm

²⁰ "About Us" AlmadinaFM.com (accessed March 3, 2011) <http://www.almadinafm.com/new/about.php>

in the past few years with new entries such as Radio Fann in April 2010.²¹ A 2012 statement from the Ministry of Information stated that there were 11 more applications under consideration.²²

Despite the entrance of these private stations, Syrian state radio still controls a significant portion of the airwaves. Having existed for decades as the only domestic broadcasters (with a few exceptions that I will mention later), Syrian government radio presents a wide range of content, if not a wide range of political viewpoints. They broadcast world and domestic news, music, talk shows, soap operas, radio-plays, educational programming, and a variety of cultural programs and special events, especially during the month of Ramadan. Radio Damascus is organized into three divisions - The General Program (al-Barnāmaj al-‘ām), Voice of the People (Ṣawt ash-Sha‘b), and Voice of the Youth (Ṣawt ash-Shabāb) - each broadcast across the country from twelve broadcast towers.²³ In 2011, in response to the Syrian Uprisings, the General Organization of Radio and Television launched a fourth branch, the religious station Noor ash-Sham.²⁴ The Syrian Ministry of Information also recently announced plans for a college radio station run through the University of Damascus.²⁵

The content of the three main divisions overlaps significantly. Each broadcasts news segments, music, and cultural programming. Musical programming is based around the expected Fairuz in the morning and Umm Kulthum in the late evening, with a different additional focus depending on the division. Besides the regional and international news coming from the general

²¹ Mohammed al-Masry, “Mudīr al-idha‘a as-Sūriyya fī hadīth khāṣṣ li Syria Post” *Syria-Post.net* (accessed February 15, 2012) <http://www.syria-post.net/index.php?news=7219>

²² “20 fīda‘iyya jadīda wa 11 idha‘at khāṣṣa wa 15 ṣaḥīfa yūmiyya.. bi-intizar tarkhīṣ wizārat al-‘i‘lām” *Shukumaku.com* April 1, 2012 <http://www.shukumaku.com/Content.php?id=39287> (accessed June 6, 2012).

²³ Mohammed al-Masry, “Modīr al- idha‘a as-Sūriyya...”

²⁴ More on this later. Phil Sands, “Assad Government Enlists Imams to calm Sunni Majority” *LebanonWire.com* April 8, 2011 <http://www.lebanonwire.com/1104MLN/11040824TN.asp>

²⁵ “qarīban idha‘a maḥliyya jāmi‘iyya li-ṭalibat al-‘i‘lām” *al-B‘ath* December 5, 2011 <http://www.moi.gov.sy/ar/aid22199.html> (accessed June 10, 2012).

program, and the youth-oriented news from *Ṣawt ash-Shabāb*, the stations include entertainment programs like “The World of Sport” mixed with cultural programming like “Sound of Zejel” (Zejel is a form of colloquial poetry), “From the Cultures of the World”, and historical soap operas such as “*Hikayāt al-Ḥubb wa al-Ālam*” (Stories of Love and Pain).

The explicitly socialist/populist focus of *Ṣawt ash-Sha‘b* is exhibited both in news segments like “With the Workers in the Fields”, and the choice of music, which adds an emphasis on Syrian singers and more *sha‘bī* (folk/popular) genres to the usual Fairuz, Umm Kulthum and *al-muṭribīn al-‘aẓīmīn* (the great singers of *ṭarab*).

Ṣawt ash-Shabāb includes more popular, youth-oriented music and adheres more closely to the playlists of the satellite television stations. It was founded in 2002 to compete with Lebanese pop stations like Strike and Voice of Tomorrow, streaming from over the border, and after the advent of private stations in Syria, competes directly with these stations as well.²⁶ As an example of the self-conscious attempts to position *Ṣawt ash-Shabāb* as an alternative to the private stations, the station advertises itself as the victor in a 2007 listener poll conducted by the private, youth-oriented Sham FM.²⁷ This isn’t to say the poll was necessarily reliable, rather that the government-run station competes directly with private radio.²⁸

The various branches of Syrian state radio, in addition to serving as the only legally authorized purveyors of political news on domestic radio, position themselves as the defenders of Syrian traditions and morals in the face of corrupting outside influence. Cécile Boëx, in her article

²⁶ Saddam Hussein “al-idhā‘at al-sūriyya al-khāṣṣa tenshir ghasīlahā..” *DamasPost.com* February 24, 2010. www.damaspost.com/خاص/الإذاعات-السورية-الخاصة-تنشر-غسيلها.htm (accessed June 10, 2012)

²⁷ “M ālūmāt ‘an Ṣawt ash-Shabāb” *General Organization of Radio and Television - Syria* (accessed January 20, 2011) <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?d=391>

²⁸ In addition to the unreliability of any kind of poll conducted in Syria (especially when a government representative is one of the options on the poll), it is likely that *Ṣawt as-Shabab* wins votes based on cultural capital in addition to pure popularity.

“The End of the State Monopoly over Culture: Toward the Commodification of Cultural and Artistic Production”, describes this stance:

The system of cultural production, derived from the Soviet model, has embedded artistic practices and outputs into a national and collective perspective. In addition, as it relied on a utilitarian vision of culture, it generated two different kinds of cultural goods: from specific ideology but still controlled by the state, and cultural products produced by the official sector, intended to have an educational function, and dealing with ‘serious’ (*jaddīyya*) issues within the nationalist ideological framework.²⁹

This applies both to the news and talk segments, which focus explicitly on Syrian culture and education, and to musical styles, where the state broadcasts tend towards a more curatorial relationship with music, emphasizing the maintenance of traditional and conservative musical values.

Existing at the will of the state, private stations tend to demonstrate at least lip service towards the social goals of state radio. Most contain in their mission statements something similar to the quote from the beginning of the state call for songs. For example, Sham FM states on its “about the station” page that:

We wanted for our radio to form a link between the various segments of society, horizontally and vertically, to facilitate the diversity of material and segments for

²⁹ Cécile Boëx, “The End of the State Monopoly over Culture: Toward the Commodification of Cultural and Artistic Production,” *Middle East Critique* 20, no. 2 (2011): 140.

the younger generation to interact with the parent's generation, and allow communication geographically, through coverage extending to all areas of Syria, as well as tying expatriates to the home country, through broadcasting on the internet.³⁰

The program director of Radio Arabesque stated in an interview that she has tried in her job to ‘balance the commercial aspect [of radio] with community service.’³¹ Version FM goes even further, with a “Who are we?” webpage that reads more like the announcement of an ambitious new public service than a private radio station.

The programs that will be broadcast on Radio Version are realistic ideas taken from the experience of the Syrian public in all of its segments. For example:

- Social Programs
- Cultural Programs
- Technical Programs
- Entertainment Programs
- Sports Programs
- Economic programs
- Heritage Programs
- Programs that address women's issues and affairs
- Children's programs
- Programs for people with special needs
- Programs dealing with health

In our programs the goal undertaken by Version Radio is to give a large forum for the youth of Syria to represent their issues, aspirations, concerns, the problems they face and the ways to address these problems, and likewise we will have a

³⁰ Sham FM “Limādha Nahnu”

<http://www.shamfm.fm/new/Pages/Default.php?guide=ae7b728dc49f50dc32c103a6bf2b1129> (accessed September 13, 2011) (my translation)

³¹ Saddam Hussein “al-idhā‘at al-sūriyya al-khāṣṣa tenshīr ghasīlhā..” *DamasPost.com* February 24, 2010. . www.damaspost.com/خاص/الإذاعات-السورية-الخاصة-تشر-غسلها.htm (accessed June 10, 2012)

major role in education and cultural instruction, and an ability to produce dramatic programs and radio serials.³²

Rhetorically, the emphasis on community service by private radio stations in Syria positions them as examples of the “social market economy” implemented by Bashar al-Assad during the first decade of his presidency.³³ Despite the high-mindedness of these mission statements, the profit motive is very present in these new stations, and the private stations differ significantly from state-run stations, not least because of the general prohibition against entertainment stations broadcasting political news.³⁴ One former employee for a Damascus-based station told me that “When they were putting the station together and trying to get the government license, the fundamental idea was to broadcast classical (*classīqī*) and heritage (*turāth*) music and refined culture. But now that they have the license, they just play the same [pop] music like the other stations.”³⁵

Arrabiyya FM 99.9 is playing a countdown of the day’s Top 3 “Oldies but Goldies.” The choices seem to be completely arbitrary, but no one is likely to complain. Today it is Melhem Barakat, then Hani Shakir. Number one is Georgette Sayegh’s recording of “Bayni wa Baynek” (Between You and Me).

³² Version FM “‘an al-idhā‘a” VersionFM.com http://www.versionfm.com/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=53&Itemid=70 (accessed September 13, 2011). (my translation)

³³ See Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*.

³⁴ In Chapter 6, I address the ways in which the content of the private radio stations has changed in response to the uprising in Syria, aligning more explicitly with the government’s politics, broadcasting political news, and even using the musical playlist to directly display affinity with the regime and critique the uprising.

³⁵ Personal conversation, April 2010.

Airplay and Corporate Structure

The standard techniques by which one would judge airplay and record sales in the US are difficult in Syria because of several factors, including the lack of enforcement of music copyright, the relative weakness of the Syrian economy in comparison to many of its neighbors, and the structural incentives of media companies to distort or obscure the relative popularity of their artists.

The integrated structure of radio and television stations and record companies in the Middle East discourages the existence of any reliable charts which might settle the matter of which artists are most popular. The largest media companies like Rotana, Alam al Fan, and Melody sign artists, produce records and videos (often with third party corporate sponsorship), distribute and market music, and own or have agreements with the radio and television stations which promote artists. In addition to the several extremely popular satellite television stations owned by these companies, two have radio station affiliates in Syria (Rotana FM and Melody FM). Despite Resolution 4981, a statute governing private broadcasting which requires that stations be owned by Syrian companies, in several cases, local stations are allowed to have affiliations with international companies.³⁶

As with most media in the Arab world, the political affiliation of the people who own these companies is widely known by their audiences, who assume at least some level of editorial control on the part of the ownership. Rotana is owned by the Saudi Prince Al-Waheed bin Talal As-Saud, and Melody Entertainment Holding is owned by the Egyptian businessman Naguib Sawaris, who purchased the company from Gamal Marwan, the son of billionaire Ashraf Marwan and grandson of Gamal Abdel Nassar.³⁷

³⁶ *Daftār al-shurūt al-khāṣṣ bil-sharakāt al-idhā'iyya al-masmū'a al-tijāriyya al-khāṣṣa wa al-murāfaq bil-qirār raqm 4981*, Ministry of Information 8/10/2004, <http://www.moi.gov.sy/ar/aid5924.html>. (accessed March 12, 2012)

³⁷ Nagla' Abu al-Naga, "Hurūb 'umarā' al-naft wa rijāl al-a'māl 'alā sūq al-sinimā wa-l-ghinā'" *al-Fajr*, December 26, 2005, 22.

With this level of vertical integration, companies often promote their own artists at the expense of those affiliated with other groups, and have no incentive to participate in sales and popularity measurements which might not favor their stable of artists. Melody FM Syria advertises the station's exclusive right to broadcast the entire of roster Melody Music artists on its homepage.³⁸ For an example of the type of self-promotion that obscures objective charts, on the week of May 3rd, 2010, during the period in which I was recording radio broadcasts in Syria, Rotana's Style FM website listed the following songs on its Top Five hits.

1. Wael Kfoury: Ḥalat Ḥub
2. Assi Al Hellani: Nadran 'Alay
3. Elissa: 'A Bāli Ḥabībī
4. Nawal Al Zoghbi: Amāneh
5. Hussein Al Jasmi: sittat aṣ-Ṣubhi

Table 2.1: Top Five Songs on Rotana Style FM Syria for the week of May 3, 2010³⁹

My own listening confirms that these five songs were all receiving a great deal of airplay at the time on other stations as well as Rotana, but it is not coincidental that all five of the artists listed here, Wael Kfoury, Assi Al Hellani, Elissa, Nawa Al Zoghbi, and Hussein Al Jasmi, are signed to Rotana Records, the recording arm of the station's parent company. Although the stations associated with pan-Arab media companies Rotana and Melody ostensibly hold exclusive rights to broadcast the artists signed to their labels, local unaffiliated stations play freely from the rosters of

³⁸ “an Melody” *MelodySyria.com* <http://www.melodysyria.com/node/104> (accessed March 12, 2012).

³⁹Rotana Style Main Page” *RotanaStyle.com* (accessed May 3, 2010) <http://rotanastyle.com/rotana/>

the major media groups, and the vertical integration of these media does not usually extend to artist exclusivity, except with new releases.⁴⁰

When stations do have exclusive rights (or at least early access) to songs, they are advertised heavily, and the phrase “*Haşriyyan ‘alā* (exclusively on...)...[name of the station]” is used to promote stations and new songs, often with the station’s name overdubbed on a song periodically to prevent recording and rebroadcast.⁴¹ Despite this practice, I have on occasion in Syria, Lebanon, or Jordan heard an entire DJ set recorded from one station and broadcast on another, unnoticed station ID overdubs and all, though my impression is that this practice has lessened in the last few years as more and more stations have moved to completely automated systems, and are less desperate for large chunks of content.⁴² Of course, quite often when a new song comes out, one can sometimes hear multiple stations each claiming an “exclusive.” Syrian stations are so unconcerned about copyright that several of the non-affiliated stations offer links to mp3 downloads on their websites, including songs by artists under contract with Rotana, Alam El Fan and the Melody Entertainment. Although some stations undoubtedly procure their music over the internet or less often by recording other stations, one station manager I met with made sure to point out that her station used entirely authorized music from hard media, not downloaded mp3s of lesser quality.

A few organizations separate from the major media corporations attempt to chart popular music sales, but problems with their methodologies make it difficult to generalize from those charts

⁴⁰ For a discussion of copyright, the pan-Arab music corporations, and access to music, see Lea Shaver and Nagla Rizk, *Access to Knowledge in Egypt: New Research on Intellectual Property, Innovation and Development* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010).

⁴¹ The process of overdubbing songs with station identification, or often the name of a specific program or DJ, is also common practice in the US.

⁴² According to two music programmers I spoke with, many stations in Syria and Lebanon employ a computer program to regular their playlists, controlling the frequency at which songs occur according to pre-programmed settings.

that do exist.⁴³ Hitmarker.com for example, begun in 2009, bills itself as “the first independent body that tracks album sales in the Arab World”, and advertises that it tracks recording sales at 50 large music stores in the region. However, in addition to the small sample size represented by 50 stores, based on my experience in Syrian music shops, I would hazard that the group of people who purchase official (non-pirated) copies of CDs or cassettes is a small subset of total music consumers, and a subset which would tend towards the upper class.⁴⁴ The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) also tracks some sales in the region in order to award gold and platinum records and name a winner of the Best-Selling Artist in the Middle East category at the annual World Music Awards, but the IFPI only tracks self-reported sales statistics, and even those only within the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi, the UAE) and Lebanon.⁴⁵

The estimates for the market share controlled by the large music conglomerates vary, but they are invariably extremely high. Nagwa Rizk estimated that Rotana and Alam Al Fan control 95% of the market in Egypt.⁴⁶ The extent to which international media conglomerates determine radio playlists is perhaps lessened by the high degree of state control in Syria, both because the state still directly controls such a significant percentage of the radio spectrum, and because the market

⁴³ This brief discussion of the problems with music sales data in the Middle East should not in any way be taken to mean that in contrast, record charts in the US are somehow sacrosanct or unsusceptible to manipulation from media companies. On the contrary, US record charts have their own sets of problems entirely.

⁴⁴ “About Us” Hitmarker.com (accessed May 19, 2011) <http://www.hitmarker.com>

Given the lack of reliable figures about music sales in general, estimates for music piracy rates for the Arab world should be taken with heaping handfuls of salt. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry’s (IFPI) 2005 report on piracy estimated copyright violation rates in Lebanon at 75% of all music sold, with 59% for Kuwait, 45% in Saudi Arabia, 51% in Egypt, and almost 100% in Morocco. The report doesn’t provide an estimate for Syria.

IFPI (International Federation of Phonographic Industries) *The Recording*

Industry Piracy Report 2005 (IFPI, 2005), 18. <http://www.ifpi.org/content/library/Piracy2005.pdf> (accessed April 8, 2012).

⁴⁵ “IFPI Awards” *International Federation of the Phonographic Industry* (accessed May 19, 2011) http://www.ifpi.org/content/section_news/ifpi_awards.html

⁴⁶ Rizk, *Access to Knowledge in Egypt*, 103.

was closed to most international corporations until fairly recently. Those corporations which are able to operate within Syria do so under the authority of a corrupt bureaucracy and a history of nationalizing companies.⁴⁷

The wide (and probably correct) assumption that even enormous and powerful corporations have to accede to the demands of the government without question is evinced by a common joke about the two cellphone companies which are allowed to operate in Syria. The first company, Syriatel, was until recently owned by Rami Makhlouf, the wealthy cousin of President Asad, “who is said to own or partly own one-quarter of the non-oil Syrian economy.”⁴⁸ According to a common Syrian joke, while it was the only mobile telephone company in Syria, the unofficial slogan of the company was “*Syriatel: Lasna al-afḍal, walakinnana al-wahīd*” (Syriatel: We aren’t the best, but we are the only.) After MTN was allowed to set up its operation in Syria, with prices still set by the government, the slogan was slightly changed, “*Syriatel wa MTN: Lasna al-afḍal, walakinnana al-wahīdūn*” (Syriatel and MTN: We aren’t the best, but we are the only ones.)

The common assumption that a small number of highly influential people and families control much of the Syrian economy is illustrated by an editorial cartoon, widely distributed on the internet, attributed to *Al Domari*, the short-lived independent paper published by ‘Ali Farzat:

⁴⁷ Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946-1970* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 187.

⁴⁸ Haddad 2011, 206.

Makhlouf sold off his stake in Syriatel in 2011 as a response to the Syrian uprisings. See “Assad’s Tycoon Cousin to Quit Business” *The Guardian* June 17, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/17/assads-tycoon-cousin-quit-business>



Figure 2.1: The cartoon shows a person thumbing through the Syrian yellow pages. “Hotel Makhlouf, Makhlouf Airlines, Makhlouf Pizza, Makhlouf Groceries, Makhlouf Cleaning Supplies: previously Al-Saffouri [a common brand of toilet paper]”

The degree of competition is greater in the private radio market than in the telecom market, but there too listeners presume that all owners must not only be rich, but also have *wasīta* (literally “mediation”), meaning clout or connections to powerful people, usually in the regime.⁴⁹ Resolution 4981 states that individuals or legal entities are not allowed ownership shares of more than one broadcast organization.⁵⁰ Despite this, two of the private stations in Damascus were founded by the same person, a wealthy businessman who has been accused of illegal business dealings with members of the Asad family. While some international corporations have been able to enter the local radio market through affiliation with local companies, a number of the new stations opening

⁴⁹For a discussion of the concept and economic significance of *wasta*, see Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria Under Asad* (London, New York: IB Tauris, 1997), 181.

⁵⁰ *Daftār al-shurūt al-khāṣṣ bil-sharakāt al-īdhā'iyya al-masmū'a al-tijāriyya al-khāṣṣa wa al-murāfaq bil-qirār raqm 4981*, Ministry of Information 8/10/2004, <http://www.moi.gov.sy/ar/aid5924.html>. (accessed March 12, 2012)

up since 2005 such as Al-Madeena FM, Syria al-Ghad, Sham FM, and Radio Fann, operate without the backing of an international media operation. Even in Syria however, the degree of integration between music and video production and distribution is so great that stations which don't have the backing of international corporations sometimes attempt to appear as if they do.

Arabesque FM – 102.3

A dozen people climb into the 'servīs' minibus heading out through ar-Rabwe to Qudsiyya. Despite the ever increasing number of cars in and around Damascus, this is the way that most people get around the city. 10 lira (~20 cents US in 2010 prices) can get you across town, but you are at the mercy of the driver's listening choices. Sometimes you get religious lectures or inshād (religious songs or chants), sometimes you get Nancy 'Ajram. Many drivers say that they prefer nashīt (lively) songs to keep their energy and attention up, so a glove compartment full of dabkat (dabke songs) on cassette is also standard fare.

Blasting from the window of a car one lane over as it slowly weaves through traffic is “Barshaluna fāris kul al-malā'ib” (Barcelona, the Knights of Every Field) over a dance beat with synth horns and piercing winds, apparently on his way to watch a favorite soccer match.⁵¹ At the moment, the servīs driver has Arabesque FM playing, and the song is slower, but nonetheless appropriate for driving. Maya Nasri – Rouh (Go) “Go, if you want, don't stay making it worse. I want you to leave me alone...”⁵²

⁵¹ “Barshaluna fāris kul al-malā'ib” (accessed December 2, 2010) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHOHhK_Gzg

⁵² Maya Nasri, “Rouh” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dje2nwZbjU8> (accessed May 20, 2012)

Audiences

In the absence of any reliable survey data on radio listeners, it is difficult to construct a model of the radio listening population in Syria. Certainly every radio station, including the state-run stations, angles its broadcast towards specific demographics and types of listeners, and to some extent it is possible to construct a kind of negative image of these radio audiences based on the ways in which they are addressed and marketed. For example, Al Arabiyya FM, broadcast from the UAE and available in Damascus at 99.9 FM, features a mixed Western and Arab playlist, and frequent English words and phrases in its bumpers and advertisements. The advertisements themselves are heavily weighted towards cars and other high-end items, cellular and internet services, higher-end restaurants and cafes, sports clubs, and clothing stores. One ad on Al Madina FM begins with the voice of a woman stating ‘I won’t agree to marry anyone who doesn’t have a nice apartment’ following by a man telling her about the wonderful apartments at the exclusive new *Garden City Resorts* development. The obvious target is what Amanda Terc calls Damascus’s ‘New Neoliberal Elite.’⁵³ However, the imagined listener that the station wants to attract and the real people listening differ quite a bit.

One of the primary audience demographics desired by advertisers and one which is catered to by radio stations is drivers, and especially young drivers. Although Syria as a whole still has a very low number of cars per capita in comparison to its neighbors in Lebanon and Jordan, this number has increased rapidly in the past decade due to the reduction in import tariffs on cars. An article in Syria Today recently stated that: ‘Fewer than 400,000 cars drove on Syria’s roads in 2001, according to the Ministry of Transport. Now, almost 2m vehicles clog the country’s motorways.’⁵⁴ The numbers provided by the Syrian ministry of transport are almost certainly inflated (the World

⁵³ Terc, ‘Syria’s New Neoliberal Elite: English Usage, Linguistic Practices and Group Boundaries.’

⁵⁴ citation - <http://www.syria-today.com/index.php/march-/754-business-features/14515-driving-demand>

Bank listed Syria at only 63 motor vehicles per thousand people for 2009), but the large growth in vehicle traffic and concomitant exhaust in and around the capital is undeniable, and a frequent topic of discussion in Damascus in cafes and newspaper editorials in 2009 and 2010.⁵⁵

In an article on private radio for the Damascus daily *Baladna* (Our Country), journalist Rena Zaid raised the fear that the entire audience for private radio is made up of “ash-shouferia” (drivers) and specifically “shouferia as-servīs” (mini-bus drivers).⁵⁶ In interviews, program directors have admitted that their primary audiences are people who are otherwise occupied, and listening while engaging in some other activity, and this naturally includes drivers as a central audience. Khalid Ismail, director of broadcasting for Syria al-Ghad, stated as much in a 2009 interview with *Baladna*:

Radio in general has a wide audience, because radio is a companion who can wander with you. It depends on the sense of hearing, so it is for drivers and housewives (*rabbat al minazel*) and for lovers and for everyone who drives a car, and no doubt that the existence of mobile radio increases the broadcasting audience.⁵⁷

In an earlier interview, the marketing director for the same station described the problem and opportunity in advertising to this audience:

⁵⁵ World Bank Motor Vehicles per capita. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IS.VEH.NVEH.P3/countries> (Accessed 5-6-2012).

⁵⁶ Rena Zaid, “al-idhā‘at al-khāṣṣa..nakhā‘ī‘alāmiyya khafīfa bi-mūjat al-FM” *BaladnaOnline* 20/8/2009 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33327&Itemid=62 (accessed March 12, 2012)

⁵⁷ Rena Zaid, “al-idhā‘at al-khāṣṣa...”

Radio, as an advertising medium, is exposed to a number of complicating factors: due to the lack of the listener's complete attention - as he is often carrying out another task while listening - as well as unintentional exposure in many cases (particularly on public transportation).⁵⁸

While the driving population in Damascus is skewed towards men, the population of riders is more evenly distributed along gender lines, and Ismail's description points out the second primary audience, women in the home.

The significance of the female audience is clear from both close attention to the radio broadcast, and from limited ethnographic observation in Damascus. As a foreign academic, my interactions were naturally constrained by both gender and class; while I was able to interact with Syrian women in a variety of contexts, such as in larger groups at cafes or restaurants, or in and around Damascus University in Mezze, the vast majority of my interactions were with Syrian men. As such, I am certainly unqualified to say very much about the social life and media consumption of Syrian women, especially outside of a certain educated class.⁵⁹ However, it is evident that women probably form the majority of radio listenership outside of the context of transportation. Many women are at home during the day, and radio is a form of entertainment which allows the listeners to engage even while working on household duties which require visual attention or movement.

⁵⁸ "Al-idhā'at as-sūriyya al-khāṣṣa wa ṣirā' alā al-'athīr bayn al-mustami' wa al-mu'lin..." originally published in *Al-Iqtisād* 2006. Available online at <http://www.aram-grp.com/index.php?d=224&id=73> (accessed June 6, 2012).

⁵⁹ While there have been some ethnographies conducted among women in Syria, such as Christa Salamandra's work amongst upper class Damascus families in *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). The study of Syria would benefit greatly from an ethnography of women's mass-media consumption practices along the lines of

Lila Abu-Lughod's work in Egypt. See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Satellite television is by far the dominant form of entertainment in Damascus homes, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is often used as an aural medium. On one visit to a friend's home in a newer and less affluent suburb of Damascus, as I sat playing with my friend's son, I asked about what channel was playing on the television, and was told that he didn't actually know as his wife controlled the television, since "my wife likes to listen while she is cooking." In the homes of the upper and middle class, a similar type of media consumption goes on, but the women listening to the radio or the television during the day are often domestic servants, rather than the women of the family. Walking around a middle-class neighborhood during the day, one often sees housecleaners hanging up the laundry to dry, and hears the radio or television coming softly through the windows out into the street from behind drying sheets. Much of the extra-musical content on private radio is specifically geared towards women. Nearly every station heard in Syria regularly broadcasts the *abrāj* (horoscope), and women also form the majority of callers to the popular relationship-focused radio talk shows, as well as the majority of the hosts for these shows.⁶⁰

One of the benefits of examining the radio medium as a locus for discourse about music and social life is that it allows us to engage with Arabic popular music outside of the crowded field of arguments over video clips and sexuality, and potentially engage with a different set of audiences than the ones usually addressed there. These discussions tend to focus on the portrayal of women's bodies, and the potential effects of that portrayal on young men watching the videos.⁶¹ While the depiction of women's bodies on television is without a doubt fraught and contested in the Arab and Muslim worlds, the preponderance of analyses, commentaries, and condemnations in both the English-language and Arabic press give the impression that the combination of "woman on display/"

⁶⁰ According to my female friends and colleagues in Syria, astrology is typically understood as an area of interest for Damascene women, though of course men read, listen to, and discuss horoscopes as well.

⁶¹ See Armbrust and Wise, *Culture Wars: The Arabic Music Video Controversy*; and Michael Frishkopf, ed., *Music and Media in the Arab World* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009).

male viewer or listener” is the fundamental pattern for Arabic music. If you simply read about Arabic mass-mediated pop music rather than listening and watching, you might think that 90% performers were women, and 90% of the audience was young men.⁶² When the medium becomes radio rather than television, it becomes clear that this model does not accurately describe radio and radio listeners, leaving out as it does the probably (female) majority of the audience, and that it must not apply to television either.

While women are certainly disproportionately represented in the Arab celebrity press, it is not actually the case that Arab mass-media is disproportionately focused on women as opposed to male performers. On Syrian radio, leaving aside the several hours a day devoted to Fairuz and Um Kulthum (admittedly a lot to bracket out), one hears more men than women on Arabic-language playlists. Casually flipping through the multitude of music channels on Arabsat or Nilesat one will usually find at least as many video clips by men as women. Of the 111 artists listed on Rotana’s website, 47 (42%) are women.⁶³ Obviously gender cannot be disassociated from regional culture here; as several scholars have remarked, it seems that the more conservative audiences (and censors) in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are much more tolerant of potentially provocative depictions of women when those women are Lebanese or Syrian rather than *Khaleeji* (from the Gulf). It is not

⁶² This criticism of the discourse around Arabic video clips is certainly not true across the board. Walter Armbrust’s work on Arabic music television has rightfully attempted to bring nuance to the discussion of video clips:

It is perfectly true that some aspect of sex features in the majority of the video clips. But despite frequent claims that video clips feature nothing but “partial nudity” and “substantial cleavage” looming out of bustiers, sex is handled differently from one video clip to another. Some are about controlling women. For example, there are a small number of honour-killing videos. Some video clips feature married couples with children. Others are narrative videos about meeting, falling in love, getting married, and having children. Despite the obsessive concern by critics with “libidinal voracity” there are in fact a number of different models of sexuality on offer in Arab video clips. There are even a few video clips to which even a hardliner like Sayyid Qutb might give at least qualified approval.

Armbrust, “What Would Sayyid Qutb Say? Some Reflections on Video Clips.”

⁶³ Source: Rotana.net <http://www.rotana.net/music/artist/page>. (accessed June 10, 2012)

surprising that Rotana's roster of Lebanese artists is heavily female, while its roster from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf is almost entirely male.⁶⁴

It may also be unsurprising to find that the majority of singers (in number if not in popularity) on Arab mass media are male, given the historical ambivalence towards women singers in Muslim societies. In situating radio broadcasts however, it is important to address the fact that the most discursively prevalent and oft-discussed gender pairing for Arabic mass media - that of a male listener and a female singer - may not be the most likely combination. Rather it may be that, in contrast to the imagined listener envisioned by American broadcasters, the average listener is a woman, and the average singer a man.⁶⁵

94.4 - Version FM

On "Version FM", Nawal Al-Zoghbi is singing "Dal'ouna". The title references one of the traditional dabke song and song genres, and the video for Al-Zoghbi's song includes dancers in village dress performing the dabke in a circle around her.⁶⁶ Her song is not a simple performance of the dabke, however; it is more of an allusion to it, done over in a slightly more TV-friendly pop style, a shabābī (youth/pop) version of a sha'bī (folk/popular) tune. While it contains elements of the dabke that one might hear at a wedding, the timbres are smoothed out a bit, and the distinctive dabke rhythm is rounded off at the edges. The tag line of the song, "Ḥabībī Āsmar al-Loun" (my

⁶⁴ I am not necessarily arguing that that significance of women's presences in video clips or mass media in general, has been overstated. Virginia Danielson is undoubtedly correct to argue that mass mediation allowed the possibility careers for many women singers, and Ali Jihad Racy notes the historical increase in the visibility and status of women singers over in the twentieth century.

Virginia Danielson, "New Nightingales of the Nile: Popular Music in Egypt Since the 1970s," *Popular Music* 15, no. 03 (1996): 302; Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17.

⁶⁵ The issue of the gender make-up of radio playlists will be addressed in Chapter 4.

⁶⁶ "Dalouna" - Nawal Al Zoghbi, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAdpmY17Auc>. (accessed June 1, 2012).

dark-colored darling), is sung on a descending melodic line that closes off the chorus in a way that satisfies the harmonic requirements of a western pop song as well as those of a traditional Levantine song.

Shabābī and Sha‘bī

In his chapter “What’s Not on Egyptian Television and Radio! Locating the ‘Popular’ in Egyptian *Sha‘bi*” James Grippo makes the distinction in Egyptian popular music between *shabābī* (youth) music of the type that dominates mass media, and *sha‘bī* (popular, in a “folk” sense) music which is extremely popular among the working class while receiving a smaller fraction of television, satellite, and radio airplay.⁶⁷ Given the influence of Cairo in the regional media landscape and the traditional links between Syria and Egypt, it is no surprise that this distinction is also present in Damascus.

However, while the distinction between *sha‘bī* and *shabābī* is certainly useful in the Syrian context, the Egyptian bifurcation described by Grippo does not map cleanly on to Syrian listening habits. One reason for this is the heterogeneity of the Syrian population, where a wide variety of ethnic, linguistic, and regional cultures precludes the existence of a single *sha‘bī* tradition that would be analogous to the relatively more homogenous Egypt. The most obvious example of this divergence would be the sizeable Kurdish minority in Syria, whose music does not appear in any form on local broadcast media.⁶⁸ Despite the lack of airplay on Syrian radio, a variety of Kurdish

⁶⁷ James R. Grippo, “What’s *Not* on Egyptian Television and Radio! Locating the Popular in Egyptian *Sha‘bi*” in Michael Frishkopf ed. *Music and Media in the Arab World* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 137-162.

⁶⁸ Kurdish language songs are outlawed on domestic broadcasts, and non-Arabic songs in general were prohibited at weddings and festivals by a governmental Decree in 1989. Enforcement of anti-Kurdish policies have waxed and waned according to domestic and regional politics since Syrian independence. During my visits to Syria, Kurdish music was tolerated in Kurdish areas, if not encouraged, and I attended one dance in a rural Kurdish region which featured primarily Kurdish music.

See Kerim Yildiz *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. (London: Pluto Press, 2005): 120.

music remains popular, both in Kurdish neighborhoods in Damascus and especially in the Kurdish areas of Northeastern Syria near Qamishli and the Turkey/Iraqi borders, aided in recent years by the Kurdish-language television and radio stations originating in Iraqi Kurdistan.

More generally amongst Arabophone groups, although specific local *shaʿbī* identities are often articulated through performances at weddings and festivals, music and dance styles are usually discussed in regional or geographical terms like desert, mountainous, or coastal, rather than ethnic, sectarian or national labels.⁶⁹ This rural association of *shaʿbī* music in Syria is also a point of divergence from the Egyptian *shaʿbī* music studied by James Grippo and Nicholas Puig, which they describe as primarily a phenomenon of urban Cairo.

In Syria as in Egypt, the term *shaʿbī* can be confusing as a musical identifier, as it is used to apply to multiple types of music of differing social associations. In the context of government sponsored radio and other media, the term *shaʿbī* is most often used in the folkloric sense, referring to music associated with rural folk performance traditions. For example, in the 2009 Syrian State Radio Sponsored Song contest devoted to the theme “Golan in the Heart”, the prize for best *shaʿbī* song went to “*al Jolan*” by Ahmed al Haj ‘Ali, a member of the folk group *Dar ‘a*, which was founded in 1986 and is dedicated to preserving and performing the musical traditions of the Hawran region of southern Syria.⁷⁰ At the award ceremony, which was broadcast on state television, Haj ‘Ali sang and performed the *rebāba* (a bowed spike-fiddle) in front of an orchestra in formal black suits, while wearing traditional Bedouin robe (*thaub*), and accompanied by a group of similarly dressed men dancing *dabke*. This type of intentional performance of musical *turāth* (heritage) is

⁶⁹ For a discussion of dance and *shaʿbi* identity in Syria, see Silverstein, “Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging.”

⁷⁰ http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9172&Itemid=60

one use of the term, but *sha 'bī* can also refer to the popular electronic drum-and synthesizer-focused dance music which is a mainstay of working class life, and wedding celebrations.

Dabke

The broadest signifier of *sha 'bīyya* as it appears in Syria and on Syrian radio would be the musical types associated with the *dabke*, a broad term which refers to a variety of group line and circle dances. The *dabke* is danced throughout the Levant, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, and as 'Adnān ibn Dhurail details in his book *Raqṣ al-samāḥ wa al-dabke, tāriḥ wa tadwīn*, is performed within Syria in innumerable variations depending on the region.⁷¹ Although there has been some scholarly attention paid to the Palestinian and Lebanese *dabke*, there has been almost no work in English on the Syrian *dabke* (and very little in Arabic aside from ibn Dhurail and an earlier work by 'Adnān Manini).⁷² Shayna Silverstein's recently completed dissertation is the first full-length study of the topic, and her ethnography will be the definitive work on the Syrian *dabke* for some time to come.⁷³

In their mass mediated incarnations, signifiers of *dabke sha 'bīyya* most often come in use of, or at least the allusion to, *dabke*-associated *iqā 'āt* (rhythmic modes), but the performance of these modes is modified to move along the *shabābī-sha 'bī* spectrum towards a more pop style.⁷⁴ As it appears in mass-mediated music, *dabke* is generally associated with a broad rural authenticity, rather than any particular region. According to Christopher Stone, this pan-Levantine association with mass-mediated *dabke* can be traced to the work of the Rahbani Brothers:

⁷¹ 'Adnān Ibn Dhurayl, *Raqṣ al-samāḥ wa al-dabka, tāriḥ wa tadwīn*

See also Nazeeh Abd Al-Hameed "Anwa 'al-dabke fi sahel as-sūrī." *Al Wehda* July 24, 2008 <http://wehda.alwehda.gov.sy/archive.asp?FileName=3211510220080724194549>

⁷² 'Adnān Manini, *al-Raqṣ al-Sha 'abiyya*. (Damascus, Syria: Arab Press, 1961).

⁷³ Silverstein, "Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging."

⁷⁴ I return to this issue in Chapter Four.

While the Dabka that the Rahbani Brothers participated in developing was based on its north-Lebanese mountain versions, the result was something new. By trying to make the Dabka more “Lebanese,” the Rahbani Brothers had, in fact, made it less so.⁷⁵

Though considered a folk genre, *dabke* is often recorded with electronic instruments taking the place of the reed instruments *mijwiz* or *arghul*, and drum machines in the roles of the *tabla*, *darboukka* or *riqq*. While the *dabke* is associated with *sha ‘bī* (folk/popular) or *baladi* (country/rural) culture, the music and dance are produced and consumed widely in cities as well, and people from all social classes are expected to know at least the basic steps. The genre has also increased in popularity outside of the Arab world in recent years due to its inclusion in the World Music marketplace, thanks to artists like Omar Suleiman, who released a series of well-received records with Sublime Frequencies.⁷⁶

This music does not, however, get the majority of the airplay on radio and satellite stations, which are aiming upmarket at an affluent audience who are perceived as less interested in *sha ‘bī* styles.

In a 2011 episode of the Syrian sketch comedy television show *Buq ‘at Dau’* (Spotlight), a sketch entitled *Dabke* mockingly illustrates the universality of *dabke* dance music, and the power it holds over even the wealthy classes of Damascus.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Christopher Reed Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 65.

⁷⁶ Omar Souleyman *Highway to Hassake: Folk and Pop Sounds of Syria* (Sublime Frequencies, 2006.) Omar Souleyman, *Dabke 2020: Folk and Pop Sounds of Syria* (Sublime Frequencies, 2009). Omar Souleyman, *Jazeera Nights* (Sublime Frequencies, 2010).

⁷⁷ Hazim Suleiman (writer) “Dabke” *Buq ‘at Dau’* season 8, episode 1 (2011).

The sketch begins in a finely appointed house, where an older man in a silk robe lies in bed. From outside the bedroom we can hear dabke music playing, and from his supine position the man's hand slowly moves up into the air in the pose of a dancer, and he is rhythmically dragged up to his feet. The song is "Aloush" by dabke star 'Ali Ad-Deek.

Sleep-dancing out of bed, out of the room and across the house towards a large television and speaker system, he stops the music and his dancing by shutting off the TV.

When his wife comes out into the living room to ask why he turned off the music, he complains to her:

"Darling, how many times have I told you that I don't want to listen to these songs in the house?"

"God forgive you, what do you mean these songs? They are sweet, and most people really love them!"

"I didn't say that I don't like them, but I don't want to listen to these songs in the house."

"They are commendable songs..."

"Enough! I'm saying I don't want to listen to these songs in the house!"

...

In the next two scenes he hears the music again and is forced against his will to dance: first in the bathroom while shaving, and then in his car, where he is compelled out into middle of the street, dancing until the music recedes.

In the following scene, he is sitting with a friend at a chic hotel café, the two of them looking very respectable as they sit and talk next to the pool. He confesses his affliction to this friend, who recommends that he see a doctor.

"What do I want to say to the doctor? O Doctor, I have dabke disease?"

Luckily, the friend spots a famous psychiatrist sitting at a table across the café, and after sending a waiter to ask permission to come sit down, he makes his confession:

“I’ll get to the issue directly. Doctor I have a problem... a dabke problem.”

“I’m sorry, but I think there is a mistake. I’m a psychiatrist, I don’t have anything to do with dance.”

“I know, I know doctor, of course. But my point it is, I mean Doctor, give me a moment...I just hear the sound of any sha ‘bī song (ugniya sha ‘bīyya), and I can’t possess myself at all, I can’t control myself...”

“Excuse me, I don’t understand, what is the nature of your job?”

“I am a retired general manager...”

“Yes, but what’s the relationship of dabke with work, did you dabke as a requisite of your job?”

“No, the nature of my job isn’t related to the dabke, but as you know Doctor, I am a general manager, and it is necessary in my position to join in every national, popular, and humanitarian event...as you know, we have many events, Doctor, sometimes there is more than one in a day. I can say that... hmm, three plus six plus six plus eight...for something close to forty years I have been dabke-ing (arba‘yīn sena ana am bedbok).”

“So I understand sir, that for all of your life you have dabked as you work”

They make an appointment, with the doctor’s instructions to make a list of all of the events at which he has dabked. The next scene takes place in the doctor’s waiting room, as half a dozen men in suits sit waiting for their appointments. Someone’s cellphone rings, and as the sound of the dabke comes out of the tinny speakers, all of the men begin tapping their feet enthusiastically. The ringtone is silenced in a moment, and in the pause, the main character asked the others what they

do. After each response in turn with “general manager”, the phone rings again, and the entire group gets up and begins a dabke line around the coffee table in the waiting room.

Despite the ubiquity of *dabke* dance and associated music in public life, its down-market and rural associations means that relative to its actual popularity, *dabke* appears on urban-focused Damascus radio stations with less frequency than other genres of lesser or equivalent popularity, which are generally pitched to a more affluent or at least aspirational listenership. This divide actually illustrates a disjuncture between the audience which listens to private radio and the audiences which the stations are attempting to attract or create. During listener request segments on Al Madina FM, Arabesque, or Version FM, the playlist shifts noticeably along the shabābī-sha‘bī spectrum towards the more working-class, *dabke* and sha‘bī side, playing popular mass-mediated *dabke* stars like Faras Karam, Melhem Zein, and Wafiq Habib. Although these call-in segments seem to illustrate a clear demand for more sha‘bī music, that demand does not necessarily drive programming, as broadcasters attempt to attract the particular demographics desired by advertisers, rather than aiming to satisfy the desires of their full audience.

University of Damascus - Mezzeh

In Mezzeh, groups of students step off the servīs and gather just outside the gates of the university as afternoon classes begin. Pairs of women share headphones as they sit on the benches outside the dental school, listening to music and reading textbooks. In larger groups, the tinny ring of pop songs played on cell-phone speakers provides a soundtrack to joking banter.

Shabābī Voices

The demographic group that I had the most contact with, outside of my time spent listening in cafes, was middle and upper class *shabāb*, young people of college age and upwards to around 30. These are the prime demographics which both Syrian private stations are directed towards and which comprise the bulk of the voices heard on private radio. A review of 30 *mudhīrīn* (broadcasters) using public biographies, social media pages, and personal knowledge, finds that although a few more established broadcasters (such as Hiam Hamoy on Sham FM) receive a great deal of airtime, the majority of voices heard on the private stations are from recent college graduates, especially of the universities in Damascus and Aleppo. Though most studied academic subjects unrelated to broadcasting (political science and English literature were common) some have been trained specifically for broadcasting and production, either through the state-funded institutes, or through programs like the Diploma in Media, sponsored by the French international station Radio Monte Carlo and Radio France International, in cooperation with the Syrian International Academy.⁷⁸

These young broadcasters are generally multilingual, and in the style of Lebanese television and radio hosts, slip English and French words into broadcasts to varying degrees according to the station and the type of music programming. The majority of non-musical airtime on the current airwaves is taken up by women broadcasters, in a move that reverses the historical position of women on Syrian radio (a 2000 article from the journal of the Arab States Broadcasting Union counted 8 women to 13 men in Syrian radio's Broadcaster Division, although 16 of 28 members in the Foreign Radio Division were women.)⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “Bil-ta’āwun ma ‘ idhā’t monte karlo wa faransa al-dawliyya al-akādimiyya as-sūriyya al-dawliyya takhruj talibat dīblum al-i’lām” Syrian International Academy SIA-SY.NET. <http://sia-sy.net/sia/news.php?id=109> (accessed June 6, 2012).

⁷⁹ An 2000 article from the journal of the Arab States Broadcasting Union counted

Many of the initial conversations about music I had in Damascus took place in and around the University of Damascus while I was taking Arabic classes early on in my time there, or later when visiting the libraries and bookstores around the University. In these conversations, after being asked what I study and the accompanying questions (“What instrument do you play?” etc...) I would often respond with “What kind of music do you listen to?” a question which most often elicited protestations of ignorance: “I don’t know anything about music.” As a musicologist, I am used to receiving this answer in the US from people who are nervous about the (lack of) social capital associated of their music tastes, and that was certainly at work to some extent in Damascus, but another significant factor is that “*mūsīqā*” is primarily associated with instrumental music.

The question “What type of songs do you like?” was thus more successful, though people still expressed some reticence and were likely to default to “Fairuz in the morning, Umm Kulthum in the evening” if they knew I was a music specialist. The question I hit upon which elicited the most voluble responses was “Who is your favorite singer on Star Academy?”⁸⁰ Even young people who ostensibly don’t watch televised song contests were often very willing to discuss exactly why they don’t watch, in great detail. This is a clear contrast between the type of knowledge about music and singing that is valued in public discourse, and the type of knowledge which is actually cultivated by casual or ‘uneducated’ listeners.

Spinning the dial, we hear a series of advertisements, each followed by a song.

89.1 - Radio Fann (Art Radio), advertises a group of cafes with new TV sets and satellite connections for watching soccer matches, then features a spot for the Damascus Honda dealership.

Song: Tamer Hosni – Come Back to Me (rapping in English and singing in Arabic)

⁸⁰ For a discussion of Arabic televised song contests, see Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics*.

94.5 - *Version FM* advertises “Top Style” Italian clothes at the fancy Sham City Center Mall, and a new automotive club.

Song: Wael Kfoury – “Al-Hub Fanūn”

99.9 - *Al-Arabbiya* pitches Subaru and a new sports club.

Song: a dance mix of Jocelyn Brown’s “Believe”

105.3 - *Radio al-Quds* endlessly repeats ads for Bawabat Dimeshq, the “Guinness World Record Holder for Largest Restaurant” just outside the city, offering Levantine, Indian, Chinese, and Allepine cuisine, and seating for six thousand people.

Song: A traditional Palestinian ensemble singing “Wayn? ‘A Ramallah” (“Where? To Ramallah”)

Advertising

The Syrian advertising market is very small as compared to the rest of the pan-Arab market. According to a 2010 report by the Dubai Press Club, Syria accounts for just one percent of total pan-Arab spending on advertisements.⁸¹ From my observation, the pan-Arab television media does not direct a great deal of attention towards the Syrian market.

In the period between the beginning of Ba’th rule in 1963 and the (now ironically named) “Damascus Spring” of 2001, when private media was generally outlawed, all advertising was controlled by the Arab Advertising Organization (*al-mu’assisa al’arabiyya lil-’i’lān*) a governmental bureau under the Ministry of Information. The organization still handles the advertising sales for state radio and television stations, newspapers, and outdoor billboards and posters. Prices for private radio advertising are set in conjunction with the bureau. In an interview,

⁸¹“Arab Media Outlook 2009-2013” Dubai Press Club (2010) <https://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/arabmedia.pdf>

one radio employee complained that private stations are still required to pay large monthly fees to this organization, although it provides no services. All media organizations are also required to reserve no less than five percent of their advertising space for use as a “free public benefit,” as determined by national media council.⁸²

Radio advertisements are produced either in-house, or by one of a number of independent studios that work as ad production agencies. A few musicians I met in Damascus supplement their income through this kind of work. In addition to music for paid advertisements, the stations also need music for internal promotions, bumpers, and ad spots. For example, the state-run *Ṣawt Ash-Shabāb* has several mini-songs that run about a minute long, and literally sing the praises of the station. My favorite such promotional tune begins with a bed of piano chords reminiscent of Lionel Ritchie’s “Hello”, a staple of Syrian radio.

ya ahla idhā’a	O Sweetest Radio,
shu bħibek ana	How I love you,
kul youm wa kul sā’a, bghany lek ana	Every day, every hour, I sing for you

Then the drums and bass kick in, and the voice is joined by a whistling synth counter melody.

ya ṣawt ash-shabāb	O voice of the youth
ya ṣawt ash-shabāb	O voice of the youth
ya ṣawt al-maḥubbi	O voice of the beloved
wa layāl al-ḥanā	And the nights of longing

⁸² “qānūn al-i’lām al-jadīd fī sūriyya” *DamasPost.com* August 29, 2011
www.damaspost.com/ملفات-إعلامية/قانون-الإعلام-الجديد-في-سورية-.htm

The density of advertisements on Syrian radio varies widely from station to station, with prices highest during rush hour and afternoons. The marketing director for Arabiyya FM pointed out that this station did not play any advertisements after nine at night, while Syria al-Ghad at one point advertised ad-free Fridays.⁸³

The period with the highest rates of radio listenership, as well as television viewership, is the holy month of Ramadan, when advertising rates on Syrian state and television rise significantly.⁸⁴ Like satellite music channels however, ad revenue is not the only means of making money for radio stations in Syria and Lebanon, as is nicely illustrated by the following experience.

One afternoon while I was staying in Beirut in June of 2011, I was listening to Strike FM, a Lebanese station which also covers some areas of Syria. The DJ, speaking in Arabic, posed the question, “What is the city in Southern Lebanon, whose name, when two of the letters are reversed, becomes the name of a person’s occupation?”

Having made a trip down south of Beirut the previous day, I quickly came up with an answer that fit the profile: the southern city of *Sayda* (Sidon in English). Spelled *saad-ya-dal-alif* (ص - ي - ا , صيدا) with the middle letters reversed, it becomes *saad-ya-alif-dal* (ص - ي - ا , صياد) *Siyad* (hunter/fisherman). Inordinately pleased with myself at the success of my meager Lebanese geography skills, I stayed tuned to the station, waiting for confirmation.

In between each song, the DJ would receive a call from a listener, remind them of the prize, and take their guess.

⁸³ <http://www.aram-grp.com/index.php?d=224&id=73>

⁸⁴“t‘arifāt al-ī‘alānat khilāl shahr ramadān al-mubārak wa ‘eid al-ḥajj l’ām 2011” Arab Advertising Organization Elan.gov.sy <http://www.elan.gov.sy/site/index.php?page=show&ex=2&dir=news&lang=1&nt=1&id=313> (accessed June 12, 2012); “t‘arifāt al-bath al-ī‘alānī fi ‘idhā‘at ṣawt al-shabāb wa ‘idhā‘at dimeshq wa ‘idhā‘at ṣawt al-sha‘b” Arab Advertising Organization Elan.gov.sy

<http://www.elan.gov.sy/site/index.php?page=dst&ex=1&dir=html&lang=1&p=22> (accessed June 12, 2012)

Listener: “Tarablus” (Tripoli)

DJ: “Āsif, ult ilek an al-madina fi'l janūb. Madīna..... fil janūb.” (I'm sorry, I said that the city is the south... A cityin the south.)

After a few songs, and a few more terrible guesses (“Beirut?”, “Byblos?”) cities that were neither in the south nor fit the criteria, I became annoyed. How could all of these people fail to figure out the answer? Surely if an American, with basic knowledge of Arabic, much less of Lebanese geography, can come up with the answer to the trivia question, then somebody else in range of the radio station must be able to do so.

I picked up my phone and dialed the number for the station, memorized at this point through endless repetition by the DJ before and after each song. After a moment a recorded woman’s voice sounded from the other end of the line, thanking me for calling and listing off my options, and letting me know kindly that I would be charged for the call.

Oh. Maybe I am not so clever after all.

The point of the contest, and the point of the many of the radio surveys that one is invited to participate in via SMS or call, is to get people on their mobile phones, at which point the telecoms, and the stations, are making money. The trivia segment between songs on Strike FM was designed less for the purpose of entertaining the audience than to drive the maximum number of listeners to call in. This type of audience interaction is a recurring feature on Syrian radio. For example, throughout the duration of “*Kān Zamān*”, a program which profiles one golden age singer each week, listeners are invited to text their vote in to decide on the featured singer for the upcoming episode.

94.4 Version FM – On the tail of the plaintive voice and Spanish guitar of Melham Zain’s “Inti Mshiti” (You left), a chorus of children sings the station’s theme, a series of nonsense syllables before the title:

“Da-da-da-da-da, Da-da-da-da-da, Feerjin Ef Em”

Version FM

“Version” FM provides a remarkable example of the disconnect that still exists between Syria and the regional and global media markets. Transliterated into Arabic as “فيرجن”, the same way that one would also transliterate “Virgin”, the name is pronounced “Feerjin” over the radio. The station thus capitalizes on the brand presence of the British “Virgin” companies in the Middle East, and is presented to Syrian Arabic-speaking audiences in a way that would naturally lead listeners to presume an affiliation with the global brand, as is actually the case in Virgin Radio Jordan and Virgin Radio Dubai. “Version FM” also uses a close copy of Virgin’s recognizable checkmark “V” in its advertisements, further enhancing the brand association.



Figure 2.2: Version FM Logo and Website Banner⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Index, *VersionFM.com* (accessed March 20, 2011)

http://www.versionfm.com/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=53&Itemid=70



Figure 2.3: Virgin FM Jordan Logo⁸⁶

Copyright laws are enforced loosely throughout the region, and piracy of media content is the norm rather than the exception. On a small scale, this kind of unofficial franchising is common for restaurants or clothing stores, where proprietors rightly assume that they are so small and difficult to reach legally that they will fly below the radar of the companies with whose brand they are associating. However, the transparent attempt of Version FM to associate with the larger global brand is specific to the Syrian radioscope, where relative isolation from the global market makes this kind of brand piggybacking possible.

The close affiliation of Syria's business class with government officials and official news outlets means that reported surveys of radio popularity are often conflicting and unreliable. In 2011 for example the Damascus newspaper *Tishreen* reported that Arabesque FM was the number one private station, while DamasPost.com conducted its own survey naming Sham FM number one later the same year.⁸⁷ In one incident in 2007, the IPSOS statistical research company's Syrian branch was shut down by order of the Governor of Damascus for operating without proper authorization.

⁸⁶ *Virgin Radio Jordan* (accessed March 20, 2011) <http://www.virginradio.co.uk/>

⁸⁷ See Appendix 2.

Precise reasons for the shutdown remain opaque in new reports, but the head of IPSOS's Syrian operations accused the head of *Al Madina FM* of playing a role in the decision, following an IPSOS survey which ranked *Al Madina FM* in third place behind *Ṣawt ash-Shabāb* and *Al Arabiyya*.⁸⁸

The afternoon call to prayer rings out from a dozen mosques and a hundred speakers. The Iranian tourists visiting the Sayyida Ruqayyah Mosque in the Old City say their prayers before heading out to the busses taking them to the Shrine of Sayyida Zaineb down south of the city. The bus drivers, listening to dabke as they wait for their load of tourists, switch over to recitations of the Quran as the faithful climb on board.

Religious Song

Religious songs, readings, and sermons form a significant segment of the soundscape, especially in everyday life as one walks the streets of Damascus and passes by shop owners and street vendors.⁸⁹ Popular religious music appears most often as songs distributed by cassette tape and burned CD, or on one of the various satellite music channels which feature it. In its most anodyne form, religious song appears on Syrian pop music stations, a manifestation constrained only by the state's preference for secular media, reinforced by both the socialist ideology of the Ba'th party and the fear of the ruling Allawi minority of any deviation from national unity that might arouse resentment from the Sunni majority.

⁸⁸ Y'acub Qadoury, "modīr ibsostat yaqūl bi ān ṣāhib idhā'at al-madīna kān warā' ighlāq maktab al-sharaka, wa ṣāhib al-idhā'a yanfī" *Syria-News.com* June 4, 2007 http://www.syria-news.com/newstoprint.php?sy_seq=51739 (Accessed May 18, 2012)

⁸⁹ See for example Laura Kathryn McClellan, *Artful Marketing: Visual and Aural Selling Practices in the Suqs (Marketplaces) of Damascus, Syria* (Phd Diss: University of Michigan, 2010).

Even on the relatively secular Syrian radio however one hears Quranic readings and religious lectures, most famously by Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan Al-Buti on state radio.⁹⁰ While the regimes of Hafiz and Bashar al-Assad had until recently been opposed to wholly religious stations, in response to the protests of Spring 2011 Asad offered concessions geared toward religious protesters, including the promise to found an Islamic satellite television station as well as a religious radio station.⁹¹ The brand-new radio station is entitled *Nūr Ash-Shām*, and broadcasts a program of Quran readings and lectures, *inshād* (religious chant, often accompanied by percussion), calls to prayer, religiously focused stories from history, etc. Appendix 1 shows the schedule of a programming day for the station.⁹²

This station is in addition and contrast to Radio *Nūr* (*Nūr* meaning “God’s Light”) broadcast from Lebanon, a station associated with Hizbullah, which “[c]alls for virtue and morality and a respect for religions” and broadcasts religious services.⁹³

In his article “Sultans of Spin: Sacred Music on the World Stage”, Jonathan Shannon argues that in many Syrian musical traditions, the distinction between sacred and non-sacred music is extremely fluid in actual practice.

... Syrian musicians generally do not distinguish between sacred and nonsacred categories in this fashion. In practice, the sacred-profane distinction tends to refer more to different venues than to different repertoires. Of course there are well-known forms of Islamic chant (*inshād*) performed in Syria that are distinct from songs performed in nonritual contexts by their association with prayer, other forms

⁹⁰ Andreas Christmann, “Islamic Scholar and Religious Leader: A portrait of Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti”, *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, 9/2, (1988) pp. 149-169.

⁹¹ Phil Sands, “Assad Government Enlists Imams to calm Sunni Majority” *LebanonWire.com* April 8, 2011 <http://www.lebanonwire.com/1104MLN/11040824TN.asp>

⁹² Idhā'at Nūr Ash-Sham Daily Program 4-3-2012. <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=596> (accessed 4/3/2012)

⁹³ “About the station” Idhā'at *al-Nūr* (accessed 19 March, 2011) <http://www.alnour.com.lb/nourpage.php?pg=description>

of ritual, and by their lyrics, which refer to Allah, Muhammad, and the prophets. Yet the lyrics of the "sacred" songs often have both spiritual and profane connotations, as is well known in Sufi poetry and song texts in praise of wine and the beloved, for example.

Shannon goes on to describe the ways in which "sacred" and non-sacred repertoires coexist, sharing both aspects such as melodies and texts, and performance practices and venues.

The ambiguity of the distinction between sacred and nonsacred song texts is mirrored in the copformance conventions in modern Syria, where audiences and performers are expected to interact in similar ways-via shouts, sighs, and bodily movements-in the context of a *sahra* (evening musical *soirée*) and during *dhikr*.⁹⁴

While Shannon is referring to live music performance genres which are not the most commonly represented on popular radio, his point about the fluidity for religious and non-religious songs applies to the radio as well as the concert stage. This isn't to deny religious listening practices which are self-consciously constructed as alternatives to the type of listening associated with popular music, and the type of "ethical listening" and "reverence for the sacred word" described by Charles Hirschkind in his book *The Ethical Soundscape* is indeed a powerful and relevant mode of audition in Islamic Syria as well as Hirschkind's focus of Egypt. However, the distinction between sacred and nonsacred music and music audition can be difficult to make. Or rather, listeners and programmers are not always interested in a practice which makes that distinction. Thus Syrian state radio will play a religious *nasheed* by a vocalist like Omar Sarmini, followed soon after by the same singer performing the secular lyrics of a *muwashah*.

The *inshād* repertory in rotation on Syrian radio should also be distinguished from the most common *inshād* on satellite television. Due to the financial backing of the conservative Gulf

⁹⁴ Jonathan Shannon, "Sultans of Spin: Syrian Sacred Music on the World Stage", *American Anthropologist*, 105/2 (Jun 2003), 269.

countries, the Saudi and Khaleeji *inshād* are the most commonly heard varieties on satellite television. Religious music also enters the soundscape in the form of an overpowered car stereo blasting a refrain of “Ya Hussein, Ya Hussein, Ya Hussein” over a thumping drum beat, an explicit kind of advocacy, and a sonic advertisement from the driver that says “I’m young, rich, and Shia.”

“The Awtar group and Qasr Ar-Rehab of Sayidnaya present for one concert only - the star Mu’en Sharif. The star Mu’en Sharif - Thursday evening, the 8th of Tamouz, 2010. For reservations and information call 0991-23-33-32. Presented by Majelet Rotana, Majelet Sabaya, and Version FM.”

Concerts

Any concert taking place in Syria requires government approval, based on Article IV of the famous “Emergency Law” instituted in 1962, which among other restrictive injunctions designed to curtail political instability, prevents the gathering of large groups of people without permits. Section A of Article IV allows the government to “place restrictions on the freedom of people in meeting, accommodation, travel and traffic in places or at certain times...” while section B allows the government to “control messages and intelligence of any kind, and control of newspapers, pamphlets, files, graphics, publications, radio stations and all means of expression and advertising prior to publication.”⁹⁵

As I learned in the course of conversation with Syrian musicians, if one is able to secure the permits for a concert in Damascus (potentially a long and often expensive process even with the privilege of government connections), performers or venues can still be required to pay for government security for the gathering, either formally through the bureaucratic process or

⁹⁵ “Marsūm raqm 51” *PDPKS.com* <http://www.pdpks.com/ppp/?p=4241> (accessed May 19, 2011).

informally through bribes to the *mukhabarat* (secret police) who will show up in any case. Thus not only do several different segments of the government bureaucracy have effective veto power over all performances, but artists and venue owners are often forced to finance their own censorship, or at least their own monitors.

The primary venues for live music are weddings, which in both rural and urban areas represent a rare opportunity for public gathering allowed by the state, and the dabke performances at weddings are the most public performances in Syria.⁹⁶ Live performances of other types of music do of course take place in a variety of settings, including formal concerts at the opera house or the conservatoire, and less formal concerts in nightclubs or restaurants, but these are more restricted. The process of financing large concerts often involves several companies jointly hosting an event, as with the Mu'en Sharif concert mentioned above, which was co-sponsored by Rotana, Sabaya, and Version FM. The difficulty of organizing large concerts, however, means that many Syrian musicians make more money and perform as often outside of Syria as they do inside its borders. For the highest level of performers, who are most able to navigate the bureaucratic issues involved in performing in Syria, and who command large fees to play at a restaurant or wedding, the promise of even larger appearance fees in Lebanon or the Gulf makes Syria an occasional stop rather than a regular option. Musicians in the Middle East typically earn almost none of their income from the royalties on records, and when dealing with the major music companies are generally paid a lump sum up front for a recording.⁹⁷ Performing is viewed as a direct source of income, rather than a method of increasing record sales.

⁹⁶ Silverstein, "Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging."

⁹⁷ Frishkopf, "Introduction: Music and Media in the Arab World and 'Music and Media in the Arab World' as Music and Media in the Arab World: A Metadiscourse", 17.

99.1 NRJ Radio

We turn the receiver to NRJ Radio from Lebanon and hear the largest uninterrupted block of English language all day.

Pet Shop Boys – I’m With Stupid

Tina Turner – I Don’t Wanna Lose You

Alphaville – Forever Young

Toto – I Will Remember

This Lebanese station has a wider-ranging English language playlist than most, and isn’t subject to the Syrian caps on foreign song plays. The close connection with NRJ’s French counterpart results in frequent programming of American and British music that was popular in France in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, foreign language stations from Lebanon have been joined by MIX FM Syria, the only Syrian English-language station, which broadcasts Western music and English speaking DJs from Beirut and the Gulf, and uses the tagline “Proud to Be Syrian.”

Lebanese Sound of Syria

As I detail in Chapter 1, from the earliest years of broadcasting in the Arabic-speaking world cross-border broadcasting has been the norm rather than the exception. Arabic is, according to Douglas Boyd, the most internationally broadcast language in the world, after English. The presence of foreign stations in Syria is an unavoidable fact, whether they are Arabic-language stations coming from international powers like the US, Britain, France, and Russia, clandestine Kurdish stations broadcasting from Northern Iraq, or private for-profit stations from Lebanon and Jordan. Broadcasters in Lebanon especially direct some of their efforts towards the Syrian audience which, although significantly poorer per capita, is also much larger than the Lebanese audience.

Compared to the domestic Syrian stations, Lebanese radio has offered a bewildering variety of radio options. According to Marwan Kraidy: “In 1995, more than fifty terrestrial television stations and more than a hundred radio stations catered to Lebanon’s estimated three million inhabitants, who lived in a country of 10,452 square kilometers, or 4,105 square miles, only twice the size of the U.S. state of Delaware!”⁹⁸

Of course, some of these stations were serving more than just Lebanon, and the Syrian sonic memory of radio is tuned to these stations as well. The existence of Lebanese stations was at least tacitly accepted by the Syrian government. For example in the 1990s the Rafiq Hariri-owned Radio Orient “enjoyed a privileged relationship with Syria’s sole advertising agency, the Arab Advertising Organization, whereby the AAO sold airtime on its behalf. This arrangement indicated to advertisers that Radio Orient was an officially approved medium in Syria.”⁹⁹

Stations are linguistically differentiated as well, with Arabic, English, and French-language programs each holding a segment of the market. Among these, the English and French stations are typically more local in focus, and are thought to broadcast to a wealthier listenership, while the Arabophone stations broadcast to the largest population, which often include Syrian listeners.

The relationship between foreign, Lebanese, and local stations extends down to the personnel level as well. Hiam Hamoy, a well-known broadcaster at Sham FM, worked previously for the French Radio Monte Carlo in the seventies, then at Paris-based Radio Orient (*idha‘at al-sharq*) during the 1990s, when it was owned by Rafiq Hariri.¹⁰⁰ As the senior broadcaster on the

⁹⁸ Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, Or The Cultural Logic Of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 122.

⁹⁹ Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* (New York: IB Tauris, 2001), 77.

¹⁰⁰ Chilán Hamzah, *Kawalis Radio Monte Carlo: nashaa, taTawer, tamweel*. (al-qāhira, al hay‘ah al-miṣriyyah al-‘āmmah lil-kitāb, 1993), 171.

private stations, well known in the industry from her previous work, Hamoy is able to book interviews with some of the biggest stars who visit Damascus.

Many of the broadcasters on Syrian private stations studied or spent considerable time outside of Syria, in Lebanon, Europe, or the US. As mentioned earlier, the young Syrian broadcasters tend also to be bilingual, and criticism directed at Syrian private radio often takes the form of complaints that the broadcasters sound too Lebanese, and that they use foreign words and phrases to an extent which alienates the less educated or the more conservative among the listenership.¹⁰¹

105.1 Rotana Style – Turning the dial, we hear, once again, one of the most popular songs in Damascus in the spring of 2010, Elissa’s “ ‘A Balī Habībī” (On my mind, darling). In constant rotation on radio, satellite music video stations, and personal stereos, the song is ubiquitous in the way that is exclusive to a hit song in the warm part of the year. A long walk across the city invariably exposes a listener to snippets of the song multiple times, wafting out of car windows and the doorways of cafes.

¹⁰¹Saddam Hussein “al-idhā’at al-sūriya al-khāṣṣa tenshir ghasīlhā...” *DamasPost.com* February 24, 2010. . www.damaspost.com/خاص/الإذاعات-السورية-الخاصة-تنشر-غسيلها/ (accessed June 10, 2012); Saddam Hussein, “al-idhā’at al-khāṣṣa ghuruf lil-tenjīm wa al-sha’ūdha wa al-fan al-hābiṭ .. wa ṣalūnāt lil-siyyāsa wa al-akhbār” *DamasPost.com*, December 20, 2011, (accessed June 1, 2012). www.damaspost.com/ملفات-إعلامية/الإذاعات-الخاصة-غرف-للتنجيم-والشعرة-والفن-الهابط-وصالونات-للسياسة-والأخبار/ (accessed June 1, 2012).

Elissa

On my mind baby
 Tonight, I'll wear the white for you
 And I'll become yours
 And all the world will witness
 And I'll give birth to your baby
 That looks just like you
 On my mind baby
 I'll live a lifetime or more, next to you
 With a love that grows
 While we grow
 And I'll age with you,
 My life disappears when you're absent
 On my mind baby
 Elissa - 'A balī habībī¹⁰²

Elissa Khoury (b. 1972), known simply as “Elissa” professionally, is a Lebanese pop star with a series of hit albums recorded for Rotana over the past ten years.¹⁰³ A staple of video clip channels, television shows, and the pan-Arab celebrity press, she has been named the best-sellinīg artist in the Middle East by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry three times. ‘*A Bālī*’ (On my Mind) was the biggest hit off of her 2009 record *Tsadaq Bmein* (Who do you believe?).

Where many Lebanese stars are best known for *shabābī* dance songs, Elissa is synonymous with *al-ughniyya al-rūmānsiyya* (romantic song). While a common criticism of popular mass-mediated Arabic music states complains that all songs are variations on the same topic of love, unrequited love, or losing love, within the work of Arab pop there are many varieties of love song. “Romantic” refers not just to lyrical content, but to a particular styles of singing and musical arrangement.

“A Bali” begins quietly, the first two phrases are each repeated over “‘A bali habībī’.....

¹⁰² Elissa, “‘A bālī habībī’ *Bastanak* (Rotana, 2006).

¹⁰³ Elisabeth Cestor, “Music and Television in Lebanon,” in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 97–110.

The image shows a musical score for the melody of Elissa's song "A Bali Habib". It consists of two staves of music in a treble clef, 2/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written on a single line. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the lyrics: 'a ba-li ha - bi - bi 'a ba-li ha - bi - bi a-gham rek ___ ma-a___ a-tril - e - k. The second staff contains the lyrics: i-sr - ek ___ ma-a ra-j - 'a - k a-hib - sel ___ ma ta - l-'ak min al-bi wa la youm. There is a blue '3' above the third measure of the second staff, indicating a triplet.

Figure 2.4: Transcription – Melody of Elissa, “ ‘A Bali Ḥabīb”

The video clip for the song begins in the interior of a church, to the sound of an organ playing “Here Comes the Bride”, and the rest of the video alternates between flashbacks of Elissa fighting and smiling with a handsome actor, and shots of her in a wedding dress, preparing for the ceremony and singing to the camera. The video and the narrative described in it by the lyrics exemplify the ideal of the Lebanese female star, the sex object who simultaneously performs the duties of wife and mother to perfection. This ideal is a standard trope of Lebanon music stardom, where even the “Ambassador to the Stars” (Fairuz) took care to mention her duties as wife and mother in most of her rare interviews.¹⁰⁴ Even the video for Haifé Wahbe’s scandalous “Bous al Wawa” (Kiss the Boo-Boo) takes place within the confines of the protagonist’s home as she takes care of a child.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Reed Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*, 2008.

Voice of the Evening

2:00am - 87.6 FM “You are listening to Voice of the Evening on Radio Damascus.”

A smooth-voiced, comforting DJ, Sim'an Ferzli, takes calls dealing with the topic of the night. He speaks in breezy newscaster when announcing the station and song titles, but slips into a comforting Damascene accent with each of the callers.

Call-In and Talk Shows

Call-in and talk shows are a significant part of the Damascus radio landscape. These include advice shows which take calls on topics like romance, family, school, etc., horoscope programs and general discussion programs where callers will chime in on news topics of the day or broad societal issues. While the shows often address everyday difficulties and problems in Syria, domestic politics is largely avoided. Private radio stations are not licensed to discuss political news, and until the 2011-2012 uprisings were prohibited from doing so (see Chapter Six). However, the line between content geared towards general interests like “Family and Child-Rearing”, the title of one radio talk show, and broadly political topics, is often blurry. Thus an interview program might have a professor of law on the air in order to discuss the rights of women to work in Syria, but all discussion regarding existing laws will be generally favorable. DJs also take call-in requests for music, but following the popularity of SMS-based satellite music channels, many music programs accept requests primarily via text messages.

2:00 am *Şawt as-Sahara on Radio Damascus*

“Tonight’s topic: split personalities” (al-izdiwaj ash-shakhsiyya).

A series of women call in to give their opinions. Callers and host are warmly polite, the callers excited to be speaking with their nightly companion, and the host greeting them like a series of missed relatives.

DJ: “What is your name, dear?”

Caller: “Leena”

DJ: “Faḍalli ya Leena” (Go ahead, Leena!)

Caller: “I heard one opinion, perhaps it is incorrect, and you will disagree with it, but”

Leena points out that a split personality is a clinical diagnosis and needs to be treated by professionals. The next caller argues that there are situations in which dual personalities are understandable or even necessary. A husband shouldn’t be the same at work as at home.

Despite the excitement in the voice of each caller at expressing an opinion on the radio, the pace of the show is very relaxed. Between each, the DJ weaves in 15 or 20 seconds of a song, slowing down the pace of the show, and often using the song to comment wryly on the topic of conversation.

DJ: “Again, the topic for tonight is dual personalities...”

A series of cinematic horn hits fades in under the DJ’s voice, followed by the mournful voice of Melhem Barakat.

“Waḥdi Ana, rah ibqa waḥdi...sākin Ana sākini waḥdi....”

“By myself, I will cry alone. Living alone, walking alone.” ¹⁰⁵

Tonight’s callers are thanked by Ferzli profusely in warm Shami (Syrian dialect), who signs off at 2:15 before sending the station off into a 54-minute live recording of Umm Kulthum’s classic “Min Ajli ‘Eynayka” (Because of Your Eyes).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described a few of the factors that shape the way that radio is programmed and listened to within the soundscape of Damascus Syria. Within that soundscape, the variety of English- and Arabic-language popular music that has become the norm in recent years on Syrian radio often appears to American ears to represent split personalities, multiple unrelated listening aesthetics juxtaposed against each other, adopted and discarded at will. In the following chapters, I will examine mass-media discourses about music in Syria, and the way that radio genres and listening categories are described and understood within the larger Syrian mediascape. In doing so I hope to illuminate the ways in which these sonic juxtapositions not only make sense, but are central to the local experience of public and state-sponsored culture.

¹⁰⁵Melhem Barakat “Waḥdi Anā” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIT7dUaNQ7g>

Chapter 3 – Popular Music in Syrian Mass Media Discourse

Introduction

Depending on who is speaking, and where one is listening, the music which dominates radio, music stores, and satellite television in the Arab world goes by a variety of names: “*bub*” (pop), “*Arabpop*”, “*shabābī*” (youthful), or “*Āghānī hadītha*” (modern song) to fans, “*jeel*” to some scholars, “*hābiṭ*” (vulgar), or “*fideo clip*” songs to its critics. In Syria, several musicians I spoke with referred to the music played on the radio and on satellite music channels as simply “Rotana Music,” implying through a reference to the largest media company a critique of both the quality and style of the music and the economic relationship of large corporations with local musical scenes. The varieties which fall under this umbrella of popular mass-mediated music include a wide range of performance and production practices. Some of these stylistic differences are extremely subtle, barely audible except to the most devoted and discerning listeners, while differences between some songs are so great that an unfamiliar listener would have a hard time imagining how this range could fit into even a term as widely defined as “pop.” The fact that these stylistic difference don’t always engender separate genres, either in the sense of fully fleshed out “genre worlds” (using Simon Frith’s terms), or even as marketing categories, doesn’t mean that they aren’t significant for listeners.¹ Rather these are the distinctions which fans argue over endlessly, and are used to read shades of meaning into lyrics and video performance, the distinctions which separate an hour of

¹Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

happy listening to a favorite DJ from a grimace and a quick change of channel. An attempt to evaluate the use of popular music in the context of politically motivated broadcasting must be sensitive to these kinds of differences.

This chapter outlines some of the categories which are used to market and define mass-mediated music in Syria. As I argue elsewhere in this dissertation, the use of popular music in politically directed broadcasts constitutes audible instantiations of institutional theories of music and music's utility in political communication, a model of the imagined listener envisioned by broadcasting power, and a model for the kinds of listening practices which these broadcasters want to inculcate. When studying a targeted broadcast like Radio Sawa, to be discussed in Chapter 4, these attempts at musical influence also need to be placed in the context of the local discourses of popular music and radio. What are the counterpropositions, and alternate theories of music and music listening that exist within the local media discourse in the target markets for Radio Sawa? In the specifically Syrian radioscape, what are the differences between the discourses of state-controlled, state-sanctioned, and cross-border regional media, and how might these differ from the musical discourses employed by international political broadcasters? Are there alternative theories of music and radio in play in addition to the alternative political viewpoints, and alternative versions of reality espoused by politically directed broadcasts?

Towards answering these questions, in this chapter I will describe elements of musical mass media discourses both within Syria and in the pan-Arab mediascape of satellite television, newspapers and radio. The sources that I draw on for this chapter include:

- Hundreds of hours of radio broadcasts, and language used by radio DJs and station administrators and programmers to describe their playlists, both on the air and on station websites, and via published and personal interviews
- Journalistic and scholarly literary descriptions of popular music, in the Syrian, Lebanese and pan-Arab press
- Televised commentary on music, including comedic references to music in the Syrian sketch comedy Spotlight (Buqa' Daw')
- Ethnographic encounters around popular music listening in Syria, especially public listening practices in Damascus cafes
- Syria state radio discourse about music, focusing especially on state-sponsored song contests

More generally, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a context against which to position the music and institutional theories of musical communication broadcast by Radio Sawa, and in particular to allow the possibility of pitting Radio Sawa's use of music against the institutional theories of music espoused by Syrian private and public state-controlled media outlets.

In the title to his essay in *Music and Mass Media in the Arab World*, James Grippo asks the question "What's Not on Egyptian Television and Radio?" in order to address the disjuncture between the polished, commercial *shabābī* (youth) music of the satellite television channels and pan-Arab media companies, and the locally popular *sha'bī* music of Cairo, played at weddings and festivals and distributed through cassettes

and burned cds.² Moving out of Egypt, by far the most studied country in Anglophone music scholarship on the Arab World, the questions changes: when it comes to Syria do we even know what *is* on the radio? Little scholarship outside of Egypt has examined Arabic popular music with the same level of attention to the way that musical differences within mass mediated categories are marketed and distributed – much less to the actual sonic distinctions which exist within the category of mass marketed music.³ There are a number of reasons for this, and Syria in general has been severely understudied, partially for reasons having to do with difficulties (some perceived and some very real) involved for Americans working in Syria.⁴

While I am most directly interested in terrestrial radio broadcasts in Syria, this chapter will engage with a mass-media discourse that includes a variety of media. To return to Appadurai's "scapes" terminology, the imagined world of the mediascape, which includes radio, television, newspapers, books, and all mass media, becomes the discursive and music theoretical terrain in which listeners experience and create meaning out of the music in their daily lives. Moving to another set of anthropological metaphors, in an article about the experimental music scene in Beirut, Thomas Burkholter invokes Marc Slobin's conception of "superculture", "interculture" and "subculture" to situate the various aspects of Lebanese music.

² Grippo, "What's Not on Egyptian Television and Radio! Locating the 'Popular' in Egyptian Sha'bi."

³ There are of course a few excellent studies of popular musical culture in the *Mashriq*, see literature review in the introduction.

⁴ The period of time that I spent in Syria between 2009 and 2010, was perhaps the easiest period for Americans and American researchers since the ascendance of the Hafiz al-Asad to power in 1970. The situation as I write this has changed

Following this logic, the Arab pop scene can be categorized as “superculture”; imported Western classical and popular music (such as Mozart and Madonna), and Lebanese music that is heard throughout the world (such as Fayrouz and Marcel Khalifeh) could be defined as “interculture”. Finally, the music played in small circles in Beirut can be regarded as “subculture”. As in Appadurai’s conception of “-scapes”, the borders between the different “-cultures” are not fixed and always in flux.⁵

Described using this model, this chapter examines the intersection between the “superculture” of pan-Arab music industry and the “interculture” of a particularly Syrian mediascape which has been characterized by a remarkably high degree of state control.

As I write this chapter in the spring of 2012, Syria is in the grips of a political and humanitarian crisis of incredible proportions. While this chapter will use some examples from the Syrian media which were broadcast or published since the beginning of the Arab Uprising and its incarnation in Syria, for the purpose of this dissertation, I am writing about the Syria of 2010, the last time I was in the country. Chapter 6 addresses some of the ways impact of the Syrian uprising have changed the local radioscape and the role of foreign broadcasts in it.

⁵ Thomas Burkhalter, “Mapping Out the Sound Memory of Beirut. A survey of the music of a war generation,” in *Itinéraires Esthétiques et Scènes Culturelles Au Proche-Orient*, ed. Frank Mermier (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007), 103–125, <http://ifpo.revues.org/550>.; Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press : University Press of New England, 1993).

Call for Songs

There are a limited number of places in the world where the public discourse, the range of ideas it is possible to express, what Stuart Hall has called “horizon of the taken-for-granted”, has been as tightly controlled as in modern Syria.⁶ In the age of satellite television and growing if still very limited internet access, the mediascape in Syria is a blend of local, regional, pan-Arab, and global international sources. Nevertheless, Syria remains a totalitarian state which maintains tight control over all domestic media, and only allowed privately owned media outlets to operate at all within the last ten years. Although scholars such as Geros, Salamandra, Pinto, and Silverstein have described a variety of methods for resisting and asserting personhood in the face of a “culture of fear”, and despite a dramatic explosion on media options available to Syrians today, the Syrian state still controlled the boundaries of acceptable public discourse in 2010.⁷

It is obvious to anyone who spends a day listening to the various branches of Syrian state radio, Voice of the People, Voice of the Youth, the General Program, and new religious station *Nūr al-Shām*, that nearly everything broadcast by the state has an ideological, nationalist, or political aspect to it, including the music. In addition to serving as the only authorized purveyors of political news on domestic radio news, the branches of state radio position themselves as the defenders of Syrian traditions and morals in the face of corrupting outside influence. This applies both to the news and talk segments, which focus explicitly on Syrian culture and education, and to musical styles,

⁶ Stuart Hall, “The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 44.

⁷Geros, “Doing Fieldwork Within Fear and Silences”; Weyman, “Empowering Youth Or Reshaping Compliance? Star Magazine, Symbolic Production, and Competing Visions of Shabab in Syria”; Salamandra, “Creative Compromise”; Pinto, “The Limits of the Public”; Pinto, Jakelie, and Varsoke, “Dangerous Liaisons”; Silverstein, “Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging.”

where the state broadcasts tend towards a more curatorial relationship with music, emphasizing the maintenance of traditional and conservative musical values.

In order to tie this political and aesthetic position to actual music and musical genres, I discuss a 2011 “call for songs” in the Syrian Radio-sponsored song contest, which I have reproduced and translated below. The description of song types which follows in the advertisement is worth reproducing at length because it details explicitly the curatorial, preservational, and didactic function that fills Syrian state rhetoric in regards to music and cultural production. The significance of the document below is not that it accurately presents the full spectrum of Syrian song; it certainly does not. Rather, as Hall has stated:

Ruling ideas may dominate other conceptions of the social world by setting the limit to what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable, within the given vocabularies of motive and action available to us. Their dominance lies precisely in the power they have to contain within their limits, to frame within their circumference of thought, the reasoning and calculation of other social groups....

In the process of detailing the various categories for musical submissions, the call for songs serves as a remarkably concise statement of aesthetic principles for Syrian radio music, and one of the more remarkable musicological documents I have seen produced by a government agency.

مسابقة الأغنية الإذاعية السورية لعام 2011

سعيًا لاستعادة مكانة الأغنية السورية ورفع سوية الإنتاج الغنائي والذائقة الموسيقية في سوريا، تعلن الهيئة العامة للإذاعة والتلفزيون مديرية الإذاعة دائرة الموسيقى عن إجراء مسابقة شاملة للأغنية السورية بألوانها الشعبية، الطربية، الرومانسية - العاطفية - الشبابية والإنسانية: المختلفة.

أولاً، القوالب والأنواع:

الأغنية الشعبية:

وهي الأغنية المستمدة من البيئة السورية تحديداً، تواكب الأحداث اليومية الحياتية للمواطن، فتصيح مشاعره كلمة ولحنا معتمدة البساطة والتلقائية الصادقة في الكلام، والآلات الشرقية المحلية، وبأسلوب السوري المتميز في اللحن. يمكن أن تستأنس الأغنية الشعبية بالموروث الفني الشعبي (الفولكلور) (دون أن تعتمد عليه كلياً).

الأغنية الطربية

وهي الأغنية المعتمدة على جمل لحنية جزلة تحتاج إلى قدرة خاصة في الأداء بدون قالب محدد حيث يمكن أن تكون قصيدة أو موشحاً بسيطاً أو أغنية باللهجة العامية. إلى جانب التزامها بما يناسب روح العصر.

الأغنية الرومانسية

وهي الأغنية التي تنطلق من عواطف المرء وتنتج إليها، تخاطب الأحاسيس والمشاعر بالكلمة واللحن الرقيقين، وبأسلوب حالم يؤثر في نفس الإنسان بما ينسبه واقعه ليسرح مع الموضوع والنغم في عالم من الخيال الحسي والفكري. يمكن أن تكون بالآلات أوركستراوية، أو بمزيج بين الآلات الشرقية والغربية.

الأغنية الشبابية

وهي الأغنية الحديثة المعتمدة على قالب حركي نغماً وإيقاعاً، والتي تناسب الاهتمامات الغنائية لشباب اليوم. لا يحصرها موضوع محدد، وتعتمد بشكل أساسي على التوزيع الحديث والضغط الإيقاعي الدارج في الأغاني العصرية. يستحسن أن يكون موضوعها جديداً حديثاً، وأن يتضمن توزيعها لمسة تميزه عما سبقه.

الأغنية الإنسانية

وهي الأغنية التي تلتزم موضوعاً إنسانياً في النص، مع ما يناسب هذا الموضوع من أسلوب لحن وجمل موسيقية وتوزيعات تتوافق والغاية المرجوة من هذه الأغنية. تظهر عواطف المرء نحو فكرة إنسانية بتلقائية وبساطة دون تكلف أو مبالغة في وصف الحالة أو تبيان المشاعر والتعاطف مع هذه الفكرة.

ثانياً لجنة تحكيم المسابقة:

تسمى لجنة التحكيم من سبعة أعضاء محكمين، وعضوين اثنين بصفة مراقب بلا تصويت. على أن يتم توزيعها كما يلي:

رئيس اللجنة

ثلاثة موسيقيين

شاعرين

واحد من الذواقة

ثالثاً برنامج التحكيم :

أ - النص:

- جودة الموضوع،
- حداثة الأسلوب،
- السبك الغنائي،
- الصور والبلاغة الشعرية،
- ترابط وتسلسل أفكار النص،
- التوافق بين الموضوع وبين المعالجة الأدبية.

ب - اللحن:

- جدة اللحن، بمعنى أن يتضمن جملاً لحنية مبتكرة .
- حداثة الأسلوب،.
- التطور اللحني وترابط الجمل الموسيقية،.
- التوافق بين الموضوع واللحن،.
- التنويع والقفزات الموسيقية،.
- التوافق بين القلب وأسلوب التلحين،.
- التوافق مع قواعد التأليف الموسيقي،.
- التوافق بين اللحن وبين صوت المطرب.

ج - الأداء والصوت:

- خامة الصوت،
- القدرة على الأداء والتحكم بالصوت،.
- التعبير وتوافق الأسلوب الغنائي مع الموضوع،.
- النطق السليم ومخارج الحروف،.
- التميز، الذي يعني أن المطرب ذو هوية صوتية مميزة .

د - التوزيع الموسيقي:

- كفاية استعمال الآلات الحية،.
- التناسب مع الموضوع،.
- التناسب مع اللحن والقلب،.
- جمال الجمل التوزيعية،.
- التوافق مع قواعد التوزيع الموسيقي،.
- بناء التنفيذ واستعمال اللوبات.

Figure 3.1: Syrian Radio Song Contest 2011⁸

⁸ The document continues to specify the qualifications and submission instructions for entrants to the contest.

The Syrian Radio Song Contest for 2011

In order to restore the status of the Syrian song and elevate both song production and musical taste in Syria, the Public Association for Radio and Television, and the Directorate of Broadcasting, Department of Music, announce the sponsorship of a comprehensive contest for Syrian song in all its many colors: folk, ṭarabiya, romantic/emotional, youthful, and humanitarian.

First, the forms and genres:

Sha`bī (popular in the folk sense) Song:

A song specifically derived from the Syrian environment, keeping pace with the daily life events of the citizen, formulating his feelings in word and melody, supporting simplicity, spontaneity, and sincerity in speech, local eastern instruments, and with the best Syrian style in melody. It is possible to draw on a folk song of from popular artistic heritage, without relying on it entirely.

Tarab Song:⁹

*A song based on eloquent melodic phrases, needing a special ability in performance, without a specific form. It can be a poem or simple muwashshah, or a song in colloquial language. It must suit the spirit of the age.*¹⁰

Romantic Song:

A song which begins from the person's emotions and explores them, it addresses feelings and emotions with refined words and melodies. With a dreamy style that penetrates a person's very soul it makes him forget his own reality to wander along with the theme and melody a world of emotional and intellectual fantasy. It can use orchestral instruments, or a mix of eastern and western instruments.

Shabābī (Youth or pop) Song

A modern song relying on a kinetic form, melodically and rhythmically, and which fits the musical interests of today's youth. It is not limited to a specific theme, and depends basically on modern production and the fashionable rhythmic stress of modern songs. It is desirable that it have a new and modern theme, and that its production distinguish it from previous eras.

Humanitarian Song:

A song requiring a humanitarian theme in the text, and that represents this theme with styles of melody, musical phrases, and production compatible with the desired goal of the song. It shows a person's emotions towards a humanitarian idea spontaneously and

⁹ The word "ṭarab" is specific enough that it is better left untranslated, referring both to the ecstatic response of music listeners, and the particular style of singing associate with the golden age of Arabic music in the mid twentieth century. For a discussion of ṭarab in English, see A.J. Racy's *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ According to Jonathan Shannon's definition: "Of probable Andalusian origin, the *muwashshah* consists of classical Arabic poetry set to music and forms the staple of the Aleppine *waslah*." Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees*, 228.

simply, without affectation or exaggeration in the description of the situation or the expression of emotions and sympathy with this idea.

Second, the jury of the competition:

The committee will include seven members, with two members as observers without a vote, to be distributed as follows:

Chairman of the Committee

Three musicians

Two Poets

One of the dhawāqa (people with good taste)

Third, the program of judging.

A – The text.

- *Theme quality*
- *Modernity of the style.*
- *Musical construction*
- *Images and poetic eloquence.*
- *Coherence and sequence of ideas of the text.*
- *Compatibility of the subject and the literary treatment.*

B - The melody

- *Quality of the music – it must include innovative melodic phrases.*
- *Modernity of the style.*
- *Development and coherence of melodic musical phrases.*
- *Compatibility of the subject and the composition.*
- *Diversity and musical leaps.*
- *Compatibility of the genre and the style of composing.*
- *Compatibility with the rules of musical composition.*
- *Compatibility of the melody and the singer's voice.*

C – Performance and Sound

- *Pureness of the voice.*
- *Ability to perform and control the sound.*
- *Expression and compatibility of singing style with the theme.*
- *Pronunciation and output of letters.*
- *Excellence, meaning that the singer possesses a distinctive vocal identity.*

D – Arrangement

- *Sufficient use of live instruments.*
- *Suitability for the subject*
- *Suitability with the melody and form.*
- *Beauty of the distribution of phrases.*
- *Compatibility with the rules of musical production.*
- *Construction of effects and use of loops.*

Figure 3.2: Syrian Radio Song Contest 2011 (translation)

This statement of aesthetic principles comes from the the General Organization of Radio and Television in Syria, and therefore carries with it ideological baggage concerning the production of Syrian national identity, the relationship between young people and tradition, and the relationship between Syrian culture and technology. However, despite the document's source and the tricky nature of the relationship between Syrian state and public culture, the breakdown of various song genres described here does fit for a significant percentage of the music played on Syrian radio. The categories defined here, *Sha 'bī* (folk/popular), *Ṭarab*, “Romantic”, *Shabābī* (Youth/Pop), and “Humanitarian”, are by no means mutually exclusive; artists frequently cross over between these genres, such that both an artist's catalogue and a single song often contain elements from more than one of the categories. Nor is this taxonomy exhaustive in terms of Syrian playlists, as I will expand on below, but it does serve as an excellent starting point for discussing the musical content of both government-run and private radio.

Two of these categories, *sha 'bī* and *shabābī* music, were discussed in Chapter 2, where I described them in terms of a continuum where the “modern production and fashionable rhythmic stress” of *shabābī* music often coexists with the “simplicity, spontaneity, sincerity in speech, and local eastern instruments” of *sha 'bī*. I similarly discussed the “romantic” category in Chapter 2 using the example of Elissa, the current queen of the romantic song (*ughniyya rīmānsiyya*). The addition of *Ṭarab* and “Humanitarian” songs to the *sha 'bī* and *shabābī* spectrum of popular music expands the taxonomy to include very significant distinctions within the playlists of Damascus stations, and will discuss these over the course of the chapter. To flesh out the

discussion of the other categories, and to extend our focus to the broader discourse on music and Syrian radio, we need to enter private stations into the discussion.

Version FM

The following chart details the broadcast week of Version FM, as advertised on the station's website, and confirmed by extensive recording and review of the station's broadcasts.¹¹ Version FM is probably not the most popular of the private Syrian stations, but its scheduling breakdown and the variety of music it broadcasts are illustrative of many tendencies which are common throughout the radioscape. I will use this program as a starting point to explore various aspects of the musical discourse, and associated listening practices.

¹¹ As I detail in Chapter 2, "Version" FM exploits Syria's lax copyright enforcement to imply affiliation with the international "Virgin" brand, as the two words are often transliterated identically in Arabic as فيرجن.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
0:00-1:00am	Umm Kulthum أم كلثوم	Umm Kulthum أم كلثوم	Umm Kulthum أم كلثوم
1:00-2:00am	Long Sad Songs أغاني طويلة حزينة	Long Sad Songs أغاني طويلة حزينة	Long Sad Songs أغاني طويلة حزينة
2:00-3:00am	Blues & Jazz	Slow English	Rock-Country
3:00-4:00am	Tarab Mujadded		
4:00-5:00am	Musical (Instrumental)	Musical (Instrumental)	Musical (Instrumental)
5:00-6:00am	Dramas of Fairuz مسرحيات فيروز	Dramas of Fairuz مسرحيات فيروز	Dramas of Fairuz مسرحيات فيروز
6:00-7:00am	Fairuz فيروز	Fairuz فيروز	Fairuz فيروز
7:00-8:00am			
8:00-8:30am	Wadi', Nasri and Zaki Nasif وديع نصري - زكي ناصيف	Wadi', Nasri and Zaki Nasif وديع نصري - زكي ناصيف	Wadi', Nasri and Zaki Nasif وديع نصري - زكي ناصيف
8:30-9:30am	Caffeine كافيين	Caffeine كافيين	Caffeine كافيين
9:30-9:45am			
9:45-10:00am	Our Press صحافتنا	Our Press صحافتنا	Our Press صحافتنا
10:00-10:30am	Ghalia and the Horoscope غالية والأبراج	Ghalia and the Horoscope غالية والأبراج	Ghalia and the Horoscope غالية والأبراج
10:30-11:00am	Legal Corner زاوية قانونية	With Radina مع ردينة	From Us and With Us منا وفينا
11:00am-12:00pm	Arabic MIDDAY Calm عربي متوسط هادئ	Arabic MIDDAY Calm عربي متوسط هادئ	Arabic MIDDAY Calm عربي متوسط هادئ
12:00-1:00pm			
1:00-2:00pm	A true word كلمة حتى		Medicine on the Air دوا عالهاوا
2:00-3:00pm	Song Requests طلبات الأغاني	Song Requests طلبات الأغاني	Song Requests طلبات الأغاني
3:00-4:00pm	Old Tarab طرب قديم	Old Tarab طرب قديم	Old Tarab طرب قديم
4:00-5:00pm	1990s تسعينيات	1990s تسعينيات	1990s تسعينيات
5:00-6:00pm	Song Requests طلبات الأغاني	Song Requests طلبات الأغاني	Song Requests طلبات الأغاني
6:00-7:00pm			
7:00-8:00pm	Star of the Week نجم الأسبوع	Basketball	كان زمان
8:00-9:00pm	Hits Arab/Western Hits عربي-غربي	Arab-Western Calm هادي	Hits Arab/Western Hits عربي-غربي
9:00-10:00pm			
10:00-11:00pm	Arabic/Western Hadi (Calm) هادي		Arabic/Western Calm هادي
11:00am-12:00pm			

Table 3.1: Weekly Program for Version FM, as of May 2012 (Source Virgin FM.com)

As the above chart illustrates, the station divides its broadcast between segments devoted to specific singers, programs devoted to broad musical genres, categories or historical periods, song requests and hits, and talk-shows. Most significant among the specific singers named, Version FM devotes three hours each morning, from 5:00 am to 8:00 am, to the work of Fairuz. Two hours are given over to her song catalogue and one hour to the dramatic audio-plays of the Rahbani Brothers, which are also interspersed with songs.¹² This level of airtime for the “Neighbor to the Moon” and the Rahbani brothers is hardly unique in Damascus, where I once spent one long morning listening to the Syria Radio’s *Ṣawt Ash-Shabāb* play thirty seven songs in a row by Fairuz. At the other end of the day, the hour between midnight and 1 am on Version FM is devoted to Umm Kulthum, completing the formula “*Fairuz bis-ṣabāḥ wa Umm Kulthum bil-masā*” mentioned in Chapter 1.

Version devotes a half hour each morning to the “Giants of Lebanese and Arab *ṭarab*, the great voices who stood alongside Lady Fairuz and sung with her and composed for her, and joined her in working with the Rahbani Brothers” and titles the programming block by listing some of these singers by first name: “Wadī (as-Safī), Nasri (Shams ad-Dīn), and Zaki (Nasīf).”¹³ The weekly program “Kān Zamān” focuses on the music and biography of one of these singers, along with the earlier generation of largely Egyptian stars (featured singers on the programs have included ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfīz, Nāẓem al-Ghazālī, Farīd al-Aṭrāsh, Leila Murād, and Asmahān.) The station also focuses on one

¹² For a discussion of the prominence of Fairuz in Syria, see Chapter 2.

¹³ Version FM, “What is On” (accessed March 3, 2012)
<http://www.versionfm.net/ar/whatison/1/1/%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AC>

“Star of the Week” for an hour on Friday evenings, as voted on through listener text messages. The practice of programming around stars is hardly unique to Syria or the Arab world, and indicates an important aspect of the way that music is discussed in Syrian media, worth exploring further.

Genealogy over Genre

The process of introducing Arabic music to Western audiences has often led scholars to describe Arab stars using analogies to Western counterparts. Thus ‘Abd al-Ḥalim Ḥāfiẓ is the “Arab Elvis”, Fairuz the “Callas of Arabia”, and Sabah Fakri the “Frank Sinatra of Syria”.¹⁴ These comparisons reach their most elaborate when it comes to Umm Kulthum:

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, the most accomplished singer of her century in the Arab World.¹⁵

There are problems with these types of formulations, both in the inevitable limitations of analogies across different histories and cultural contexts, and in their potential to create the impression of non-intersecting teleological trajectories of popular culture. This type

¹⁴ Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc, 2005), xii.

Matthew Fraser, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Soft Power and American Empire* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2005), 211.

¹⁵ Richard Nidel, *World Music: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 189.

of presentation of popular culture can be dangerous not just because the comparison usually assumes that the foreign popular culture will/should gradually come to resemble the Western one, but also because it neglects the circulation and intersections through which listeners and public figures do inhabit the same musical and media landscape (the Celine Dion of Lebanon for example ...is Celine Dion.)

Despite these potential drawbacks, the practice of situating musicians based on analogies and relationships to other singers is nearly unavoidable, and has some concrete benefits. Primarily, it allows the speedy communication of a tremendous amount of information about both musical style and social role, provided that author and reader share a similar context. We are familiar with the practice when employed by music writers as a tool for both communicating sonic information and for situating the writer and the reader within a set of shared references. Within a shared set of references, we can make allusions which convey meaning about a specific musical attribute like timbre (“The record has a ‘Memphis Horns’ sound”) or about a broad set of musical and musical-social connotations (“The band sounds like the Dionne Warwick hired the Flaming Lips to play a party at Phil Spector’s house!”). The case of cross-cultural analogy is somewhat different, in that the label “Arab Elvis” is meant to situate Abdel Halim Hafiz socially, in terms of audience, sex appeal, etc. but not necessarily to assert any direct sonic relationship between the two singers. While it would be interesting to hear a traditionally musicological, style-focused comparison between the two stars, that is almost never the area being illustrated by these types of cross-cultural analogies.

Perhaps the most convincing rationale for the use of this type of comparison is that the invocation of other singers to situate an artist socially and musically is

fundamental to the discourse on popular music in the Syrian and the pan-Arab media. The interviews, reviews, and discussions about music which take place in local newspapers, radio, and television inevitably situate singers in terms of their similarities and differences with peers and the stars of previous generations.

This aspect of discourse about music is perhaps unremarkable, as the practice of comparing one performer to another is one of the basic exercises of music criticism all over the world. However, the rhetorical practice takes on particular resonance in the context of Arabic music, where for example Walter Armbrust has written about Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s “authenticating geneology”, the musical lineage and *isnād* (chain of transmission) used by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to claim authority in both the folk and classical Arabic music traditions. The word *isnād* is primarily used in the context of the scholarly evaluation of the validity of *hadīth*, and refers to the chain of attributions by which details of the Prophet’s life have been passed down from scholar to scholar. In Armbrust’s usage, the word also carries allusions to the millennia old tradition of biography and intellectual genealogy in Islamic literature, of which the most famous example is Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isbahani’s *Kitāb al-āghānī* from the 10th century (a.d.).¹⁶ In an aside to the discussion of ‘Abd al-Wahhad’s use of authenticating geneology, Armbrust contrasts the presentation of Elvis Presley with Arab artists:

The process of authenticating Arab artists is starkly different from the way Western artists present themselves to the public. Elvis Presley is an excellent example of how differently we present artistic authenticity...the

¹⁶ Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author’s Craft in Abū L-Faraj Al-Isbahānī’s Kitāb Al-aghānī* (Psychology Press, 2003), 26.

manner of presenting Presley to the public was invariably as a “unique event.” The public presentation of Arab artists is always as ‘the next link in the chain.’¹⁷

At the same time that a lineage of musical succession has particular historical resonance in the Arab and Islamic contexts, the contours of the modern Arabic radioscape also reinforce the primacy of individual singers as points of reference. In a mediascape where even today a few stars demand an incredible level of bandwidth, the work of these voices (Umm Kulthum, ‘Abd al Wahhab, Abdel Halim Hafēz, and Fairuz) can come to the status of single-artist song genres. Thus Syrian stations don’t just program Fairuz: they program *fairūziyyāt*, a term used by Syrian and Lebanese radio stations to refer to the music of Fairuz and to newer recordings of songs she made famous.¹⁸

Part of the difficulty then in writing about Arabic popular music for unfamiliar audiences is that where a great deal of Anglo-American music criticism is concerned with the policing and/or disruption of genre boundaries, the equivalent discourse in much of the Arabic-speaking world is proportionally more focused on individuals in connection with one another. It is relatively easy to broadly describe a musical genre in terms of defining characteristics, and indeed the Syrian daily paper *Baladna* has run a series of articles defining Western popular genres (rock ‘n’ roll, rap, jazz) which tend not to even

¹⁷ Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 242.

¹⁸ In general, I try to avoid the word “cover song” when discussing Arabic popular music. The term and its opposite, “original”, imply a very specific model of unity between songwriter and singer. This model is derived from Anglo-American rock music, and isn’t very useful in most other contexts.

reference individual performers or composers.¹⁹ Conversely, discussions of Arabic musical genre and style in the Arabic-language press tend to reference specific singers.

In contrast to the cross-cultural analogies, within a shared Arabic musical context, the invocation of another singer is assumed to describe not just social relevance and fame, but aspects of musical performance. Thus when a singer is described as “like George Wassouf”, this usually implies both a certain level of vocal mastery, and a commentary on the timbre of their voice. The younger singer in question probably has the trademark scratchy timbre and weary delivery of the “Sultan of *tarab*”, or some other particularity of vocal timbre or delivery which renders their voice an acquired taste, rather than an immediately accessible sound.

The other information conveyed by the invocation of one singer in relation to another, having to do with the biographical details, popularity and social position, is similarly important in these comparisons. Here the usefulness of the comparison relies not just on familiarity with a singer’s music, but on a shared knowledge based on the discourse on singing stars that occurs in publicity bios, newspaper, television and radio interviews, internet message boards and book length biographies, the popular discourse around popular singers. The celebrity industry is big business in the pan-Arab media, and the demand for gossip on actors and singing stars is high in Syria, although the local Syrian press typically exhibits a more subdued attitude towards the personal lives of

¹⁹ Ala ‘Amer “alwān al-mūsīqā: Rock and Roll... awla ṣiḥat ṣirā‘ al-thaqāfāt” *Baladnaonline.com* April 10, 2012, http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58805 (accessed April 20, 2012).

Ala ‘Amer “‘Rap’ ihtijāj bidah shabab amreeka wa waṣl ilā furuq sūriya” April 4, 2012 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58678 (accessed April 20, 2012).

Ala ‘Amer “alwān al-mūsīqā al-jazz.. ṣarakhat al‘abīd al-mumtaziya bimūsīqā al-asiyad” April 17, 2012 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58922 (accessed April 20, 2012).

celebrities than the Lebanese based or pan-Arab media.²⁰ In interviews, singers are often asked their opinions about other singers, and any especially juicy tidbits are repeated *ad nauseum* on popular websites like *Elaph*, and *Al-Bawaba*. A rather extreme version of this kind of positioning appears in a reporter's exchange with Fula al-Jazairiyya from an interview in *Baladna*:

Baladna: When we talk about the modern youth song (*al-ughniyya ash-shabābiyya al-ḥadītha*) we come to mention Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe, Elissa, and Nawal al-Zoghbi and others. Do you accept the inclusion of your name on that list?

Fula: My small observation is that Nancy sings sweet songs, but I like to see her sing for children. Nawal al-Zoghbi, my testimony is compromised [*shahadetī majruḥa*, implying that they are too close to accurately critique one another], Haifa presents a picture of the beauty of Arab women, but as for the rest, I have no comment on them. However, I am the Sultana of Ṭarab, and no one competes with me.

Baladna: Who named you the Sultana of Ṭarab?

Fula: The audience named me. I love many of the singers and their examples, but I am the Sultana of Ṭarab and no one competes with me. Not even Warda al-Jazairiyya, no one disagrees with me that this is true. The

²⁰See George Weyman, "Empowering Youth Or Reshaping Compliance? Star Magazine, Symbolic Production, and Competing Visions of Shabab in Syria" (M.Phil, University of Oxford, 2006), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~metheses/WeymanThesis.htm>.

Sultan of Ṭarab, George Wassouf, how many copies have been made of him, and remain the Sultan, and authentic.²¹

Many of Fula al-Jazairiyya's songs fit quite well alongside the shabābī music video stars mentioned in the reporter's question, and her most popular music certainly would appear out of place next to the performers described by AJ Racy in his seminal book on *ṭarab*. Nevertheless, she prefers to associate herself with singers from older generations (Warda and younger George Wassouf), and refer to herself with an honorific professing excellence in the *ṭarab* tradition.

As the dialogue above also illustrates, the use of an honorific title or *kunya* assists in placing the singer within a musical genealogy. The young Syrian singer Mohammed Daqdouq, a contestant on *Star Academy 8*, recently released a song entitled *Nimr al-Ghāba* (Tiger of the Jungle) and in publicity documents, his website, and Facebook pages, is referred to by the name *nimr al-ughniyya al-arabiyya* "The Tiger of Arabic Song". This tactic follows the model of George Wassouf, who gained the title "*Sultan of Ṭarab*" after the release of his first album "*al-Hawa Sultan*." In a further link back in the chain, Wassouf himself is often referred to by fans as *Abu Wadi'* (an honorific meaning father of Wadi'), having named his son in what will resonate with many fans as a tribute to Wadi' al-Safi, the legendary Lebanese singer of the previous generation.

This practice of referring to singers by a *kunya* or epithet even extends to the western artists most integrated into the regional media-scape. Thus Michael Jackson,

²¹ "Fula al-Jaza'iriya li- *Baladna*: Ana sulṭāna al-ṭarab wala aḥed yunafsenī" *BaladnaOnline* May 5, 2008 www.baladnaonline.net%2Far%2Findex.php%3Foption%3Dcom_content%26task%3Dview%26id%3D6793%26Itemid%3D75&ei=aYFCUNa9Cqbp0gH4hYGwDQ&usg=AFQjCNGgrcYq04YVFGVWcmhH0uVSHfMNYQ&sig2=78D-MpHx3qftQN-xhRik_w (accessed May 6, 2012).

possibly the most popular American singer in the Arab world, is nearly always referred by the honorific “The King of Pop” in addition to his name, in both the press and in conversation. Although there are definitely American artists for whom an honorific has is in common usage (Elvis as “The King” for example), for all but the most ardent American fans of Michael Jackson, it would seem slightly silly to use this title rather than his name when discussing the singer in casual conversation, but in the Arab world, I have had numerous conversations in which listeners express their admiration for the songs of “The King of Pop” rather than “Michael Jackson.”²²

In regards to the Arab artists, the honorific is doing more work than Jackson’s title. As we shall see, the sometimes tenuous relationship between discursive reference to *ṭarab* authenticity and the actual songs and performance styles that we would more often associate with the *ṭarab* tradition is an important aspect of the way that music is organized in the Syrian radioscope.

Mass-Mediated Ṭarab

As Shannon writes:

Today...the *sahra* has diminished in importance and many Aleppine music lovers (perhaps the majority) experience *ṭarab* in the context of listening to mass-mediated music, chiefly through cassettes and radio broadcasts. Thus, rather than speaking of a single *ṭarab* culture, we must

²² There are of course, artists who are commonly referred to by an honorific title in the American press, from “The King” through “The Boss.”

attempt to understand how diverse *ṭarab* cultures are formed through musical performance and mass mediation.²³

Despite the oft-heard criticism that private stations play only *shabābī* pop, or *hābiṭ* (vulgar) music, early afternoons on Version FM, as on several other stations, are devoted to *ṭarab*. Indeed, most Syrian stations devote some part of their broadcast day to Umm Kulthum, Sabah Fakhri, Warda al Jazairiyya, Muhammed ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Asmahān, and other singers from the ‘Golden Age’ of *ṭarab* song (roughly 1925-1975, though the latter date continues to shift forward for younger audiences). These songs, in contrast to the majority of pop programming (though like the *sha‘bī* recordings which circulate via cassette and cd) are often recorded in live concert, or simulations of live concerts, with audible audience noise. They are also much longer on average than a *shabābī* pop song, ranging from seven or eight minutes up an hour for a single recording.²⁴ Both the length of these songs, and the possibility for long elaboration and repetition of phrases which it allows, and presence of audience sound in recordings are signifiers for the type of experience expected of listeners.

The concept of *ṭarab* describes a listener’s experience of ecstasy, the heightened emotional state that can accompany concentrated, active listening to a masterful performance.

According to Racy:

²³ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Wesleyan, 2006), 163. The word “sahra” refers to a “small, intimate events of music, conversation, and food.” Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees*, 229.

²⁴ Depending on the time of day, radio stations will sometimes truncate long recordings by fading or cutting out long instrumental introductions. It is worth noting however that even the Arabic pop songs tend to run slightly longer than their Western counterparts. See the discussion of the Radio Sawa playlist in Chapter Four for more on this.

In the *ṭarab* culture, ecstatic experience develops significantly through active listening, through the creative musician-audience feedback that energizes the performance. Therefore, the idea of passivity, which James and others have associated with the mystical state, applies only loosely. Indeed, passive listening in the strict sense is neither appreciated nor considered conducive to ecstatic transformation.²⁵

The audition of *ṭarab* music over the radio naturally presents a different set of possibilities for the listener than the direct “musician-audience feedback” loop described by Racy in live performances. However, the practice of listening to *ṭarab* over the radio has its own set of historical associations built on the same set of understandings described by Racy, as experienced in a different medium. While the possibility of a listener influencing the performers does not exist for recordings or music over the radio, the performance of listening inevitably shapes the experience of music. This performance of listening to mediated music is described by Shannon:

Many of the dynamics of the *ṭarab* culture in the context of live performance also hold true for listening to mediated music, especially when people listen to music in groups. Listeners often will respond to a tape player as they do in live concerts...I have even seen some listeners curse at their stereos with such phrases as “May God wreck your home! (*yikhrab baytak!*) to express delight at a performance (approbation is

²⁵ Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Ṭarab*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 207.

sometimes couched in negative evaluations); one man even slammed his fist down on the cassette player in consternation with a particular recorded performance, thereby enacting emotional presentations in the context of mediated music that might be more appropriate for “live” music.²⁶

As the music which looms largest in the cultural memory of radio in the region (see Danielson on Umm Kulthum), *ṭarab* is closely associated with the memory and practice of collective radio audition.²⁷ While very different from the direct interaction between musicians and listeners in a live performance, collective audition of mediated music creates another a sort of feedback loop: between the radio performer, the audience present in the recording, the individual listener and the group.

As I describe in the previous chapter, the role of radio in Damascus cafes has largely been usurped by satellite television music channels and mp3 players. During my time in Damascus, I did however occasionally witness the type of listener interaction with recorded *ṭarab* music that is generally associated with live performance (in my experience intense, concentrated listening was more common in homes, shops, or other private-public spaces). This type of performative listening included exclamations of pleasure at moments of heightened emotion or displays of skill, and commentary on a singer’s voice and pronunciation and on the quality of the poetry. In public, the men who engaged in this *ṭarab* listening were invariably older, and in a few cases the performance of listening was obviously for my benefit.

²⁶ Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees*, 171-172.

²⁷ Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthūm, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

In one instance in mid-February in Damascus, I was sitting in a café in Abu Roumanneh with a cup of coffee and a notebook, reading the paper and half-heartedly writing down unfamiliar words to practice later. It was early enough in the day that no one had yet turned on the television, and a radio was playing an old live recording of a full-voiced woman singing with an orchestra. I have a tendency to bob my head or rock in my chair a bit while listening to music, regardless of the style or meter, so I must have been visibly enjoying the recording, because an older man sitting two tables over leaned in my direction, smiling:

“*Ya ‘amo, bt’arif ha al-mutribeh?*” (“Hey there [uncle], do you know this singer?”)

Not being certain, I equivocated: “It is old. I don’t think she is Umm Kulthum, but maybe I’m wrong? I don’t know.”

Smile widening, he introduced himself as Abu Tariq, and corrected me: “Of course it isn’t Umm Kulthum. This is Asmahān. You know Asmahān? You know Farīd al-Aṭrāsh?” (her brother and also a legendary musician).

After I acknowledged knowing Farīd al-Aṭrāsh and Asmahān, though obviously not as well as I should, he began to explain enthusiastically. Asmahān was born in Syria, and many people prefer her voice to Umm Kulthum, and there was a *musalsal* (television series) about her I should watch if I was interested, and I should be interested, and if I cared about music I need to know about her.

For the rest of the song, about ten minutes in length, he would nod approvingly at moments, and give a periodic *ya salām* (O Peace!), or other expression of appreciation, while looking over at me to see if I was paying appropriate attention. At one point he praised the strength of her voice, and pointed out her pronunciation (*lafz*). When I confessed that my Arabic was not good enough to judge anyone's pronunciation, he reassured me: "That's not important, the basic thing is that you, as a young person (*ka shāb*), listen to the great singers."

This small scene is close to the archetypical example of an encounter instigated and shaped by the ethnographic "participant observer". Abu Tariq was not engaging with the music vocally before talking to me, and without my presence he probably would have continued to drink his tea quietly while waiting for a friend. His performance of this kind of listening was motivated by educating the foreigner about good music, and the pleasure in demonstrating competence.

Quoting Shannon again:

In mediated contexts, listeners enact *ṭarab* cultures through their presentations of conventional *ṭarab* responses and the establishment of virtual connections with the performers...By displaying *ṭarab* responses, listeners demonstrate to others, and to themselves that they are capable of being moved emotionally by music, which is a valued attribute of the self for many Aleppine artists and music lovers.²⁸

²⁸ Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees*, 2006. 172.

What this anecdote illustrates is not simply the self-definition of *ṭarab* listening described by Shannon, but the distinct didactic valence of mediated *ṭarab*, both as it appears on the radio and as it is listened to in social situations. Within the Syrian radioscape, the programming of *ṭarab* is often described as a sort of public service, elevating the standards of youthful listeners, or reminding them of the values of the past.

Naturally, in personal interactions in Syria I was subject to more direct education than would have been directed towards an average Syrian sitting in a cafe. As a youngish looking foreigner interested in music, I was often offered advice as to where to find real Syrian music, and told that I shouldn't be listening to the radio or watching television. Part of this had to do with people's very understandable confusion about my project. Due to security concerns discussed in the introduction, my conversations focused on music rather than the political aspects of broadcasting. As a musicologist and musician myself, who obviously *liked* the high-status, authenticity-laden music that serious musicians are supposed to like, the fact that I was interested in music that was at least publicly considered disposable pop was understandably confusing. Even people my own age and younger, who themselves listened primarily to the Arabic and Western pop music played most often on radio and TV, would try and point me towards high-status, authenticity-associated forms of music.

Of course, the pedagogical thrust of mass-mediated *ṭarab* listening isn't directed towards foreign musicologists. Listening to Syrian radio and reading newspapers, one is constantly exposed to the notion of broadcasting *ṭarab* as a kind of public service for educating young people in the music refined authenticity. The didactic function of

broadcast *ṭarab* is set against the common criticisms of *shabābī* and pop music described by Michael Frishkopf :

“Since the onset of media technologies, Arab scholars, intellectuals, music connoisseurs (*sammi‘a*), trained musicians, and social conservatives have frequently criticized newly emerging mediated music as aesthetically inferior and low-brow, overly commercial, excessively Westernized, even dissolute. The social importance of this music thus tends to be downplayed (if not decried) by those eager to assert what is sometimes assumed to be ‘timeless’ Arab ‘art’ or ‘classical traditions (the *turāth*, or heritage) of *al-mūsīqā al-‘arabiyya* in its stead, though ethnographically *turāth* is a highly chronocentric term, a temporally moving target observed, nostalgically, as those genres or styles preceding – by a generation or two – music popular among those who are presently young.”²⁹

Singers, record companies, and broadcasters counter this criticism by providing the continuous recordings of the older songs, and oft-made references to earlier singers and styles. Where, as Danielson, Racy and others have noted, the vocal qualifications of previous generations of singers were often proved through biographical references to *Qurānic* recitation, working as a *muezzin* at a local mosque, the official biographies of today’s younger stars are incomplete without a mention of time spent working on the songs of the “Golden Age”, and a youthful appreciation for *ṭarab* heritage.

²⁹ Frishkopf, “Introduction: Music and Media in the Arab World and ‘Music and Media in the Arab World’ as Music and Media in the Arab World: A Metadiscourse.”, 5.

While not every *shabābī* star has the vocal technique to convincingly sing Umm Kulthum, the ability to perform from the recorded *ṭarab* tradition is a requisite for success on shows like *Star Academy* and *Arab Idol*, and artists often perform the older songs in attempt to prove their identification with the Arab singing tradition. On Version FM the newer versions of songs from the *ṭarab* cannon are referred to as *ṭarab mujaddad* (neo-*ṭarab* or renewed *ṭarab*), and are afforded one of the less valuable daily time slots, between 3 and 4 am. The tagline for this music block attempts to leverage the nostalgic reverence for the *ṭarab* songs and the star power of *shabābī* singers:

Helwa al-dhikriyyāt wa ajmal al-ughniyyāt. fadlu Sharīn, Asala wa Mu'en, Subhi wa Sultan, Nancy wa al-Jassār wa ghairun khitār. ajmal al ugniyyat at-ṭarabiyya al-mujaddida.”

“The sweetest of memories and the most beautiful of songs. The best of Shareen, Asala and Mu'en, Subhi and Sultan, Nancy and Jassar, and other selections. The most beautiful renewed *ṭarab* songs.”³⁰

Singers in Lebanon and Syria especially also reference the “folkloric” music of Fairuz and the Rahbani Brothers as markers of authenticity. For example, in one interview quoted in Syrian daily *Al-Watan*, Elissa stated that she “has a room in her house dedicated to vocal practice on the songs of Fairuz.”³¹ Asserting one’s presence in a

³⁰ Version FM, January 6, 2012.

³¹ “kashafat al-fanāna al-lubaniyya Elissa ‘an annahā takhaṣṣiṣ ghurfā fī manzilhā taqūm fihā bi tamrīn ṣawtha youmiyyan ‘alā aghāni al-najma Fairuz” *Al Watan*, June 1, 2011 <http://www.alwatan.sy/dindex.php?idn=102309> (accessed April 21, 2012).

lineage descending from Fairuz has a different valence than one from the older *ṭarab* singers, as Fairuz's style is generally considered more vocally accessible, though more authentically local. Fairuz's music does sometimes employ impressive vocal technique, but she also sings simple folk songs, largely devoid of the markers of *ṭarab* mastery. This is significant because despite the rhetorical significance of invocations of *ṭarab*, a great deal of the music heard on Syrian radio is far away from *ṭarab* in style and in listening practice.

Hādi'

The other broad category that takes up large segments of the broadcast day on Version FM, and numerous other stations are blocks of *hādi'* songs. Among Syrian radio stations, the term *hādi'* (literally "calm") is roughly analogous to "light" or "lite" on American radio. This is not a genre or style of music; rather it is a programming category which refers to a certain feeling and type of emotional engagement. I am not aware of any musicians who describe their own music primarily as "*hādi'*", but among radio listeners it implies both a certain set of musical attributes, along with a certain type of engagement with the music. The *ṭarab* designation, as well as the "long, sad songs" played on Version FM, or that appear on government radio's *Ṣawt as-Sahra'* (*Voice/Sound of the Evening Party*), implies a high level of emotional engagement and continuous interest. In contrast, *hādi'* songs are assumed not to arouse the same type of intense emotion, although this certainly doesn't imply a lack of emotional response.

In some ways this forms the musico-theoretical opposite to *ṭarab*. As a listening experience, the emotional journey of *ṭarab* is antithetical to the calm of the *hādi'* programming format. Interestingly, *hādi'* songs are often present in situations involving

public, collective audition as well, though as music imagined to calm the emotions rather than arouse an ecstatic state. Radios in workplaces, upscale stores, and Syriatel offices are often tuned to stations playing *hādi*' songs.³²

The positioning of *ṭarab* and *hādi*' as opposing sides of a dialectical spectrum describing the musical and emotional encounter between listener and radio also creates some interesting implications for the position of Western songs in the Syrian radioscape. As the category of music with the highest level of discursive authenticity, in the sense of an association with Syrian nationalized authenticity and a general pan-Arab '*asabiyya*, the concept of *Western ṭarab* is oxymoronic. No matter how familiar or beloved, a foreign song would seem out of place in a block of either *ṭarab qadīma*, or *ṭarab mujaddada*. At the other end of the spectrum, the *hādi*' radio category does not carry the same aura. Although the Arabic-language music in *hādi*' blocks may be very "Arab" in terms of the constituent musical elements (rhythm, melodic line and ornamentation, instrumentation, etc...) it does not have the same discursive association with authenticity. Without the burden of *ṭarab* authenticity, *hādi*' describes a feeling, type of listening, and programming category into which Western songs can be incorporated as well as Arabic. The determining factor for the *hādi*' category is not linguistic or even stylistic; rather it is the emotion reception state which the songs are thought to engender in listeners.

Calm in this case, does not necessarily imply a lack of emotion; in fact, the adjective most often paired with *hādi*' in the vocabularies of radio DJs is *rūmānsī*

³² I should mention that although these categories can be conceived as opposite ends of musical-emotional spectrum, that doesn't preclude areas of overlap between them. Artists who appear during "*Ṭarab Mujaddad*" programming blocks can also appear during *hādi*' sections, though probably not the same songs.

(romantic). Thus the English language programming for Version FM's daily block of *hādi*' songs overlaps greatly with the former Radio Samar's "Music for Romantics", or Ninar FM's "Love Songs" programming blocks.³³ Two of the artists whose music often appears in *hādi*' blocks are Kāzīm as-Sāhir, the Iraqi singer and composer, and Mājida al-Rūmi, both known among other things for singing arrangements of work by Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, icon of modern Arabic love poetry, and according the Salma Jayyusi, "the most popular poet in the Arab World".³⁴ These artists remain part of the discursive genealogy which includes the most respected singers of previous generations while staying on the popular side of artistic respectability. Sāhir's songs, in particular his setting Qabbani's early poetry, have often been seen as populist, relatively accessible breaks from earlier more classical styles.

Any number of songs from the repertoire of Sāhir and Rūmi could be used to illustrate the general affect associated with the term *hādi*'. On the page and absent a sonic example, the combination of romance, eroticism, and calm which characterizes the Arabic *hādi*' playlists might best be illustrated by one of Qabbani's poems which has not, as far as I know, been set to music.

³³ Radio Samar is now Radio Nujoom.

³⁴ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 368.

On Entering the Sea – Nizar Qabbani

Love happened at last,
 And we entered God's paradise,
 Sliding
 Under the skin of the water
 Like fish.
 We saw the precious pearls of the sea
 And were amazed.
 Love happened at last
 Without intimidation...with symmetry of wish.
 So I gave...and you gave
 And we were fair.
 It happened with marvelous ease
 Like writing with jasmine water,
 Like a spring flowing from the ground.

Translation – Lena Jayyusi and Jack Collom³⁵

The vision of love described in this poem, the effortless consummation of two complementary natures, is certainly not universally present in songs which might be described as *hādi'* and *rūmānsī*. However, the emotional tone of the poem recreates to me a mimesis of the listening experience that is the ideal of light-romantic music. This is an unintentional poetic-musical ekphrasis analogous but completely opposite to the music-drunkenness that one might feel while listening to Sabah Fakhri sing “*khamrat al-hob*” (“Wine of Love”) four hours into a late-night concert.

The Western music programmed in *hādi'* and *rūmānsī* blocks comprises by far the most popular body of Western songs in Syria, and these tend to conform to a broad

³⁵ Nizār Qabbānī, *On Entering the Sea: The Erotic and Other Poetry of Nizar Qabbani*, trans. Lena Jayyusi, Sharif Elmusa, and Jack Collom, et al. (New York: Interlink Books, 1996), 7.

set of musical, lyrical and semiotic norms. The songs tend towards big romantic ballads, often with a string orchestra or otherwise expansive-sounding instrumentation, and without aggressively syncopated rhythms. The focus here is on the discourse around the music on radio, but later in Chapter 4 I will directly address musical, lyrical, and historical elements which typify Western songs on Syrian radio.

“Humanitarian” (Advocacy) Song

The final song category described in the Syria Radio *Call for Songs* at the beginning of the chapter is “Humanitarian Song”, the category which on its face, would seem to be the least common. Returning to the contest rules, state radio calls for a humble, unexaggerated advocacy of humanitarian themes:

A song which requires a humanitarian theme in the text, and that which suits this theme in style of melody, musical phrases, and production compatible with the desired goal of the song. It shows a person’s emotions towards a humanitarian idea spontaneously and simply, without affectation or exaggeration in the description of the situation or the expression of emotions and sympathy with this idea.³⁶

The Syrian General Organization for Radio and Television provided a number of ready models in this category, in the previous year’s song contest, entitled “Golan in the

³⁶ “Musābiqat al-Ughniyya al-Ithā’a as-Sūriyya l’ām 2011” *General Organization of Radio and Television - Syria* <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?p=100072> (accessed March 20, 2011).

Heart”.³⁷ That contest awarded prizes for best production, text, and melody, as well as best male and female vocalist, best duet, and best *sha’bī* song (the winner of which was mentioned in Chapter 2). However, in order to expand the definition of humanitarian song to more usefully describe the Syrian radioscope, it is necessary to expand beyond the boundaries of the humanitarian category as defined by the call for songs to include some of the areas of songs which are left out of the state taxonomy.

Specifically, the call for songs doesn’t mention religious songs (*āghānī dīniyya*), patriotic or nationalistic songs (*āghānī waṭaniyya*), political songs (*āghānī siyāsiyya*), or foreign or western songs (*āghānī ajnabbiyya* or *āghānī gharbiyya*). Of these, I would group patriotic, political, and some religious songs into a broad category which I call “advocacy songs.” An advocacy song could be anything from a song in praise of a political figure, to the soccer anthem *Barshaluna fāris kul al-malā’ib*” (*Barcelona, the Knights of Every Field*), mentioned in one of the ethnographic interludes from the previous chapter.

Taking that example for a moment; most soccer fans in Damascus root for either Real Madrid or Barcelona in Champions League soccer, and on big match days the streets are filled with car stereos pumping out one of the dozens of Arabic language songs praising players and mocking the opposing teams. With the global reach of big-time European club soccer, the songs come from all over the Arabic speaking world, in a variety of styles, including hard-rock and rap songs like the Saudi rap group Monsters of the West (the west here referring to Western Saudi Arabia), whose Barcelona tribute is

³⁷Fadi Telfah “musabiqa aghani-al-jolan fi al-qalb.. tawaz’a jowazha” *ESyria.sy* November 16, 2010 <http://www.esyria.sy/equnaytra/index.php?p=stories&category=activities&filename=201011161030011> (accessed March 16, 2012).

one of the most viewed Arabic soccer songs on YouTube.³⁸ The idea of a song that advances a specific position, and does so while paying attention to the compatibility of the aesthetic components of the song with the cause being advocated, is a common one, for which there are numerous examples outside of the realm of strictly “Humanitarian” songs.

Political Advocacy – *Idhā‘at al-Quds* and “*Talfīn ‘Ayyāsh*”

The most direct example of political advocacy and political music on Syrian radio before the arrival of the Arab Uprisings, and a unique outlier both in terms of playlist and politics, is Radio Al-Quds. Named for the city of Jerusalem (al-Quds), the station was founded by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command and began broadcasting on January 1st, 1988, at the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifada.³⁹ The station takes a hard line towards Israel, and tags its station identification breaks with slogans like “From the river to the sea, on the road to return, Palestine remains.” As station run by exiled Palestinians, the station broadcasts, in its own words, “temporarily” from southern Syria. The sonic mood of the station is a combination of lighthearted advertisement and the endlessly dramatic: some of the station’s ID bumpers feature men and women advertising “*Idhā‘at al Quds*” over the beginning of “O Fortuna” from Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. Syrian support for the PFLP-GC and its operations in Syria, including Radio al-Quds, is one of the factors that have caused the

³⁸ W7oosh Al-Gharbiyya “Barsha” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS-ICZ0yiYo> (accessed December 2, 2010).

³⁹ Kirsten Nakjavani Bookmiller and Robert J. Bookmiller, “Palestinian Radio and the Intifada,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 19/4 (Summer 1990): 96-105.

US to designate the country a “state sponsor of terrorism” since 1979.⁴⁰ The Syrian state injunction against political reporting on independent radio stations does not apply to Radio al-Quds, though of course complete support for the Syrian regime is a condition of the station’s and its organizers’ continued existence in the country.⁴¹

In addition to its unique position in relation to the Syrian government, Radio al-Quds is notable for the varieties of music it broadcasts. Taking the musical programming as part of the political project, the station heavily relies on traditional Palestinian songs, songs which express Palestinian solidarity, and religious *inshād*. Songs which explicitly advocate for or express solidarity with the plight of Palestinians are commonplace all over the Arab world, from Fairuz’s “*Ana La Ansāk Filistīn*” (I don’t forget you, Palestine) to the hip-hop of Ramallah Underground. Al Quds radio draws from this enormous body of music. In the context of the relentless propagandizing of Radio al-Quds however, every song with the slightest reference to Palestine, or any kind of struggle, immediately becomes a song of direct political import.

It is within this context, where a song can become politicized by context as much as by content, that we might understand some of the more subtle instances where Syrian radio might have multiple political valences. Take for example “Talfān ‘Ayyāsh”, the great piece by Ziad al-Rahbani.⁴² This song, which I heard one night in Damascus on

⁴⁰ U.S. State Department *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*
<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm> (accessed January 6, 2011).

⁴¹ Unlike the majority of radio stations in Syria, *Al Quds Radio* is not available online. While I have not listened to the station directly since I was last in Syria, according to Syrian newspaper *al Thawra*, the station was maintaining its support for the Syrian regime as of June 2012, and was targeted by rebels. “*masallahūn yastahdifūn idhā‘at al-quds.. al-jabha al-sha‘biyya: ‘amal irhābī lan yuthannīnā ‘an muwāqifinā*” *al Thawra* June 11, 2012
<http://thawra.alwehda.gov.sy/archive.asp?FileName=65239495320120610234616> (accessed June 13, 2012).

⁴² For a sample recording of Telfin Ayyash, see here <http://www.6rbmasr.com/singer61-song4270>

Arabesque FM in a block following a ballad by American James Blunt and a love song by Abdel Halim Hafez, has a variety of political valences of differencing levels. As a composition by Ziad al-Rahbani, the song comes from what Christopher Reed Stone calls the “Rahbani Nation” of Lebanon, but the song is from the sarcastic, cynical, and self-aware Lebanon that emerged post-civil-war.⁴³

...

‘Ayyāsh called, while we were standing around waiting for him

‘Ayyāsh called, God heal him

‘Ayyāsh called, ‘Ayyāsh called

‘Ayyāsh lied, while we were standing around waiting for him

‘Ayyāsh lied, he never swears anything, except on his religion

He called and he lied

...

‘Ayyāsh lies, he lies with sophistication and obfuscates

‘Ayyāsh lied, and like usual we know who he is

...⁴⁴

The song is a swirling mixture of repeating vocal lines on the refrain of “Talfan ‘Ayyāsh” and ascending trumpet and saxophone countermelodies in an arrangement for choir and big band. Fairuz’ recording of the song with a women’s choir on “Live at Beitaddine”

⁴³ Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: Fairuz and the Rahbani Nation* (Routledge: New York, 2008).

⁴⁴ Fairuz, *Live at Beitaddine 2000*, Musicrama/Koch 2001, compact disc.

ends with a dizzying syncopated melody on the line “wa akhirran talfan ‘Ayyāsh mitl ma ka innu ma talfan” (“And finally, ‘Ayyāsh called, as if he hadn’t called.”)

wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al -
 -fin wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin

Figure 3.3: Melody from Ziad Rahbani’s “Talfan ‘Ayyāsh”

The revolving melody of the chorus pauses for a moment for a four-bar flute solo, then returns, the same figure split into two...

wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an
 wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an

Figure 3.4: Doubled Line from Ziad Rahbani’s “Talfan ‘Ayyāsh”

Then another flute solo, and the same melody in three parts:

wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an

wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an

wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an

Figure 3.5: Tripled Line from Ziad Rahbani's "Talfan 'Ayyāsh"

The final time through the theme, as the chorus adds a fourth voice, the big band

winkingly inserts the "James Bond" theme into the air of espionage and distrust.⁴⁵

i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin

i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin

i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin

i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin wa a-khi-r-an ta-l-fin 'a-y-y-i-a - sh mi-tl ma ka i-n-hu ma-a-a t-al - fin

Figure 3.6: Full Chorus from Ziad Rahbani's "Talfan 'Ayyāsh"

The piece is a subtly political song, with 'Ayyāsh filling the role of self-serving and untrustworthy politician, and this kind of political valence can be applied to any variety of situations. It was evoked by Lebanese writer Ghassan Tefhha in 2005 to satirize the

⁴⁵ Voicings for the big band parts are approximate.

sense of perpetual waiting for a corrupt leadership during the investigation in to the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, and by Massoud Mohammed in August of 2011 to criticize Prime Minister Najib Mikati.⁴⁶ The song also has a more macabre political association for some, based on a coincidental invocation of the assassination of Yahya ‘Ayyāsh, the well-known Palestinian bomb-maker who is thought to have been killed in 1996 by Israeli intelligence by means of an exploding cell-phone.⁴⁷ While the song was written and recorded before the death of ‘Ayyāsh, and for most listeners the only political associations will be Rahbani’s subtle cynicism, the words “Talfan ‘Ayyāsh” inevitably evoke the well-known story strongly enough that some listeners at least assume that the song was written in response, and might therefore read it as a commentary on Palestinian-Israeli violence.⁴⁸

The majority of songs on Al-Quds Radio may have little political meaning attached to them, but as we have seen recently in the context of the Arab uprisings, the songs of mostly apolitical, extremely popular artists like Tamar Hosni can become strongly politicized with remarkable speed depending on events.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ghassan Teffha “Talfan ‘Ayyāsh” *ANmag* Issue 04, (November 2005)
<http://www.anmag.org/issues/04/02/040201.php> (accessed January 6, 2012).

Massoud Mohammed “Al-ra’īs Mikati...talfan ‘Ayyāsh...man qatala al muqawimīn al waṭaniyyīn” *Beirut Observer* August 22, 2011
http://www.beirutobserver.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60545%3A%20massoud%20%26%20ca%20tid=39%3A%20features%20%26%20Itemid=60 (accessed January 6, 2012).

⁴⁷ Serge Schemann, “Lilling of Bomb ‘Engineer’ Unites Palestinian Factions” *The New York Times* January 10, 1996.

⁴⁸ For example, see the youtube comments for Ziad al-Rahbani’s 2008 live performance “Telfen ‘Ayyash” at the Damascus Citadel <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENep7-6feXA>. (accessed May 19, 2011).

⁴⁹ During the Egyptian Revolution, Hosni initially criticized the protesters in Tahrir Square. When he later attempted to join the protests and address the crowd, he was rejected and forced out of the square. Since the revolution he has recorded several songs in praise of the revolution and its martyrs. “Protesters Reject Tamer Hosni” *Al Bawaba.com* February 11, 2011 <http://www1.albawaba.com/latest-news/protesters-reject-tamer-husni%E2%80%99s-participation> (accessed February 16, 2012).

Language and Westernization

Much of the discussion of Arab mass mediated popular music, in both English and Arabic, has centered on the question of the Western influence over Arabic popular culture. Numerous critics of Arab pop music and music video clips in particular have argued that this music exemplifies a Western encroachment on authentic Arab culture.⁵⁰ Reports in Anglophone press about these intellectual battles most often frames the debate in terms of Islamic critiques of secular music and visual culture, but in reality the “Westernization” critiques, as with critiques of popular music and sexuality, come from a wide variety of political and cultural viewpoints. While conservative religious figures across the pan-Arab press create steady stream of criticism pointing to a corrupting influence described as Western and un-Islamic, critics who espouse a more secular worldview are similarly worried about the loss of authentic Arab culture and a the commercialization which seems so fundamental to the modern Arab music industry. In Syria for example, the secular, state controlled daily newspapers often run critical essays calling for an investment in local song and performance styles as a means of combatting cultural hegemony without assuming a religious criticism.

One of the central tenets of state discourse about Syrian media is the preservation of its Arabic nature and the elevation of artistic standards among broadcasters and listeners, or in the words of the call for songs: “to restore the status of the Syrian song and elevate both song production and musical taste in Syria.” According to Resolution 4981 governing private radio, the language of broadcasting must be in formal or local Arabic, and no more than 20% of a station’s broadcast time can consist of foreign songs.

⁵⁰ See Frishkopf, *Music and Mass Media in the Arab World*, 2010.

The reality of this injunction does not live up to the legal theory however, and the presence of MIX FM (the lone Syrian foreign-language station, broadcasting in English) in the Syrian radioscape illustrates that this rule is not universally applied.⁵¹ The requirement that stations record and archive one month of their broadcast to be delivered to the ministry of information on request means that in theory stations can be audited at any time, but here as with the more direct and restrictive forms of state news monitoring and censorship, the reliance is on self-censorship rather than daily control.⁵²

This 20% rule for radio does not come up in published interviews with radio station managers or articles about radio stations in the Syrian press, and there is little visible evidence that stations are constrained by the rule. The radio station employees I spoke with in 2010 never expressed any complaint about being limited in the amount of Western music that stations could play, rather, they tended (at least outwardly) to be invested in the idea of building up a local Syrian music and media industry, and their criticisms of radio stations were largely focused on wanting to push for more high-culture associated music and music by local singers and groups.

Even a strict enforcement of this rule would not create quite the limit on radio stations that one might assume. The common practice of devoting several hours in the morning to Fairuz and an hour or more in the late evening to Umm Kulthum (see Chapter 2) means that stations wanting to create a more Western mix during another portion of the broadcast day are able to do so. Whether due to this aspect of scheduling or due to the laxness of enforcement of the relevant statutes, it is quite easy during the day to find a

⁵¹ *Daftār al-shurūt al-khāṣṣ bil-sharakāt al-idhā'iyya al-masmū'a al-tijāriyya al-khāṣṣa wa al-murāfaq bil-qirār raqm 4981*, 8/10/2004, <http://www.moi.gov.sy/ar/aid5924.html>.

⁵² See Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

local station with a playlist that is more Western-focused than, for example, Radio Sawa's ~30-35% English-language mix.⁵³ Another indication that stations are not substantially constrained by this rule is the way that Western music is scheduled throughout the day. For example, Version FM typically devotes an hour between 2:00 and 3:00 am to a Western block of various designations (80s, Rock and Country, Blues and Jazz, Slow English, French, Italian and Spanish). If the station was really constrained by the 20% rule and felt there was more demand for Western songs, programmers would probably use the less listened-to early morning hour for Arabic-language songs.

Several listeners I met, especially those involved in the Damascus rock and alternative music scene, did express dismay at the inability to hear the music that they were interested in on local radio.⁵⁴ One friend reminisced about a late-night heavy metal program on one of the Lebanese stations that he used to stay up and listen to in his teens, saying that the variety of [rock and western] music available was better before the advent of Syrian private radio. In general though, my impression based on conversations with listeners and people involved with radio is that even in cosmopolitan Damascus, the bulk of radio listeners prefer an Arabic language playlist with the occasional English song. This is backed up by the criticisms of some stations by listeners in the radio survey conducted by Damaspost, where one of the main complaints of Al Madina FM was that the station's broadcasters use too much foreign terminology and that announcers were

⁵³ I discuss Radio Sawa's playlist in greater detail in Chapter 4.

⁵⁴ For more on the Damascus rock scene, see Chapter 5.

speaking in a multilingual emulation of Beirut radio and television hosts, rather than speaking like Syrians.⁵⁵

Even if there are ways around linguistic restrictions for well-connected companies, the rhetoric of Syria as preserver of Arabic language and culture is maintained by the regime and the official outlets. A 2011 sketch in the Syrian comedy program *Spotlight* illustrates this element of official discourse by mocking the practice of “Arabization” of English technical terms and neologisms. In the sketch, entitled “*ta’rīb*” (Arabization, or translation to Arabic), a panel of *muthaqqafīn* (cultured) Arabic professors and officials sit around a conference table coming up with Arabic terms to replace the encroaching English language terms.⁵⁶

“Today, we want to arabize some world vocabulary and special terminology, to bring it into our language.”

“Beautiful, like what?”

“Like terms...which have something to do with computers, for example.”

“Excuse me Doctor, its name is the *ḥāsūb*”

“Pardon me, dear colleague, the word was late in coming to me.”

The group begins with the term “CD.” The first few suggestions are actually in occasional use as Arabizations, but the attempts become increasingly ludicrous:

⁵⁵ Saddam Hussein, “al-idhā‘āt al-khāṣṣa ghuruf lil-tenjīm wa al-sha‘ūdha wa al-fan al-hābiṭ .. wa ṣalūnāt lil-siyyāsa wa al-akhbār” *DamasPost.com* December 20, 2011. (accessed June 6, 2012)

⁵⁶ Mazin Taha (writer), “Ta’reeb” *Buq‘at Dau* Ep. 2 Season 8.

“What do you think about referring to it as *al-qurṣ ad-dā'irī*” (literally: round disk)

“One moment if you please, I vote that we call it, better than *ad-dā'irī... dā'irat al-m'alūmāt*” (circle of information).

“*qurṣ al-m'alūmāt* (disk of information) is appropriate.”

“Do not forget, colleagues, that it is *maḍghūṭ!* (pressed!)

“Its title is *qurṣ al-m'alūmāt al-maḍghūṭ!*” (the pressed disk of information).

“I propose that its name be *qurṣ al-maḍghūṭ wa al-mudajjaj min m'alūmāt.*” (the disk [that is] pressed and bristling with information)

“Wonderful Doctor, Wonderful! Agreed!”

The computer mouse becomes the “device for moving and opening files,” the internet “the net for entering into information.”⁵⁷ Later, at the home of the committee Chairman, his wife is speaking to a friend, and warns that when her husband comes home, she may need a translator:

“Doesn't he speak Arabic?”

“Yes, he speaks Arabic, but not natural Arabic. See that *botogas* (stove), he calls it a *mūqid*. The microwave? It is *al mūqid dhu shohunat al-*

⁵⁷ The final term Arabized in the scene is a quick political joke. Tasked with finding a translation for the word “virus”, the chairman of the committee wants to find something “appropriate for cockroaches”, and suggests *qā'id al-fataḥ* (the leader of Fatah).

kaharabamagnetissiyya (the hearth characterized by the delivery of electromagnetism.)”

At the same time that the sketch mocks this official discourse about the maintenance of the Arabic language, it also highlights the hypocrisy of the people setting the discourse. At home with his wife, the official speaks in comically elaborate *fusha*, but in a final scene we see him at a fancy Western café with his young mistress, where he nonchalantly orders in trilingual Lebanese fashion: “Garson! Lo Samahet (if you please), two Nescafé”.

While English has been steadily encroaching as the language of commerce, education, and the neoliberal elite in a Damascus, the dominance of the Arabic language remains a principal point of Syrian bureaucratic discourse at least, if not practice among the economic elite.⁵⁸ Syrian universities are well known for teaching engineering, science, and medical courses in Arabic, while in many other Arab countries these subjects are taught in English or French, especially at the post-secondary level. The sons of wealthy and connected families however, often including members of the Ba’ath Party and the state bureaucracy, are likely to study abroad in English, French, or (for a slightly older generation) Russian-speaking universities. Bashar al-Asad himself famously studied ophthalmology in London.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ For an excellent, in-depth discussion of the use of English among Syria’s young business class, see Amanda Patricia Terc, “Syria’s New Neoliberal Elite: English Usage, Linguistic Practices and Group Boundaries” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011).

⁵⁹ David W. Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 57.

The differences between official rhetoric of the state and the actual practice of the elite and educated youth is illustrated by the contrast in linguistic practices between state television and the nominally private Syrian television station *Addounia TV*, owned by Rami Makhlouf, the President's cousin. The latter features significantly more English than the Syrian governmental news station, though its news programming directly parrots the government. For example, though the news crawl on *Addounia* periodically switches to English, the crawl on Syria tv (from what I have seen) remains in Arabic. Youth focused programming especially features a more polylingual presentation style. For example, *Addounia* broadcasts a program entitled “*Shabāb-tube*”, a youth-focused interview show which features segments on issues like Facebook's new timeline, or the stress of studying for year-end exams. The host and guests all speak Arabic, but the program's introduction and segment titles are printed in English, and guests often drop as much of a sentence of English (less often French) into their answers to the hosts questions, mirroring both the style of popular Lebanese television hosts, and the linguistic patterns of Syria's young elite.

This style, adopted especially by the young university graduates who form much of the broadcasting talent in Syria, is frequently criticized by monolingual and working class listeners, as well as nationalists and older educated listeners who object to the drift away from the eloquent language of their favorite classic radio voices. Some critics of Syrian radio speak of a “Lebanese broadcaster complex,” lamenting the tendency of radio hosts and DJs to mimic the multilingual speaking style of Syria's neighbor. In one article, the director of government youth station *Ṣawt Ash-Shabāb* acknowledged the problem even as he made clear that he had addressed it on his station:

The time of the tradition of Lebanese dialect has ended on *Ṣawt ash-Shabāb*...but a word may slip through sometimes, and sadly some people judge on the basis of a single word in addition to the emphasis on the place of the Arabic language, so the use of foreign terms is practically nonexistent now.⁶⁰

In contrast, the director of Al Madina FM responded to critics of his station's use of English words: "These people are sealed off by themselves, and they don't understand the Syrian citizen, who has become an intellectual."⁶¹

Although state rhetoric about preserving the primacy of the Arabic language is a significant part of the mass media discourse about music in Syria, this by no means indicates a fundamental opposition to Western music as such. On the contrary, the Ba'thist government has encouraged and funded institutions for the cultivation of Western art music, based on a Soviet model of national and collective development which encourages a both "commercial/lowbrow and national/highbrow" as well as expressions of folk or popular culture which fit unthreateningly within the "mosaic" of national culture.⁶² The Damascus High Institute for Music is primarily engaged with the promotion and education of Western art music, although there is also an Arab music

⁶⁰ Saddam Hussein "al-idhā'āt al-sūriyya al-khāṣṣa tenshīr ghasīlhā..." *DamasPost.com* February 24, 2010. www.damaspost.com/خاص/الإذاعات-السورية-الخاصة-تنشر-غسيلها/ (accessed June 10, 2012).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Cécile Boëx, "The End of the State Monopoly over Culture: Toward the Commodification of Cultural and Artistic Production," *Middle East Critique* 20, no. 2 (2011) 144; for a discussion of the concept of a mosaic in reference to Syrian national identities, see Silverstein, "Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging."

faculty and performing ensembles. Due to the historical relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union, the Western art music scene in Damascus has close connections to Russian music pedagogy. Many of the institute's instructors have historically been of Russian origin, and Syrian artists have often spent time studying in Russia.

In an essay from January 2011 in *Al-Watan* (The Nation) entitled "The Creative Inheritance of Arabic Music" (*al-mīrāth al-ibdā'ī lil-mūsīqā al-'arabiyya*), music critic 'Ali al-Ahmed expressed both the fear of Western domination and a hegemonic musical language (not necessarily the same thing), and rebutted those who see the use of Western instruments and techniques as antithetical to the creation of a particularly Arab musical style. This article is worth quoting at length, as it expresses the two dueling attitudes towards music and the West described in official Syrian media: the desire for a music that is authentically Arab, and the certainty that this will require a mastery of "advanced Western musical knowledge." As the style is somewhat dense in my (fairly literal) translation, I have excerpted and annotated several passages.

Al-Ahmed begins with a criticism of contemporary Arabic music, and what he sees as its abandonment of the long tradition of Arabic musical scholarship:

That which makes contemporary Arabic music mortgage itself, in many of its products, to a single language, even if it grants some immediate benefits, abandons voluntarily an extended inheritance from the creations and brilliances of the Arab and Islamic spirit in music research and knowledge, and methods of performance and practice which have had a beautiful presence in the musics of human civilization.

Arguing that it is possible to celebrate the values of this inheritance without “submission to the arguments of the past,” he then critiques a slavish devotion to old styles and practices.

We find these arguments of the past always exemplified and presented in many of the musical folk styles, where they are presented as though they were without any change or modification, preserving their symbols, traits and purity...

Meanwhile Arabic music has abandoned its legacy – its identity – under false and unconvincing pretenses, and is lacking in knowledge and objectivity.

He then entertains the notion that the devotion to old styles and practices might be necessary as an alternative to a purely Western musical education.

*Perhaps some of these arguments are correct, especially if we know the type of academic method which one studies, and which does not allow education in this inheritance, except knowledge **of**, not **in** it. These approaches to [the significance of the Arabic musical inheritance] make whoever is musical write inside the purview of western music alone, in its form, believing it to have the necessary vocabulary and techniques which*

aid him in developing his musical work, while the science of Arabic music stands as an obstacle in the path of this project, as he thinks.

He rejects both the fully Western path, and complete abnegation of it that would come in reproducing tradition, and cites the historical precedents for musical hybridity, referencing Munir Bashir as an example of a performer (oud) and composer who took the expertise gained studying Western music, at the Franz Liszt Academy in Hungary, and used it to blend “modernity and authenticity in one creative alloy.” He continues citing Toufiq al-Basha, Nūri Iskandar, ‘Atea Sharara, and Marcel Khalifé as exemplars of a class of modern composers and musicians who “write Arabic music that we call ‘Arabic’ and not western music written in an Arabic hand.” He closes with a quote from musicologist Shareen Malouf:

Researcher Shareen Malouf says in the book “Arabic Music, the Question of Authenticity and Renewal”: “We remain in one situation despite the multiplicity of situations of loss, and this case is summed up in that we discover and we create and we vitalize in patterns musically congruent with our heritage. We spread what we have in every village, and under every root, and in a few of the pages of history. We open up to these patterns to globalization, and we open them up to become eligible to accept the tumbles of advancement in human civilization, and especially the musical ones among them. (Our heritage drinks from these patterns, and gives to them, without losing its authenticity or melting into what it has taken, and thus we become part of the universal heritage. We interact with it, rather than enter into a battle with no equivalence, or to conclude a race behind what others have provided for us. It is necessary for us to have patterns of musical heritage formed of what remains of our history and traditions, and we nourish it from an unwritten heritage and we make

*it viable, because the West benefits as the West tries to convert us to its music.*⁶³

Many of the most celebrated composers of Arabic music such as Mohammed ‘Abd al-Wahhab or Ziad Rahbani, are lauded for their integration of Western and Arabic musical elements, and the call for songs presented earlier also allows for the use of Western instruments and orchestration.

Lena Chamamyān

An excellent example of music that can be both authentically Syrian in its discursive positioning and hybrid in its mixture of Western and Arab musical style, is the work of Lena Chamamyān. This extremely talented vocalist rose to prominence in the mid 2000s, and became the most successful representative of what some Syrian writers have referred to as Syria’s new wave (*al-mawja al-jadīda*) or alternative music (*al-mūsīqā al-badīla*) scenes.⁶⁴ Chamamyān’s music appears regularly on Syrian radio, and she has performed to sizeable crowds in Syrian and Lebanon, but her combination of jazz instruments and arrangements and traditional Arabic instruments puts her in something of an upmarket, educated niche in terms of audience. Nevertheless, she is a fixture of Damascus media, appearing in dozens of articles in the Damascus papers, and interviews with the local radio stations. Backed on her recordings largely by musicians from the Damascus music scene, she is among the most successful representatives of a network of young Damascene musicians whose other recorded efforts have included rock and jazz

⁶³ ‘Ali al-Ahmed “al-mīrath al-ibdā’ī lil-mūsīqā al-‘arabiyya” *Al-Watan*. January 16, 2011 <http://alwatan.sy/newsd.php?idn=94075> (accessed June.1, 2012) My translation.

⁶⁴ Rama Qanwati, “khatwa lil-baḥth ‘an mūsīqā jadīda mawja mūsīqā ‘ālimiyya jadīda” *Shorufat* Vol. 55 June 15, 2009, <http://www.shorufat.com/read.php?sid=1799&id=13> (accessed February 12, 2012)

bands with varying degrees of success. Chamamyan has become one of the go-to examples for articles in the Syrian press about the talent of young graduates from the High Institute for Music, along with a few lesser-known groups like *Jussour* (Bridges) and *Harāra ‘Ālia* (High Heat).⁶⁵ Her music is arranged by Aleppine saxophonist and composer Basel Rajoub, a graduate of the conservatory in Aleppo.

Chamamyan’s biography makes her ideally suited to the dual narratives of international progress and Arab tradition, illustrating the possibilities of a pluralistic yet Arabophone-Syrian polity. Born into Syria’s sizeable Armenian community, Chamamyan attended the Damascus University for economic management and the Higher Institute for Music in Damascus for voice. Her albums *Hal Asmar Ellon* (2006) and *Shamat* (2007) consist largely of jazz arrangements of traditional songs from Syria and *bilād ash-Shām*, the first album carries the title of a traditional song, and the second literally means “*Shām* songs.”⁶⁶

An excellent example of the mix of Western and Arabic vocal styles comes in her performance of “*A-Rōsānā*” on *Hal Asmar Al-Loun*. The traditional song is arranged to a Latin jazz accompaniment, with the piano and bass comping through chord changes. Chamamyan sings the first few verses syllabically, with minimal embellishment.

⁶⁵ Marwan Darībati, “al-furuq al-mūsīqiyya al-sūriyya.. hal kānat ḡahra am ḡaqīqa ḡhair mutabalwara,” *Baladna*, October 25, 2011, http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=57071 (accessed May 14, 2012).

⁶⁶ The transliterations of “Hal Asmar Ellon” and “Shamat” are from the album cover art.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "A-Rōsānā" by Lena Chamamyan. The score is arranged in five horizontal staves, each representing a different instrument or voice part. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Voice, Horns, Bass, Congas, and Piano. The music is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 9/4 time signature. The Voice part features a melodic line with some rests. The Horns part provides harmonic support with complex chordal textures. The Bass part has a more rhythmic and melodic line. The Congas part consists of a steady, rhythmic pattern. The Piano part provides a harmonic and rhythmic foundation with a melodic line that often mirrors the vocal melody.

Figure 3.7: Lena Chamamyan, “*A-Rōsānā*” (lyrics omitted)

Through the song Chamamyán steadily adds ornaments and turns to the original melody, reinforcing the impression this isn't an American standard with lyrics translated into Arabic, but a melody native to the language and vocal tradition.

After modulating down a whole-step halfway through the recording, the rate of improvisation increases. By the end Chamamyán is singing in melismas lasting almost the duration of the first verse, building a rhythmic counterpoint to the instruments through stepwise bounce back and forth between D and E. In my ears, her vocal command of Arabic and Western style is so idiomatically fluid that when she lands on the Bb's and C#'s at the end of the tune, they are simultaneously the "out" notes of a jazz vocalist and a final modulation to a neighboring *jins* before ending a *taqsim*.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "A-Rōsānā" by Lena Chamamyān. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two staves: the upper staff is labeled "Voice" and the lower staff is labeled "Bass". Both staves contain musical notation, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *mf*. A large, curved line with a wavy tail (a fermata-like annotation) spans across both staves, indicating a sustained or held note. The second system also features two staves, with the upper staff containing a triplet of notes marked with a blue "3" and a wavy tail. The lower staff continues the bass line. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks.

Figure 3.8: Lena Chamamyān “*A-Rōsānā*”

The influence of Western jazz and the “oriental jazz” of Ziad Rahbani is obvious in this music, and her song choices are certainly reminiscent of the sha‘bī Fairuz. In the current Damascus Radioscape, Chamamyan’s mastery of vocal ornament means that her songs appear on Version FM’s *tarab mujaddad* blocks.

This combination of the old with the new, the Western with the traditional, allows Chamamyan to be portrayed in Syrian media as an exemplar of modern Syria. The party newspaper *al-Baath* described her titled profile “The Artist Lena Chamamyan...Music able to absorb our heritage.”⁶⁷ When the Syrian Computer Society announced the beginning of a partnership to digitally document and preserve the music scene in modern Syria, the face of the partnership was Lena Chamamyan. Articles about her usually mention that she won the best album prize from Radio Monte Carlo in 2007 for *Hal Asmar Ellon*.⁶⁸ A 2009 profile in *Baladna* referred to her as “Voice of the Memories of an Entire Generation.” The generation implied is the young one which comprises Damascus’s local music scene, but the memories are of an older *shām*. Despite all of this press, her music remains largely peripheral outside of the listening habits of the urban elites; her audience is relatively marginal compared to either the *shabābī* stars who appear on satellite television, or the *dabke* stars who play at weddings and festivals.

⁶⁷ Silwa Abbas “al-fanāna Lena Chamamyan... al-mūsīqā qādira ‘alā isti‘āb turāthina” *al Baath* <http://www.albaath.news.sy/user/?id=1430&a=57558>

⁶⁸ Hnady Diwara, “Lena Chamamyan taghanni bi ghaḍ al-naẓr ‘an al-jumhūr,” *Baladna*, June 7, 2008, http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10637.

In this way, Chamamyan's music is like much of the programming, in that it both plays to the cosmopolitan tastes of Syria's economic elite (through the style of the arrangements), and maintains a reverence for Syrian song traditions.

Juxtapositions of Style

At least in terms of the ways artists publicly present themselves and their musical influences in interviews and in the press, there is a great deal of overlap between the respectable, high status musical genres and the popular but oft-disparaged *shabābī* styles which dominate video clips. The prime vehicle for star creation over the last decade, the televised song contests like *Superstar*, *Arab Idol*, and *Star Academy*, requires contestants to at least try their hands at the older and more high-status song, which are thought to bring in an older and broader audience as compared to newer songs which might be more geographically and demographically restricted.⁶⁹ These contests, and the stars that they create, attempt to depict their new and old music as part of a continual tradition of Arabic singing which defies the criticisms described by Frischkopf above. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of styles and subject matter which these television stars engage in is not accepted without comment or criticism.

An example of the way that many people hear these moves back and forth between genres as jarring or nonsensical comes again from *Buq'at Dau'*. In a popular recurring sketch, the show parodied *Arab Idol* style singing competitions with a series of audition scenes for a show called *Star al-Arab*. In one of these clips, a very nervous Lebanese contestant comes out onto the stage, and after a series of jokes (one judge asks

⁶⁹*Mawwāl* is "solo singing of colloquial poetry to an improvised melody" Shannon, 228.

the bald contestant what kind of hair gel he uses), explains tentatively what he is going to perform:

“I’m going, I’m doing a little thing...I want to present to you something from the great master Wadi’ al-Şāfi ...a *mawwāl*/I mean, and then afterwards a song.”

He begins singing with deadly serious affect, in a comically inadequate voice, straining at the bottom of its range to imitate the weighty sadness of Wadi’ Al-Safi.

The harvesters have passed by, the birds of winter have passed.

The fig leaves dry, and clouds shadow the barrenness.

And the keeper of the jasmine, has not yet returned

mar`u al-ḥaṣidīn, mar`u tuyūr al-bard

yebisu waraq at-tīn wa al-ghaim tel al-jard

wa naṭurat al-yasmīn b`ada ma raj`at b`ad

After closing the last line solemnly at the bottom of his range he moves into the next song, rap-singing the first few lines of the hit Egyptian song “*Shankuti*” by the composer, singer and television host Essam Karika. It is a comedic song in Egyptian slang over a *sha`bī* beat, and describes a young man of poor morals and manners, with an upbeat and

incredibly catchy repetition of the word “*shankuti*” serving as the response to every line (roughly translated as “sleazy”).

The one who's a big liar and hits on college girls

What does that make him?”

The contestant pauses, and the three judges in the panel join in automatically:

“Shankuti!”

The one who stays up late and claims the opposite on the phone

Talks to his friend's girlfriend, sells him out and betrays him

What does that make him? *Shankuti!*

Shankuti, shankuti...

The auditioner in the sketch, visibly nervous, is obviously not attempting any kind of clever juxtaposition of vastly different songs. Rather he seems to think this is completely normal, which makes the contrast between the heartbreaking but terribly rendered *mawwāl* and the flighty pop song even funnier. The two songs are opposites not only in lyrical content, and high-culture esteem, but in terms of the reaction of listeners, in this case depicted by the panel of judges in the sketch. The expectant looks on the faces of the judges during the slow melody of the (usually improvised) *mawwāl* is in direct contrast to mechanical repetition of the word “*shankuti*”, drawn from the three judges

like an autonomic response which surprises even the utterers. Not only the singer, but the listeners as well are thrust from one style of listening to another.

The sensitivity of listeners to this kind of contrast in performance (and listening) style is one of the things that condition the playlists of Syrian stations. Although many stations now use computer programs to control songs lists, with a song's frequency set ahead of time and a programming algorithm assuring that it appears a given number of times a day, programming blocks on Syrian radio are still organized to create a consistence of song and listening styles.

Western Music and the Significance of the (long) 80s

While a larger discussion of Western music in the Syrian radioscope will place in Chapter 4, it is necessary to establish the way that Western music is utilized on Syrian private radio. In one interesting example, Version FM devotes several hours each week to music from specific decades. One of these music blocks is an hour in the afternoon devoted to Arabic music from the 1990s, and is labeled "*tis'eenat*" (90s in Arabic). The other, labeled "80s" (in English), occurs from 2:00-3:00 am in the morning and consists entirely of English-language songs from that decade. Songs from the "80s" are the only Western music block drawn from a distinct chronological period, while other programming blocks include "Rock-Country", "Blues & Jazz", and "Slow English." The 80s also represents a significant programming category on American radio, but the absence of any other decades as musical identifiers gives credence to the idea that timbres which Americans aurally understand as signifiers of the 1980s often fit more easily into the Syrian radioscope than songs from other periods. One explanation for the popularity

of Western music from what I might describe as the “long 80s” (~1975-1995) to borrow a practice from historical musicology, has to do with the use of synthesizer timbres, and this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Here however I will briefly describe a historical theory for the prevalence of Western music from the long 80s on the Syrian radioscope. The roots of this theory lie in the differences between the histories of music radio in the US and in the Levant.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, the boom in FM radio in the United States occurred in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁰ In combination with the baby boom after World War II and the accompanying demographic bulge, FM radio in the United States has been disproportionately devoted to music from the first two decades of its major cultural significance, and the period of this culturally dominant age group’s youth, the 1950s and 1960s. Naturally there are many other social and cultural factors which have contributed to the significance of music from this period in American culture generally and on radio in particular, and I want to avoid making a broadly deterministic argument about technology and demographics dictating the course of popular music.

Since roughly the mid-1950s, pop music from that period has remained in constant air play, joined by music of the 1960s and slowly shifted to the “oldies” format, where it slowly aggregates songs from later decades. Although there is a small percentage of radio programming devoted to music from before this period, by and large the collective memory of American pop radio, and the concept of “pop” itself, begin in the 1950s and 60s.

⁷⁰ This is despite the fact that technology for frequency modulation based radio transmission had existed since 1933, and FM radio did not actually eclipse AM radio listenership until 1979. Hugh Sloten, *Radio and Television Regulation: Broadcast Technology in the United States, 1920-1960* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 112.

The following panel from Randall Monroe's web-comic XKCD, entitled "Tradition", illustrates the idea brilliantly by charting out "the 20 most-played Christmas Songs by decade of popular release":

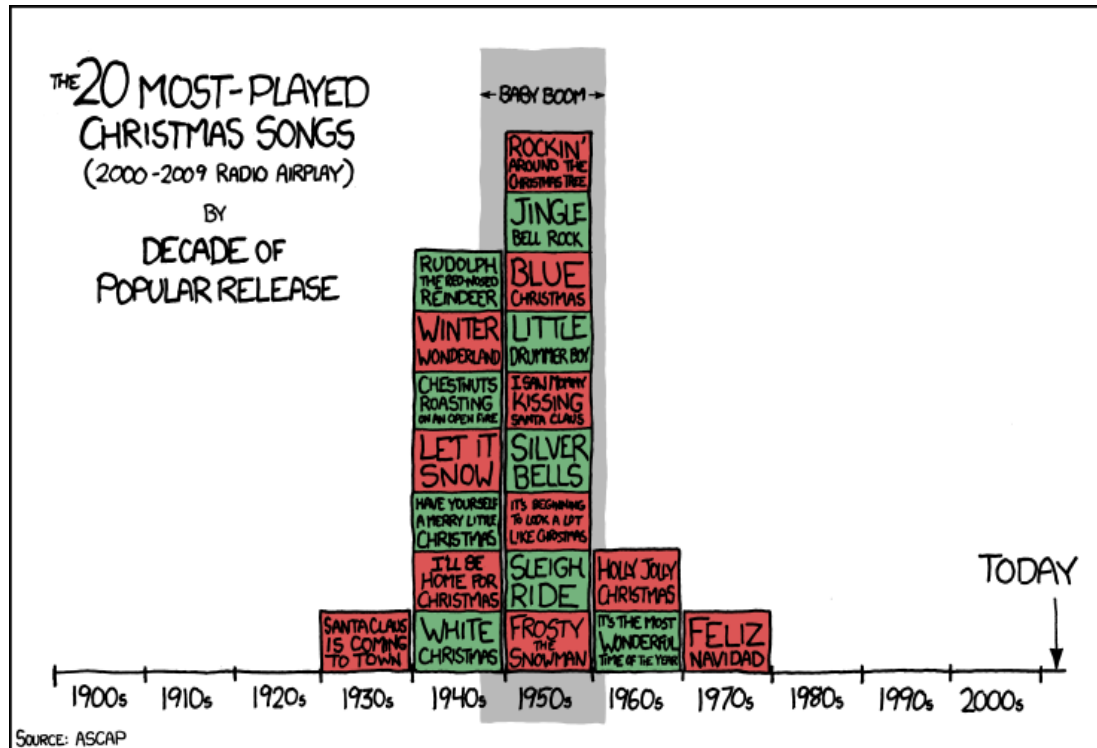


Figure 3.9: "Tradition," Randall Monroe, XKCD.com⁷¹

As displayed on the XKCD webpage, text appears when a mouse hovers over the comic, with the tag line "An 'American Tradition' is anything that happened to a baby boomer twice."

While Christmas is certainly a special case wherein there is a larger than usual market for nostalgia, I would argue that in general American FM radio displays a similar, though much less dramatic, tendency to emphasize pop music which was popular in the

⁷¹ Randall Monroe, "Tradition" XKCD.com (<http://xkcd.com/988/>) (accessed May 19, 2012).

early years of the FM and demographic (baby) booms, especially as opposed to music from earlier periods. This argument is admittedly a gross simplification of the development of pop music in the US, but it is useful as a framework within which to contrast pop radio elsewhere in the world. As I have argued in Chapter One, it can be misleading to examine radio elsewhere in the world from an American historical conception of the medium. However, especially when discussing the role of American and Western music within other media systems, it can be useful to contrast local histories with the American one, which in some radio scholarship can problematically be taken as something of a default rather than a specific historical case.

Moving over to Syria and Lebanon, it is possible to find a similar radio boom, and a similar continuation of musical popularity from that period, at least in terms of Western music. Medium and short wave radio have been a significant force in the Levant since the 1930s, especially in regards to international state-sponsored broadcasts (see Chapter 1). The major FM radio boom in the region happened during the Lebanese Civil War, which saw the emergence of more than 100 local radio stations broadcasting a wide range of content in French, Arabic, English, and Armenian.⁷²

For many Syrians, the first major exposure to Western popular music was on these Lebanese stations. The presence of the Syrian military in Lebanon during and after the Civil War, in combination with the policy of compulsory male military service, means that a huge number of Syrian men had experience stationed either in Lebanon or near the border during this period. Thus even many Syrians who lived outside the

⁷² Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, Or The Cultural Logic Of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 122.

broadcast range of Lebanese stations would have had opportunities to be exposed to the full range of Lebanese radio (often for extended periods with very little to do, as the countless Syrian jokes about military service will attest). Additionally, an enormous number of poor and working-class Syrians migrate back and forth to Lebanon for work.⁷³ The existence of the Syrian “youth bubble” which began in the 80s and 90s only further increases the number of listeners in Syria for whom the formative interactions with Western music took place during this period.⁷⁴

Thus for a large number of Syrians, the Western music with the most emotional resonance, and which sounds most familiar coming over the radio, comes from the period of the Lebanese Civil War and immediately after. The Syrian private stations which have attempted to supplant Lebanese cross-border stations in recent years have banked on this affinity in their programming. While the fully English stations like MIX FM (Syrian), and NRJ Radio (Lebanese, but widely audible in Syria) focus on newer Western music – the MIX FX playlist is usually indistinguishable from an American top-40 station – the Western music on primarily Arabic-language stations in Syria disproportionately consists of music from the 1975-1995 when compared to American radio.⁷⁵

⁷³ John T. Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁷⁴ See Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Navtej Dhillon. *Missed by the Boom, Hurt by the Bust: Making Markets Work for Young People in the Middle East*. (Washington DC: Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings Institute, 2009).

⁷⁵ I will address some musical reasons for this particular emphasis within the Western playlists in Chapter 4.

“The Syrian Song” in Mass-Media Music Discourse

Within the cross-media public conversation about music, as well as in discussions I witnessed and participated in among musicians and people involved with radio, there is a tremendous amount of concern for the state of Syrian music, and especially for “the Syrian song.” State radio call for songs is emblematic of this, but the anxiety extends throughout radio, television, news, and public performances. It can be hard to find an interview with a Syrian singer on the radio, or read one in a newspaper, without hearing the artist or the interviewer lamenting the status of the Syrian music industry, and the country’s seeming inability to create and nurture local stars. The weakness of local music production and “star production” is often contrasted with the television drama industry.⁷⁶ Syrian *musalsalat* (serial dramas), often financed by money from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, have become extremely popular across the Arabic-speaking world, and are Syria’s most visible cultural export.⁷⁷ The relative weakness of music production is blamed on an array of factors: a lack of production companies, copyright enforcement, governmental support, or private capital; disinterest on the part of listeners, Westernization, Rotana, television in general. The list goes on and on.

⁷⁶ “Adhina al-‘ālī: yajib al-istifāda min tajribat al-drama al-sūriyya wa isqāthā ‘alā al-ghinā” *BaladnaOnline.net* October 4, 2010, http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=48320 (accessed June 10, 2012).

⁷⁷ See here the work of Christa Salamandra on Syrian television dramas: “Television and the Ethnographic Endeavor: The Case of Syrian Drama,” *Transnational Broadcasting Studies’ Culture Wars: The Arabic Music Video Controversy* (2005): 4–18; “Creative Compromise: Syrian Television Makers Between Secularism and Islamism,” *Contemporary Islam* 2, no. 3 (2008): 177–189; “Spotlight on the Bashār al-Asad Era: The Television Drama Outpouring,” *Middle East Critique* 20, no. 2 (2011): 157–167; “Moustache Hairs Lost: Ramadan Television Serials and the Construction of Identity in Damascus, Syria,” *Visual Anthropology* 10, no. 2–4 (1998): 226–246.

Government media outlets are frequently the publishers of these laments: for example the Ministry of Culture sponsored arts journal *Shorufat*, has published a number of articles which criticize Syrian production facilities, copyright system, and the Syrian song in general.⁷⁸ Criticism of the government's role in fostering an environment for the music industry is frequent, but it is usually expressed in abstract terms, rather than the result of actions and decisions of specific individuals or groups. Direct criticism of the government officials and policies, even in the context of musical production and performance, is one of the "red lines" which people know not to cross in public speech.⁷⁹

A satirical article entitled "I am a *muṭrib*, oh the arrows I bear" (*Ana muṭrib, aya niyālī*), written by Basil Hamwi for a *Baladna* column in 2009, describes an interview between a singer and a radio broadcaster.⁸⁰

The Syrian *muṭrib* sits with the broadcaster in his radio interview in one of the private radio stations, where initial talk revolves around the newly released single, and the surprising success it has achieved. Then the bored broadcaster is compelled to ask some questions to the artist, converting his

⁷⁸ Bade' Munir Sabij, "al-ughniyya al-sūriya tabḥath 'an huwiyyatha" *Shorufat* No. 79, June 21, 2010.

Abdel Rahman Taqi, "Al-musīqiyun ash-shabab fi sūriya" *Shorufat* No. 50, 9, 2009.

Neefin Al-Hadida, "Hassan Taha: mūsīqānā al'arabiyya al-sharqiyya b'aida 'an al-ḥala al-fikriyya sawa' 'alā ṣa'īd al-muntaj aw al-mustami'" *Shorufat*, No. 95, February 14, 2011.

⁷⁹ The phrase "red lines" is common parlance in Syria when referring to issues of public discourse and censorship. See, for example, Marlin Dick, "The Thin Red Lines: Censorship, Controversy, and the Case of the Syrian Soap Opera Behind Bars," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 16 (2006), <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Dick.html>.

⁸⁰ Basil Hamwi "ana muṭrib, ay wa niyālī" *BaladnaOnline.com* February 4, 2009 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26229 (accessed June 10, 2012).

radio interview to resemble an official investigation. He directs some provocative questions to the artist, and some accusatory ones, and then questions reminding him of his contentious past. Before the end of the interview, that the broadcaster must direct to his guest the traditional question: Are there difficulties in your Syrian existence?... What are their causes? Is it a result of the lack of local production companies?... Or that the audience doesn't react to Syrian song? AARRGHHG???

This is the moment that the Syrian *muṭrib* (and interviewee) is scared of. When put with this question, he is left with two options, both of them bitter. Either expand the discussion by venting anger and speaking spontaneously without limitations, or simply shake his head and say: “Whatever you say, sir.”

In the end, the writer concedes the lamentable status of the Syrian song, but blames this on the very people who he mocks for endlessly asking about it, the broadcasters.

We find that the ignorance of our domestic stations to Syrian song is a principle obstacle to the fame of its *muṭribīn*, and not these possibilities which have become a certain traditional discussion between any broadcaster or journalist and a *sha' bī* or less famous Syrian *muṭrib*. For we see that among ten interviews with Arab *muṭribīn*, there is one spot for

the Syrian *muṭrib*, who is lucky to that he can talk about his next album over the air on the broadcast of his beloved Syria!!!⁸¹

With all of this concern about the “Syrian Song” it is worth asking what exactly people consider “Syrian” about the Syrian song. To a large extent, when the issue is discussed on commercial radio, this is primarily an issue of artist origin and song dialect.

As was discussed above, biography and “authenticating genealogy” are significant to the way that listeners talk about and categorize artists. It is certainly true that music from outside the nation’s current borders, especially the music of Fairuz and the Rahbanis, can become associated with Syrian identity; the historical resonance of *Bilad ash-Sham* and interrelations between modern Syrian-Lebanese media and culture means that for many Syrian citizens, this music is fundamental to daily life and group identity. It would be extremely jarring (bordering on unthinkable) to hear a Syrian refer to the Fairuz as “foreign music.”⁸² Despite the fluidity of audience and association in the Arab *mashriq*, Syrian media does reflect at least a verbal desire to promote work by citizens.

A larger issue than birthplace however is the use of language. As numerous scholars have noted, the language of pan-Arab popular music is comprised of a number of regional dialects of Arabic, not necessarily broken down according to a singer’s nationality. Michael Frishkopf notes:

⁸¹ In the midst of the Syrian uprising, there has been an explosion of “Syrian Song” on the radio. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

⁸² A current example of this is Sham FM, a commercial Damascus station that is both explicitly nationalist in its rhetoric (notably more-so in the midst of the current crisis), and based musically around Fairuz and the Rahbanis.

Indeed, dialect manipulation is an important marketing strategy in contemporary mediated pop music. Egyptian, Lebanese and Gulf singers frequently adopt each-others' dialects (sometimes even mixing them on a single album) to enhance commercial viability across subregions...though ultimately most pan-Arab popular singers tend to be categorized by subregion, as North African, Egyptian, Levantine, or Gulf, injecting common feeling into regional identities that did not formerly exist as such.⁸³

The primary complaint about the place of Syrian song within the pan-Arab musical world is linguistic, and reflects the paucity of mass-mediated songs in local Syrian dialects. Not only do Syria's stars go abroad to record in Lebanon and Egypt, but they go abroad and record in Lebanese and Egyptian. This is true both for today's video-clip stars and for many of the Golden Age vocalists. Siblings Asmahān and Farid al-Atrash, two of the most famous "Syrian" singers of the mid-twentieth century, worked (and were largely raised) in Egypt and sang in Egyptian dialect.⁸⁴

Rather than hoping for the expansion of a particularly Syrian musical style out into the pan-Arab mediascape, the goal in regards to a Syrian presence in the pan-Arab music world would be simply for Syria (and Syrian Arabic) to become more audible both locally and internationally. Thus one hears interviews on the radio with contestants from

⁸³ Frishkopf, "Introduction: Music and Media in the Arab World and 'Music and Media in the Arab World' as Music and Media in the Arab World: A Metadiscourse.", 25.

⁸⁴ Sherifa Zuhur, *Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song* (University of Texas Press, 2000), 11.

the pan-Arab televised singing contests where their lack of success post-contest is compared negatively to that of singers from other countries with strong music industries.⁸⁵

Framed by these two primary qualifiers, the Syrian-ness of a mass-mediated pop song is primarily determined by biography and dialect, but there are also stylistic ways in which a particularly Syrian musical identity might be articulated. Very briefly, I would point out three potential sets of tropes used by musicians who appear on Syrian radio to create a specifically Syrian musical identity: 1) musical tropes of Syrian *sha'bi* culture - primarily *dabke* rhythms and instrumentation, 2) tropes associated with the urban high-art *muwashah* tradition of Aleppo and Syrian *tarab*, and 3) cosmopolitan mastery of Western techniques with specifically Syrian musical material. A full exploration of these aspects of Syrian song is beyond the scope of this dissertation, for the purposes of this discussion it will suffice to point out the relevance of the “Syrian” song as a discursive category in the local radioscope.

Conclusion

In this chapter and the previous one I have outlined a number of the categories and programming genres which form the topography of the Syrian radioscope, based on both the direct rhetoric of the state media organs, and the general mass-media discourse in Syria. These categories include *shabābī*, *sha'bi*, *tarab*, *hadi'* and romantic, advocacy (or humanitarian), religious, and “Syrian” songs. The purpose of outlining this taxonomy is not simply to describe a set of musical categories. It allows us to describe, visualize,

⁸⁵ See for example Sonia Safr “al-muṭrib al-sūrī.. marka musajjala fī al-khārij faqāṭ” *BaladnaOnline.net* August 28, 2008 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13689 (accessed June 10, 2012).

and compare the music playlists between various stations. For example, the following figure approximates the normal playlist of Version FM.

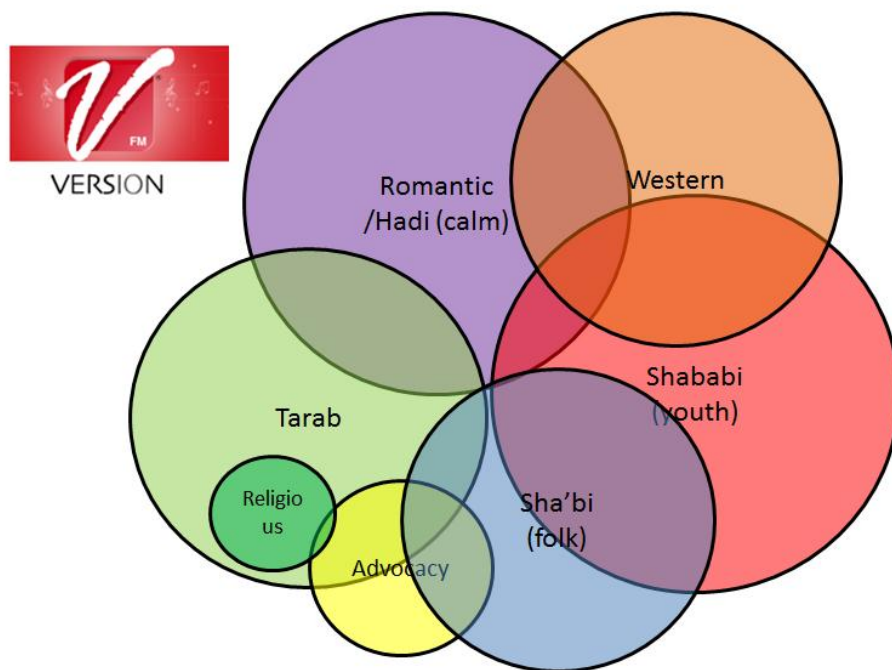


Figure 3.10: Graphic representation of Version FM's playlist

The illustration represents the approximate time devoted to various song categories, as well as the degree of overlap between categories (though a two dimensional representation does not allow a visualization of all points of connection between categories.) Contrast this with the playlist of *Ṣawt al-Shabāb*, the government's youth-oriented station.

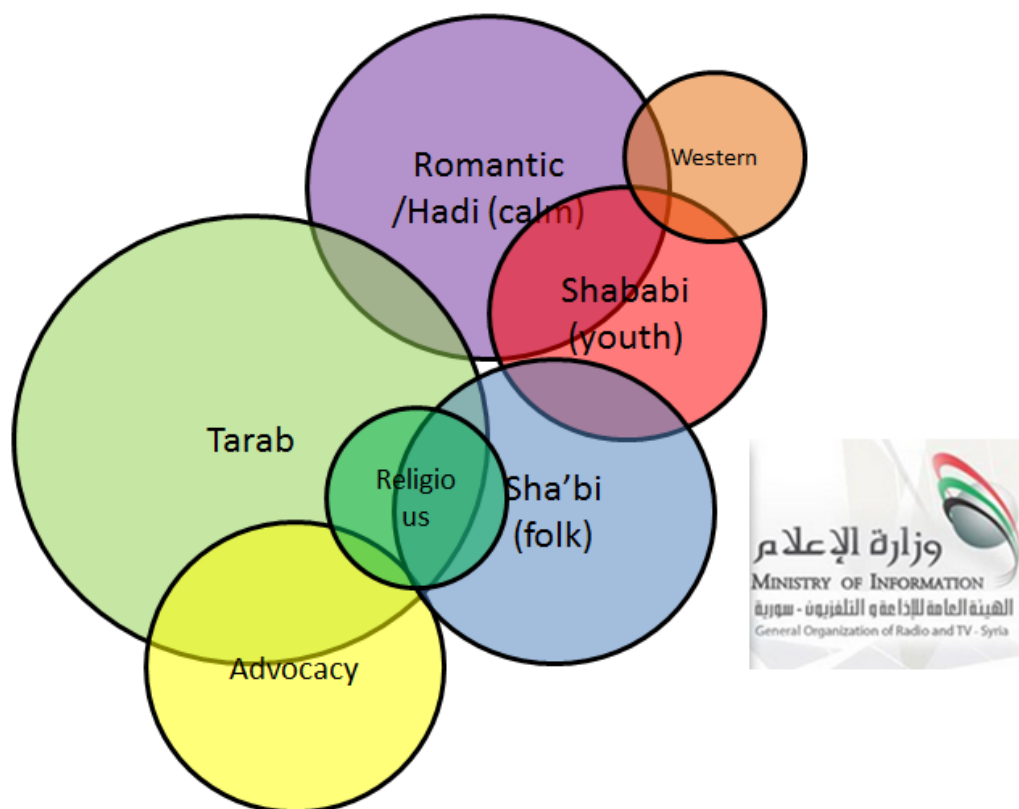


Figure 3.11: Graphic representation of Şawt Ash-Shabāb’s playlist

Of course, these illustrations are quite subjective. I have listened to over a thousand hours of radio in the course of research for this project, and documented over a hundred hours of broadcasts in a database which includes songs, advertisements, and talk shows and interstitial material. However, the nature of continuous 24-hour radio broadcasts as an object of study, and the impossibility of listening to more than one at a time means that my impressions are inevitably based on small, statistically insignificant sample sizes. As such, the primary usefulness of these graphs is to illustrate the relative differences between stations.

It should also be mentioned that the nature of my listening practice and history has the potential to create vastly different impressions than would be received by another listener. While in Syria I listened to the radio on the same timetable as everyone else; after returning to the States, my listening patterns became completely removed from those of Damascus life. Listening to radio recordings I made in Syria, and streaming radio over the internet, my consumption of radio is extremely time shifted, condensed, and concentrated, facts that would change my experience even without the obvious factors which make me experience radio differently from Syrian listeners (as a non-native speaker, American, musicologist, etc.) I am under no pretense that my level of familiarity with the pop music played on Syrian radio approaches that of, say, a 16 year old student in Damascus.

While I am confident that I have done enough listening that my general characterization of radio playlists would be recognized as fairly accurate by most Damascene listeners, these charts would not necessarily line up with individuals experiences of the stations. As was discussed in Chapter 2, most radio listener's consume broadcasts according to a routine built around their daily schedules, at home and work. For example, I spoke to with one *servīs* (minibus) driver who works the evening and night shifts every day and listens to the radio as well as his own cassette collection while driving. His experience of radio stations takes place during these times, and his perception of Version FM for example was as a station that played primarily *hadi'* and romantic music, and Umm Kulthum after midnight. The person who drives the same *servīs* during the morning and day shift would have a completely different impression of the same station.

Although broad playlist analysis will fall short in describing the experiences of individual listeners, it is nevertheless essential for situating American broadcasts within the contours of the Syrian radioscape. In the next chapter I will address Radio Sawa, and describe how it fits in among this radioscape.

Chapter 4 – Radio Sawa, Sonic Consumerism, and Western Music in the Syrian Radioscape

Introduction¹

In 2002 the Bush administration shut down the Voice of America's Arabic language service, replacing it with Radio Sawa, a 24 hour pop-music station which breaks up an Arabic and English language playlist with short news segments. Fast-tracked along with its sister satellite television station Al Hurra after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Radio Sawa was billed by originators in the US Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) as a departure from the "ineffective" practices of the VOA Arabic service, and a way for the US to break through what then-BBG Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson called the "distorting filter of radio and television stations controlled by those hostile to the United States."² Though scholars of Arab media have rightly pointed out the faults in this monochromatic picture of the Arab news media landscape and tried to address American sponsored news in a more realistic historical and regional context commentary on the music half of Sawa's music and news framework has tended to come mostly in the form of mocking headlines ("Britney vs. the Terrorists.")³

¹ Parts of this chapter will be published in the volume *The Soundtrack of Conflict*, ed. MJ Grant (Göttingen, Germany: Ost Verlag, forthcoming)

² Kenneth Tomlinson. "Testimony to the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations" U.S. Senate. Committee on Government Reform. February 10, 2004. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004.

³ Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001); Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskander, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network That Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003); Robert Reilly, 'Britney vs. the Terrorists.' *The Washington Post* (February 9, 2007), A19.

The music-focused Sawa has been more successful than the all-news Al Hurra in creating a consistent audience, and despite the undisputed primacy of satellite television as the number one entertainment and news medium in the Arab world, radio remains a significant source of news and entertainment for large portions of the region's population, and has a long history as a locus of political contestation. This chapter undertakes an analysis of the musical content and programming style of Radio Sawa, placing the station and the theory of musical utility it employs within a history of US Arabic language broadcasting that goes back to World War II.

Against the backdrop of the history of US international broadcasting, I propose two broad theories of music radio and its power as a tool for public diplomacy and propaganda, described in Chapter One. The first theory views music as a communicative medium that includes semiotic content beyond its lyrics; music is thought to illustrate, advocate, and instantiate the values and culture of the broadcasters, creating an affinity between the listener and the broadcasting country. The second theory conceives of music primarily as a medium of exchange, the currency with which listeners are induced to become audiences for non-musical content, whether that content is commercial in the case of corporations, or public diplomacy and propaganda in the case of states. These theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they are both employed in attempts to "move the needle" of public opinion towards the US, but they express profoundly different views about what music is and what it can do.

Within this framework the analysis in this chapter identifies the music and formatting on Radio Sawa as defined by the second, transactional theory in international broadcasting. I argue Sawa does not attempt, as is often portrayed in the press, to

inculcate familiarity with and appreciation for American culture while demonstrating respect for local culture. Instead it can be viewed as an effort to develop a pattern of radio listening based on a consumer capitalist relationship between listeners and radio, in which music is purely currency used to entice listeners to become members of audiences. Far from an ancillary effect of the programming, this type of listening practice and relationship to music becomes an end in itself. The fundamental idea communicated by the music and formatting of Radio Sawa, apart from any news content, is exactly that transactional, consumerist nature of listening that the station's format engenders.

Although I argue here that Radio Sawa is organized around a theory of music typified by exchange value rather than musical meaning, I don't believe *listeners* necessarily perceive the music and musical choices as bereft of meaning. Rather, individuals use patterns of listening shaped by the practices of daily life, local discourses about popular music, and decisions about aesthetic preferences and personal identification, in order to make sense out of foreign music, and integrate it into existing categories of listening. To explore this aspect of music reception, the second half of this chapter shifts away from the direct content analysis of Radio Sawa to describe some of the ways in which Western music is integrated into the Syrian radioscope, relying on the discursive categories established in Chapter 3.

Theories of Music in American International Broadcasting

The most common rationale for the use of music in US broadcasting holds that music, and especially music viewed by Americans as quintessentially American - jazz, rock'n roll, blues, country, R'n B and more recently hip hop - has the ability to

communicate fundamental information about America, in a way that positively inclines audiences towards the country and its people. This is the most common rationale for music described by the broadcasters across the history of American international broadcasting, and it is maintained today in programs such as the US State Department's *Rhythm Road Program*, administered through Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York.

The mission of The Rhythm Road is to share America's unique contribution to the world of music and to promote cross-cultural understanding and exchange among nations worldwide... Building on the rich legacy of the legendary Jazz Ambassadors, the program has expanded in recent years to include music that is quintessentially American. Musicians are invited to apply in the genres of jazz, blues, bluegrass, Cajun, country, gospel, hip hop/urban, and zydeco.⁴

Scholars like Von Eschen have rightly pointed out the extent to which the conception of music as conveying something fundamentally American can obscure the complicated political realities of audiences and musicians alike. Nevertheless, the theory that, in the words of famed VOA broadcaster Willis Conover, "Jazz is its own propaganda", remains embedded in both the popular and governmental discourse about music and its place in US governmental broadcasting.⁵

⁴ "Letter from Jazz at Lincoln Center" http://jalc.org/theroad/about_letterfromjalc.asp (accessed June 1, 2012).

⁵ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 16.

The rhetoric does not exclusively apply to American music; another version of the theory asserts simply that music, as the “universal language”, has inherent communicative potential. Thus, in 1945 VOA music director Elizabeth Lomax advised programmers to:

... sample every kind of music which is truly part of the American scene... as well as music of your target area ... We can create a bond of friendship by telling our audience in effect: ‘We in America know your music as well as our own’.⁶

During the Cold War, the focus of US communication abroad was on the ideological battle between capitalism vs. communism. As early as 1964, however, the USIA had come to the conclusion that using the word “capitalism” directly to advocate reform was ineffective.⁷ Resorting to subtler methods of contrasting the fruits of capitalism with the downsides of communism, American programmers, many coming from private radio and bringing expertise in commercial advertising, attempted to drive up demand for American cultural and physical products of all kinds. The identification of consumerism itself with Americanism created a logic in which the expansion of markets for US consumer products was seen as not just economically beneficial, but central to the expansion of US political influence.⁸

⁶ Alan Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 288.

⁷ Cyrus Leo Sulzburger, ‘Should the Old Labels Be Changed?’ *The New York Times*, July 6, 1964, 28.

⁸ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Emily Rosenberg, ‘Consumer capitalism and the end of the Cold War’ in *The*

A view of music as cultural commodity is not necessarily incompatible with the idea that it might also “project America”, and these two theories often go hand in hand, but bringing political economy into the discussion of musical meaning gives us access to other theories of how music might be operating.

Scholars of the political economy of communication describe commercial radio as a series of transactions in which listeners are induced with content (often musical) into becoming part of an audience. As the main commodity produced by the radio industry, audiences are then sold to advertisers, with the value of these audiences based on the relative desirability of various demographic attributes and listening practices.⁹ When the entity wishing to purchase a particular audience is a political actor rather than a corporation, other content (like news) may take the place of ads, but the principles of audience manufacture remain the same. To quote Fernando Bermejo:

How exactly does the audience become a commodity and how is its labor appropriated by media firms? This occurs through audience measurement, which can be considered an attempt to ‘define the intangible’...ratings firms do not simply ‘check to determine’ the size and characteristics of the audience, they actually manufacture the audience through a set of measurement procedures that are shaped by both industry dynamics and

Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 3: Endings Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 489-512.

⁹ Fernando Bermejo, “Audience Manufacture in Historical Perspective: From Broadcasting to Google,” *New Media & Society* 11, no. 1-2 (February 1, 2009): 133-154.

the technological and usage patterns of the media whose audience is manufactured.¹⁰

In order to attempt to influence the political views and values of an imagined Arab listener, broadcasters must create an audience. The goal is not just to attract listeners, but to shape them, through the act of listening, into a different form.

The Beginnings of Radio Sawa

The man who developed Radio Sawa is Norman J. Pattiz, a Clinton appointee who began work on the Sawa concept in January of 2001, and the founder of Westwood One. That company, which merged with Dial Global in 2011, was the largest distributor of commercial radio programming in the United States, and a pioneer in the practice of distributing entire 24-hour streams via satellite to be broadcast locally.¹¹ Within this model, programming decisions down to the level of individual song choices are set centrally, based on intense market and focus group research. Using this model, Radio Sawa is recorded and distributed from the home office in Washington, DC, and the Middle East production office in Dubai, with regional news offices and correspondences located around the region in Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, Bagdad, Amman, and Beirut.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid, 137.

¹¹ Kevin Rose, “Westwood One and Dial Global to Merge” *The New York Times Dealbook Blog* Nytimes.com 1 August, 2011. <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2011/08/01/westwood-one-and-dial-global-to-merge/> (accessed February 2, 2012); Jane Mayer, “The Sound of America”. *The New Yorker*, 18 February 2002, 60.

¹² U.S. General Accounting Office. ‘Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved’. GAO-06-762. (2006), 12, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-06-762> (accessed April 22, 2012).

Early in the process of beginning Radio Sawa, Pattiz gave statements that seem to support both of the theories of music broadcasting expressed above, sometimes calling music “a tool to deliver the audience”, and sometimes describing it as something that can illustrate useful stories about America.¹³ Not an expert in the Arabic-speaking world, Pattiz brought experience in the areas of distribution, audience research, and audience manufacture. From early on, spokespeople for the station emphasize the use of audience research methods in constructing the format and playlist of the station. Initial research for Radio Sawa was conducted by Edison Media Research in Amman, Cairo, and Bahrain, where pollsters went door to door and “played 5- to 7-second hooks from 500 American songs and 500 Arabic songs on cassette tapes in households...” then “calculated a score for the songs based on how the listeners rated the snippets.”¹⁴ The Broadcasting Board of Governors continually hires outside firms to conduct focus group and polling research, to assess the reaction to news content, and to garner information about song preferences, and significantly, to register internal benchmarks necessary to demonstrate progress and growth.¹⁵

The BBG describes Radio Sawa’s programming as “a carefully crafted blend of Western and Middle Eastern music programming that successfully attract[s] listeners to

¹³ Jane Mayer, “The Sound of America”. *The New Yorker*, 18 February 2002, 60; Paul Tough, ‘Pop-aganda’. *The New York Times Magazine*. 15 December 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/15POPA.html> (Accessed April 22, 2012).

¹⁴ Eli Lake, ‘Pop Psychology: How Lionel and J.Lo Can Help Bridge the Gap Between Us and the Arabs.’ *The Washington Post*, August 4, 2002. B03.

¹⁵ See for example the request for bids: “Qualitative Research for Radio Sawa and New Middle East Television Initiative” *Federal Business Opportunities FedBizOpps.gov* <https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=7b5bb5d3e30fa418deeab7ea160d3259&tab=core&cvview=1> (accessed November 1, 2012).

stay tuned for substantive news and information programming.”¹⁶ Beyond this thin description, the musical and other non-news programming on the station is never addressed in any detail in the Board’s reports or funding requests. Examining the station’s website (Radiosawa.com) one would assume that it is a 24-hour news broadcast, as the site contains no information about music at all, though 80% of airtime is devoted to music and non-news content.

Radio Sawa is currently broadcast from more than 40 relay sites in 19 Arabic speaking countries in North Africa and the Middle East, over an area spanning Morocco to Oman.

¹⁶ Broadcast Board of Governors, *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request*. (2011) http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/12/bbg_fy12_budget_request.pdf (accessed April 22, 2012).

FM	
Abu Dhabi – 98.7	Meknes - 91.9
Agadir - 101.0	Mosul - 106.6
Akkar, North Lebanon - 98.7	Najaf – 105.8
Amman/West Bank – 98.1	Nasiriya – 103.6
Amara - 91.6	Northern Jordan - 107.4
Baghdad – 100.4	Rabat - 101.0
Basra - 107.0	Ramadi – 97.6
Beirut - 87.7	Samawa – 95.6
Bekaa Valley /Western - 98.7	Sidon - 87.7
Bethlehem/Ramallah - 94.2	Sulimaniyah - 88.0
Casablanca – 101.5	Tangier – 101.8
Djibouti - 100.8	Tikrit – 97.1
Doha - 92.6	Tripoli, Lebanon - 87.7
Dubai - 90.5	Zahle - 87.7
Erbil - 106.6	
Fes – 97.9	Medium Wave (AM)
Hebron/Gaza-100.2	Egypt-Levant – 990
Hilla – 90.4	Iraq and The Gulf – 1548
Jenin - 93.5	Sudan & Yemen – 1431
Khartoum – 97.5	
Kirkuk - 98.8	Satellite
Kuwait - 95.7	Arabsat
Manama - 89.2	Eutelsat
Marrakech – 101.7	Nilesat

Table 4.1: Radio Sawa broadcasting sites.¹⁷

The station is divided into seven streams: Iraq (FM and AM); Jordan and the West Bank (FM); the Gulf (FM and AM); Egypt (AM); Morocco (FM); Sudan, Djibouti and Yemen (FM and AM); Lebanon and Syria (FM), all of which can also be heard online at radiosawa.com as well as on Arabsat, Eutelsat, and Nilesat.

¹⁷ Source: RadioSawa.com (accessed October 1, 2011).

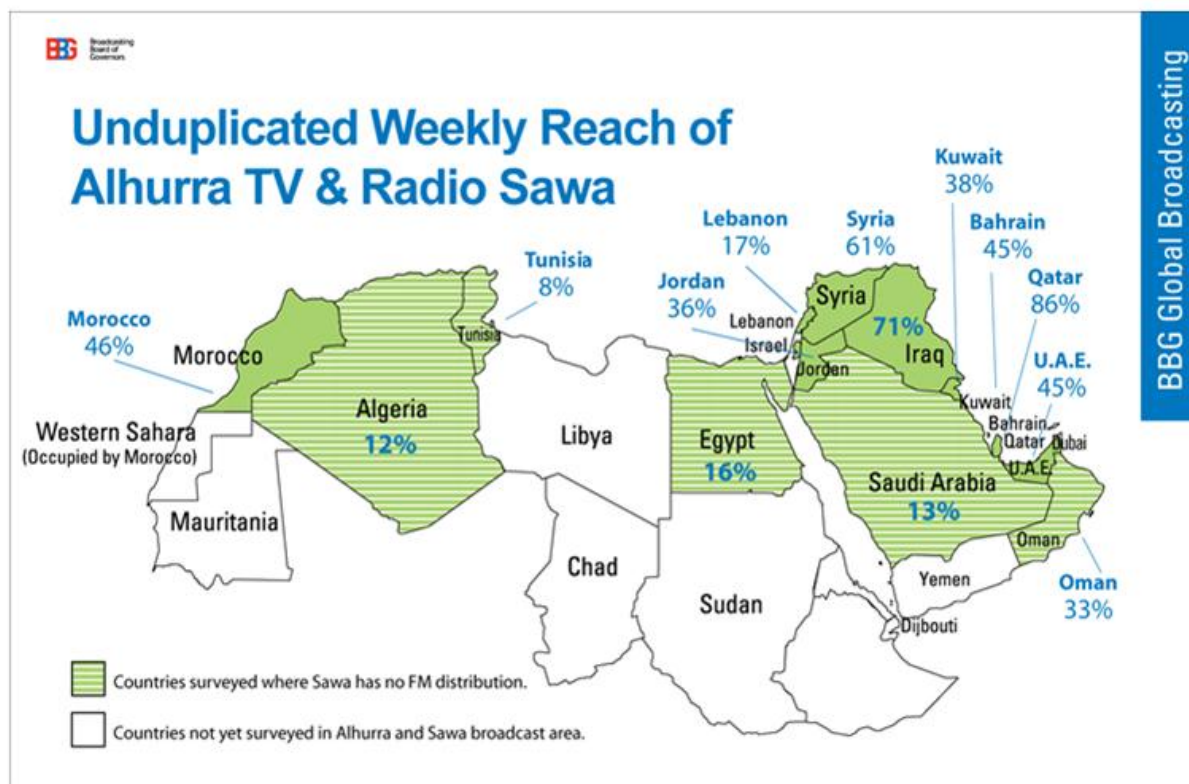


Figure 4.1: Unduplicated Weekly Reach of Radio Sawa (BBG Report)¹⁸

According to US-commissioned market research on Radio Sawa, these regional streams have a combined weekly audience of over 17.6 million listeners.¹⁹

The BBG considers Sawa and Al Hurra “surrogate” services, designed like precursors Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty to replace local media outlets.

¹⁸ Map reproduced from: Broadcasting Board of Governors, “Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV: Performance Update” *BBG.gov* January 2010, 5. <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/12/Alhurra-SawaResearchDataJan2010.ppt> (accessed November 1, 2011).

¹⁹ These numbers are all subject to question as they are often based on very small sample sizes, in addition to being funded by interested parties.

Broadcast Board of Governors, *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request*. (2011) http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/12/bbg_fy12_budget_request.pdf (accessed April 22, 2012).



Figure 4.2: Map of Middle East Broadcasting Network of target audience region and degree of press freedom.²⁰

In addition to the \$112.7 million yearly combined operating costs for the MBN, the State Department has invested a great deal of effort into convincing Arab governments to allow the US to broadcast from FM transmitters within their borders.²¹ Leaked reports from the US Embassy in Cairo detail a series of meetings held in 2005 between State Department officials and their Egyptian counterparts, in which Egypt was pressured to either make an exception or alter its broadcasting laws in order to allow Radio Sawa to broadcast in the

²⁰ Map reproduced from US Broadcasting Board of Governors 2010 Annual Report /p. 32

²¹ Ibid.

FM band from a local transmitter. Though American officials threatened to withhold \$227 million in scheduled aid to Egypt's Economic Security Fund, the attempt to pressure Egypt into shifting its laws (along with an attempt to convince the state broadcasting agency to ban Hezbollah-run Al Manar TV from the state-owned NileSat network) were unsuccessful.²²

In Syria, the US has not negotiated FM broadcasting rights, and the station is available on FM wavelengths streaming over the border from Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq depending on the region of the country, in addition to AM band and free-to-air satellite broadcasts. A BBG-funded survey of young listeners conducted by Intermedia in February of 2008 claimed that 29% of young adults (15-29) had reported listening to Radio Sawa in the previous week. The BBG has produced various estimates for the station's weekly audience in Syria. While the largest estimate I have seen from the

²² U.S. State Department Diplomatic Cable, "Cairo 005514: Visit of NEA Assistant Secretary Welch to Cairo July 16, 2005" (July 18, 2005). Published February 10, 2011 by *Aftenposten.no*. Available at: <<http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4025246.ece#.T1VeNoeiFGe>> (Accessed April 22, 2012); U.S. State Department Diplomatic Cable, "Cairo 005743: Charge Discusses Radio Sawa and Foreign Correspondents' Access with Information Minister El Fekki" (July 26, 2005). Published February 10, 2011 by *Aftenposten.no* <http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4025250.ece#.T1Vb3oeiFGd> (accessed April 22, 2012); U.S. State Department Diplomatic Cable, "Cairo 006210: BBG Representatives Discuss Radio Sawa with Information Minister El Fekki," (August 11, 2005). Published 10 February, 2011 by *Aftenposten.no* <http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4025254.ece#.T1Vb5JeifGd> (accessed April 22, 2012); U.S. State Department Diplomatic Cable, "Cairo 006577: Visit of NEA Assistant Secretary Welch: Meeting with Prime Minister Nazif," (August 25, 2005). Published February 10, 2011 by *Aftenposten.no* <http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4025256.ece#.T1Vb8IeiFGd> (accessed April 22, 2012); U.S. State Department Diplomatic Cable, 2005. "Cairo 007547: U/S Hughes' Meeting with Egyptian Prime Minister Nazif," (September 26, 2005). Published February 10, 2011 by *Aftenposten.no* <http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4025259.ece#.T1Vb9IeiFGd> (accessed April 22, 2012).

places the weekly Syrian audience at ~2.7 million, in other reports, the BBG claims an audience of 1.5 million listeners per week, or about 11% of the Syrian population.²³

Judging the accuracy of these claims ethnographically, even among a limited population, would be extremely difficult, and is not the goal of this study. While in Syria I made no attempt to conduct even informal surveys to estimate Radio Sawa listenership, and doing so would have been extremely problematic. As a researcher the prospect of becoming closely associated with an American propaganda station had the potential to introduce an unacceptable level of scrutiny from Syrian intelligence services, for both myself and my local interlocutors and friends.²⁴ I certainly met people in Syria who had listened to the station, but based on my experience in Syria and Lebanon, and to a much lesser extent in Jordan and Palestine, the station plays a larger role in public consciousness in Amman and Ramallah than it does in Damascus and Beirut.

Syrian and Arab Criticism of Radio Sawa²⁵

Radio Sawa, and to an even greater extent its companion television station Al Hurra, has received a significant critical response in the Arabic language press, almost all

²³ Broadcasting Board of Governors, “Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV: Performance Update” *BBG.gov* January 2010, 5. <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/12/Alhurra-SawaResearchDataJan2010.ppt> (accessed November 1, 2011).

BBG Annual Language Service Review Briefing Book 2010/ p. 18

²⁴ American researchers in Syria, especially Caucasian male ones, inevitably confront the notion that they might be spies. While the accusation in my experience was almost always made in a joking manner, the ubiquity and paranoia of the Syrian *mukhābarāt* renders the joke less funny than one might hope. I know of at least two occasions when acquaintances were visited by *mukhābarāt* who inquired about their association with me, based only on the fact that I was an American.

²⁵ All quotations in this section are my translations from Arabic.

of it negative.²⁶ However, despite the overwhelmingly negative tenor of the criticisms leveled against Radio Sawa and Al Hurra, the vast majority of specific mentions of Radio Sawa in the Arabic-language press are completely neutral, consisting only of a reference for a quote (“In an interview with the American Radio Sawa [some politician] stated...”) Thus the bulk of the mentions of Radio Sawa tend actually to bolster the reputation of the news coverage, in that they occur in the context of reporters restating quotations and information reported by Radio Sawa. Whatever the impact on listener’s opinions of America, Radio Sawa has unquestionably succeeded in finding a place within the Arabic media ecology, as evinced by the frequent references to Sawa reported stories by other media outlets.

When criticized directly in the Arabic press, Sawa and Al Hurra have been described as part of a “media invasion” or a “propaganda war”, considered an extension of the “neo-colonial” state of the Arab world, and described as “honey to attract cultural wasps.”²⁷ Addressed using the entire range of synonyms for propaganda discussed in the introduction (directed media, penetrating media, public diplomacy, etc..) they are described as part of a larger, warmongering American media system:

²⁶ In the following section I cite Syrian, Egyptian, Lebanese, Moroccan, pan-Arab, and internet-based sources. For the purposes of the discussion of Syria, I should note that while outside newspapers have been periodically banned in Syria over the past ten years, the Lebanese and pan-Arab newspapers are certainly read in Damascus when available. Similarly, while internet use remains relatively low in Syria (and internet infrastructure extremely poor), the internet is a very significant and growing part of the Syrian media discourse, especially among young people.

²⁷ Habīb Jarādī, “idhā‘at sawa...namūdhaj al-ghazū al-‘ilāmi al-amrīkī lil-maghrib” *Al-Tajdīd* November 16, 2003. <http://www.attajdid.info/def.asp?codelangue=6&infoun=9850> (accessed June 10, 2012); Ayman El-Amir “Filtering the Propaganda” *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* May 16-22, 2002 Issue No. 586. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/586/fe1.htm> (accessed June 10, 2012); Tariq Mohammed Amin Dirha, “qanāt al-ḥurra: hal hiya ‘aṣl amrīkī li jadhāb dabābūr al-thaqāfa fi minṭaqatnā” *Tishreen* February 12, 2005 <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/26721> (accessed January 15, 2012).

Radio Sawa has emerged, like the Voice of America broadcast, as one of the tools of the media war against the Arab World after the American domestic media machine succeeded in forging the mentality of the American citizen, especially after the events of September 11th.²⁸

Although many commentators in the pan-Arab press have expressed concern that Sawa's combination of music and news could be successful in attracting young listeners, in the Syrian national press, the American broadcasts are almost always discussed in terms which take their failure for granted. The idea that the stations have had and will have no effect on the Syrian populace is assumed.²⁹ Using the failure of the stations as a logical starting point, commentators in Syrian national media often explain this failure in terms of a Syrian reaction to Sawa and al Hurra's perceived pro-Iraq war and pro-Israel bias, and of using what they describe as the failed techniques of Israeli propaganda:

The funny thing is that some foreign channels which broadcast in Arabic didn't learn from the Israeli experience. [Israel] endlessly repeated the same methods of blatant propaganda, forgetting that Arab audiences have come to distinguish very easily between the wheat and the chaff, and

²⁸ Habīb Jarādī, “idhā'at sawa...namūdhaj al-ghazū al-'ilāmi al-amrikī lil-maghrib” *Al-Tajdīd* November 16, 2003. <http://www.attajdid.info/def.asp?codelangue=6&infoun=9850> (accessed June 10, 2012).

²⁹ See for example: Mahi al-Dīn al-Moḥammed “šūrat Amrikā bayn al-'ilām wa al-siyāsa” *Tishreen* <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/16044> (accessed January 15, 2012); Hamdan Hamdan, “muthaqqafū al-'arab wa fiḍa'iyat al-ḥurra mā bayn dawr al-muthaqqaf wa bā'i' al-thaqāfa” *Tishreen* September 4, 2005 <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/48094> (accessed March 12, 2012); Nāšir Shamālī “tašwīq al-imbrāṭuriyya al-mankafi'a qudwatan lil-'ālim” Nov, 27, 2011 <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/245621> (accessed January 15, 2012).

know who supports their welfare, and who wants to keep them at the vile nadir.³⁰

The resemblance of Radio Sawa to a commercial station, and the attempt to sell America as a brand, is also frequently noted:

“...the underlying goal of the station [is] to win a young Arab audience through the use of programs resembling commercial advertisements, aimed at the promotion of a certain commodity. But in the case of Sawa [this commodity] becomes American news and values, the subject of the American broadcasts.”³¹

Although addressed with less frequency than the news content, music comes in for a similarly strong condemnation in the Syrian press:

The beaten-down humanity of this miserable Arab world does not want to dance and sway licentiously to the melodies of Michael Jackson and Britney Spears, and doesn't want to laugh at a few quick news briefs woven together in the style of Goebbels.”³²

³⁰Fayṣal al-Qāsim “limādhā fashalat al-faḍā`iyyāt al-ajnabiyya al-muwajjiha ilā al-`ālim al-`arabī” *BaladnaOnline.net* December 26, 2009 (accessed January 16, 2011).

³¹ Habīb Jarādī, “idhā`at sawa...namūdhaj al-ghazū al-i`lāmī al-amrīkī lil-maghrib” *Al-Tajdid* November 16, 2003. <http://www.attajdid.info/def.asp?codelangue=6&infoun=9850> (accessed June 10, 2012).

³²Fayṣal al- Qāsim “limādhā fashalat al-faḍā`iyyāt”

While some critics describe the musical side of Radio Sawa as simply a cover for political propaganda, others view the music itself as an attempt to encourage the Westernization of Arab youth.

Sawa tries to inculcate cultural Westernization, Americanization even, in the fabric of young minds in a novel way, broadcasting an Arabic song then an American song in succession around the clock...[political orientation comes] in the form of light and quick doses or propaganda.³³

Despite the consistent default position in the Syrian (state-controlled) press that Radio Sawa and other politically directed broadcasts from outside the country are completely ineffective in the goals of swaying the population, the same press does not claim that no one listens to the broadcasts in Syria.³⁴ Rather they argue that, according to the title of one editorial in *Tishreen* "Their voices do not enter my hearing" (*aṣwātuhum lā tadkhal sam' ai*): in other words, that the acts of listening, hearing, and believing are not the same thing. In this essay, after describing a number of American efforts to influence Arab audiences, author Mousi As-Sayid closes by quoting a taxi driver, who states: "I listen to these frogs every day, and their words do not enter my ears."³⁵

³³ Ibrahim 'Alūsh, "Sawa Sawa... idhā 'at tashwīsh 'a al-hawā'" FreeArabVoice.org <http://www.freearabvoice.org/arabi/maqalat/sawaSawa.htm> (accessed January 15, 2012).

³⁴ It should be noted that not all foreign broadcasts receive the same treatment from the Syrian press. Radio Monte Carlo for example, the long-running French broadcast in Arabic, had a significant presence in Damascus before the Syrian uprising, and partnered with a number of Syrian organizations to promote cultural and educational programs..

³⁵ Moussa As-Sayid, "*aṣwātuhum lā tadkhal sam' ī*" *Tishreen* September 7, 2008 <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/151125> (accessed June 10, 2012).

The irony in this criticism of Radio Sawa goes beyond that implied by cries of “propaganda” coming from Syrian state-controlled “mobilization media”, to use William Rugh’s characterization.³⁶ The bigger irony is that the assumption of citizens listening without hearing, participating in the broadcasts without being swayed or convinced by them, is a mirror image of the process described by Lisa Wedeen in her study of public performances of loyalty around the personality cult of Hafiz al-Asad.³⁷ As Wedeen describes it, the goal of regime in propagating the Asad cult is not necessarily to inculcate belief or “legitimacy.” Rather citizens are required to “act as if”, observing the public forms of loyal citizenship even in the face of state rhetoric which is patently unconvincing or ridiculous. In this model, it is significant only that audiences perform the actions of listening, if not necessarily the mental functions of hearing.

I detailed some of the anglophone criticism of Radio Sawa and Al Hurra in the introduction to this dissertation. As previously stated, despite the fact that the large majority of the station’s broadcast day is devoted to music, there has been almost no discussion of the actual musical content of the station, beyond references to well-known pop stars in the Western press. The following paragraph by Sam Hilmy, former director of the Near East, North Africa, and South Asia Division for the VOA, comprises one of most direct critiques of the musical content of the station:

Pop is a major successful commercial enterprise that targets a wide youthful common denominator, but it alone cannot present the picture of

³⁶ Rugh, *Arab Mass Media*, 29.

³⁷ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

America which American public diplomacy is intended to present—that of a country with rich, multifaceted culture, revolutionary ideals, commercial vitality, history-making values of human rights and social justice, and standards of transparent government. Nor is pop music what young Arab needs today to form a more enlightened view of their societies and the world, or to build a more participatory society firmly rooted in human values. Pop does not attract potential future leaders or opinion makers. It does not build credibility.³⁸

In contrast Radio Sawa's supporters assert that listeners to the station, attracted by the music, stay to hear the news and are exposed to a more accurate view current events, and of the US and its policies in the region than is available anywhere else. What none of Radio Sawa's Arab or American critics have done is analyze the musical and non-news content of the station, the material which makes up the vast majority of the broadcast station.

Content Analysis

Since I first tuned in to Radio Sawa in Sana'a, Yemen, where I was studying Arabic in the summer of 2007, I have listened to hundreds of hours of broadcasts from the station, either over FM and AM broadcasts while in the Middle East, or via internet streams for each of the regional channels while in the US. For the content analysis in this

³⁸ Sam Hilmy, "Radio Sawa: America's New Adventure in Radio Broadcasting," *Arab Media & Society*, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 12. <<http://www.arabmediasociety.com/index.php?article=187&p=0>.>

chapter I catalogued a bit over 24 hours of Radio Sawa's Levant broadcast, from January 11-12, 2012. While the contours of Sawa's playlist have changed significantly over the period in which I have been listening, this sample is a representative selection of the current music and formatting of the station.

During this period I logged 290 song plays and 246 nonmusical events, including station identification bumpers, newsbreaks, promos, and general interest segments. In the sample, the station employed a playlist of 118 individual songs by 84 different artists or groups. By means of extensive listening, cross-referencing with recordings of other stations, and scouring of the internet and my own collection of recordings, I was able to identify the vast majority of the songs in rotation on the station.

The table below details the format of a typical hour of Radio Sawa. Apart from a daily half-hour news show, the format is extremely consistent, with only occasional exceptions for extended news programs.

Event	Description	Duration
Arabic Song	Hossam Jneid - "Raja' Illy"	4m
What's New?	"What's New? (<i>Shu ft Jadid?</i>) - Cinema" - Description of the film "Knuckle" by Irish Director Ian Palmer	30s
Western Song	Selena Gomez & The Scene - "Love you like a love song"	3m15s
Promo	"For additional information about Radio Sawa, visit RadioSawa.com"	15s
Arabic Song	Iwan - "Adini Ganbak"	3m
Arabic Song	Darine Hadchiti - "Ya Toqburni "	4m
News	"The World Now" - News Break	7m
Arabic Song	Fadel Shakir - "Allahu 'Alam"	4m
Station ID	Radio Sawa Station ID	5s
Western Song	Rihanna - "We Found Love"	3m15s
You and Your Health	"Radio Sawa presents You and Your Health" - Information about Alzheimer's	1m15s
Arabic Song	Joe Ashkar - "Sayerlo"	4m
Wisdom of the Day	"al-kalamu Sifet al-mutakalem" (Speech defines the speaker)	20s
Arabic Song	Wael Kfoury - Ma Tehky	5m
Sawa Chat	Q: "Do you think there will be peace in the Middle East in 10 years?" A1: "Maybe!" A2: Sadly no, violence increases violence, dictatorship increases dictatorship, injustice increases injustice..."	1m30s
Western Song	Tinie Tempah Feat. Kelly Rowland - "Invincible"	3m10
Station ID	"Sawa Sawa Sawa!"	5s
Arabic Song	30 second intro to a song, cut off by news break	30s
News	Headlines from the longer newsbreak earlier in the hour	1m30s
Arabic Song	Mohamed Hamaky Ft. Perry Mystique (rapping in English) - "Ahla Haga Fiki"	3m
Station ID	"Sawa! Stay connected to everything new!"	10s
Western Song	Melanie C "Weak"	3m20
Promo	Al Hurra TV promo spot	30s
Arabic Song	Asmara - "Ash'ak"	4m40s
Station ID	"Hello, You are listening to Radio Sawa. [I'm] Wael Jassar"	5s
Arabic Song	Wael Jassar - "Mahma Toulou"	3m30s

Table 4.2: An hour of Radio Sawa programming (11-12am Beirut time, 11 January 2012)

To clarify this breakdown in terms of programming category for readers unfamiliar with current Lebanese pop, we can examine the following chart from the Office of the Inspector General's 2010 review of the performance of the Middle East Broadcasting Networks. Aside from the fact that Table 4.2 describes the Levant stream of Radio Sawa and Table 4.3 the Iraq Stream, the main difference between the tables is that the OIG's chart examines a somewhat unrepresentative period which includes a full ½ hour news broadcast.

In Time	Out Time	Length	Event Description
7:15:00	7:46:30	31:30	Newscast
7:46:30	7:46:37	00:07	Newscast Close
7:46:37	7:50:32	03:55	ARABIC SONG: Current Superhit
7:50:32	7:50:38	00:06	Morning ID
7:50:38	7:54:12	03:34	WESTERN SONG: Current Superhit
7:54:12	7:54:57	00:45	Program: What's New
7:54:57	7:59:02	04:05	ARABIC SONG: Current Hit
7:59:02	7:59:51	00:49	Program: SAWA CHAT Iraq
7:59:51	8:00:00	00:09	PROMO: Artist Promo
8:00:00	8:04:43	04:43	ARABIC SONG: Gold
8:04:43	8:05:00	00:17	PROMO: Music Promo
8:05:00	8:08:34	03:34	WESTERN SONG: Current Superhit
8:08:34	8:08:40	00:06	Morning ID
8:08:40	8:12:45	04:05	ARABIC SONG: Current Superhit
8:12:45	8:13:25	00:40	PROMO: Alhurra Promo
8:13:25	8:15:00	01:45	ARABIC SONG: Gold

Table 4.3: Description of an hour of Radio Sawa Programming³⁹

³⁹ *The Broadcasting Board of Governors' Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc.*, Report of Inspection (Office of Inspector General, March 2010), 69.

The station is extremely reliable in its timing and content, with two news breaks an hour plus a consistent mix each of the general interest segments Sawa Chat/What's New?/You and Your Health/Wisdom of the Day. Though dead air is the bane of all radio broadcasters, the station projects a rapid pace even compared to other stations, often cutting off the end of one song and using a station identification bumper to overlap with the next. This large-scale rhythm, and the frequency and brevity of bumpers and promos, is probably what Norman Pattiz was referring to when he complained that most Arab radio sounded "pretty dull and pretty drab."⁴⁰ The underlying music bed rarely stops, though it does cut out one minute into the longer news breaks, a sonic signal that this news segment will last five minutes or more (inadvertently alerting listeners as to when to change the station if one prefers not to listen to the news).

The overall tone of the station is greatly influenced by the non-musical programming elements, in addition to music and news, and I will thus begin with a description of these.

Entertainment News/Promo Spots

The most direct means by which Radio Sawa advances a consumerist ethos is through the inclusion of ad-like segments of entertainment and media news, entitled "*Shu fi Jadīd?*" (What's New?) broadcast hourly in the categories of Cinema, DVD/Video, Music, and Computers and Video Games. These segments consist of updates about newly released films, mentions of Oscar nominations and other entertainment news, and

⁴⁰ Hilmy, "Radio Sawa: America's New Adventure in Radio Broadcasting," 2.

alerts about new albums and games. The segments are similar in length and style to paid ads on commercial radio, but they are presented as a service, helping listeners stay connected to what's new.

While many of the segments seem to line up with the imagined audience of the station, the products are not necessarily congruent with the musical style of the station or interests of the presumptive listeners. Musically, the station occasionally often pushes albums by artists whose music would not be played on Radio Sawa's top 40 format (I've heard spots describing albums from Neil Young, Black Sabbath, Joni Mitchell, and Paul Anka). Depending on the products being advertised, some "Shu fi Jadīd" segments can seem downright absurd. When listening with friends in Sana'a a few years ago I heard a spot advertising the release of MLB 2007, a new baseball video game - an odd thing to advertise in a country where small minorities do own personal computers, but no one plays baseball.

Returning to audience theory, it is not immediately clear how these spots should be characterized: are they the goods given to listeners to recruit them into becoming part of an audience-commodity, or the message conveyed by the customer (the US government) who purchases audience attention? The companies who make the products are not paying for the advertising time. These types of product spots do make sense however under the supposition that the purpose is not to sell the product, but to drive demand generally, to inculcate a consumerist relationship to American cultural products.

Sawa Chat

Among the defining programming features of Radio Sawa is a segment called “Sawa Chat”: “Sawa’s flagship interactive feature, broadcast hourly, providing the audience an opportunity to express opinions on political and social issues of interest to Arab youths in response to the question of the day.”⁴¹ Throughout the course of the broadcast day a question is repeated, and once or twice an hour a mix of people in “man on the street” style interviews give their opinions. Questions for this segment vary from political and social (“Do you think there will be peace in the Middle East in ten years?”/“What do you think of women who work to support their families?”/“Do you think that some nationalities are smarter than others?”) to personal or consumer focused (“Do you feel scared when faced with a new matter?”/“Do you judge people based on the type of car they drive?”).

These questions and answers attempt to shape the ways in which listeners process both the news and daily lives. Some, such as the question about the types of cars people drive, can seem quite patronizing. However, the effect is not as simple as a reminder not to judge a book by its cover or blindly admire wealth. Like many of the questions posed during “Sawa Chat” segments, the question is less about getting an answer than it is about putting the queried in a subject position amenable to American policies, or American style consumer capitalism. “Do you judge people based on the type of car they drive?” places the listener in a consumer, and arguably American mental state through its very premise (everyone drives a car, and the kind of car you drive might say something about you).

⁴¹Norman Pattiz, “Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV: Opening Channels of Mass Communication in the Middle East,” in *Engaging the Arab & Islamic Worlds Through Public Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Public Diplomacy Council, 2004), 81.

In addition to the question of the day, Sawa's programmers control the responses broadcast on the station, and shape the discussion through these answers as well as the questions. The most obvious editorial control evinced by the answers on "Sawa Chat" is the lack of religiosity relative to other call-in shows in Lebanon and Syria. Whereas local shows are filled with religious justifications for and against any position one can think of, "Sawa Chat" is a largely secular feature.⁴² Whether this is because of some directive to minimize religious discourse, because of the large proportion of Lebanese Christian employees at Radio Sawa seeking and curating responses from a largely Muslim audience, or some other reason, is difficult to say.⁴³

The segments close with the tag-line "Sawa Chat – You talk, and we listen", and although we know whom those pronouns are supposed to indicate, the real people being referred to are somewhat vague. "You" are given no direction on how to participate in the "interactive feature," only the direction to identify with a larger audience. Respondents in Sawa Chat segments reply in the local dialect of Arabic, depending on the various regional Sawa streams, so the audience knows very roughly where the answers are coming from, but is not directly instructed to call-in or participate. In contrast to the chat and call-in features on private stations in the region, such as the call in

⁴² This is apart from common idioms, such the steady stream of *insha'Allah* (God willing) that is inevitable in any discussion of the future in an Arabic speaking country.

⁴³ According to Mamoun Fandy, who interviewed a number of former employees at Radio Sawa and al-Hurra:

Not only is the staff at Al-Hurra and Radio Sawa predominantly Lebanese, it is for the most part Maronite Christian. There are a few Shia Muslims, but there is not a single Sunni Muslim working at Al-Hurra or Sawa. It is shocking that a station created for the Muslim world has failed to employ reporters that represent the largest Muslim community. As one former reporter put it, "No one is going to trust a station that only puts people named John and Joseph on the air. Where are the Mohamads and the Alis? They have to realize that the majority of the audience in the region is Muslim."

Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words*, 112.

trivia program I described in chapter two, getting listeners to actively respond is not a priority.

As for the “We” listening to the comments (all in Arabic of course) featured on the segment, the word certainly doesn’t refer to the people who fund Radio Sawa. Given the fact that it is illegal under the Smith-Mundt Act for the US government to broadcast Radio Sawa inside its own borders, regular American citizens are not likely listening to these comments either. The real audience for the comments is of course listening and talking to itself, with the form and content of that interaction mediated and controlled by the radio station.

Music

Sawa has a playlist consisting of approximately 65% Arabic language music (or Arabic with some English), and 30% English language, with the occasional lyric in Spanish, French, or Farsi. In comparison to the local Syrian stations, this is higher than average, discounting the presence of the mostly English-language MIX FM. The percentage is also higher than the 20% legal limit on foreign language songs for Syrian stations, though as we have discussed in previous chapters, this limit may be largely theoretical. The uniformity of Radio Sawa’s playlist means that one can hear, almost without exception, the same number of Western songs spread out over any given hour, day or night. This is a significant contrast to Syrian stations, which as I describe in Chapter 3, vary their playlist according to the time of day. Those programming blocks on Syrian radio which do feature Western songs will usually play more per hour than Radio Sawa does, creating a higher density of foreign language songs during that period. Thus, due to the difference between Radio Sawa’s extremely consistent round-the-clock

programming patterns, it plays both more Western music than most stations, and less Western music than many programs.

As one would expect in the Levant stream, which is advertised as being broadcast “*min Jabal Lubnan*” (From Mount Lebanon), music by Lebanese artists dominates the Arabic playlist.

Lebanon	45%
USA	17%
Egypt	14%
England/Canada/Australia	7%
Syria	7%
Europe/South America	7%
Other Arab Countries	3%

Table 4.4: Playlist Breakdown by Artist Country of Origin (Based my analysis of the January 2012 sample.)⁴⁴

Though the other regional streams are not as heavily weighted towards Lebanese singers (Radio Sawa Egypt features a significantly higher percentage of Egyptian, for example), Lebanon is one of the two the largest exporters of pop stars in the Arab world, and music from Lebanon features prominently on all of Radio Sawa’s streams.

⁴⁴ I derived these numbers through extensive listening and logging of song plays in a database. When I was unable to recognize artists, I searched the internet using lyrics to identify songs and recordings. I then cross-referenced this database with advertised (record company) artist bios to find countries of origin.

As Table 4.4 shows, music made by Americans only accounts for 17% of Sawa's total playtime. To be sure, the global market for English-language pop music is so integrated today that identifying the American artists within an English-language playlist is a task that would be impossible for most native English speakers, much less native Arabic speakers. As such, it is difficult to detail the extent to which a playlist sounds particularly American without examining one area and group of listeners in detail, and as I argue elsewhere, the extent to which individual songs register as foreign depends on the extent to which they are able to be interpolated into local programming categories (this process will be addressed later in this chapter.) Certain musical features such as rap vocality might be associated with the US, but these types of musical signifiers can be misleading, and in fact the majority of the rapping played during the sample period was by non-Americans. However, the 17% figure does illustrate the extent to which the goal of broadcasting identifiably American music and musical forms, central to earlier iterations of American musical diplomacy, has been largely abandoned by Radio Sawa. In fact, in almost no market that Radio Sawa operates is the station the largest purveyor of American music. Listeners who are specifically drawn to American or Western music can choose from stations geared mostly towards Western music such as NRJ Radio in Lebanon, Mix FM in Syria, Nile Radio in Egypt, and Beat FM in Jordan, or stations that play a mix of Arabic and Western music, like Radio Fann in Syria.⁴⁵

In typical CHR/Top 40 pop radio format, the station is divided between a set of high-rotation songs, repeated about once every four hours around the clock, a tier of

⁴⁵When Sawa began broadcasting in 2002, the mix of English and Arabic music was an unexploited segment in many markets, but even that niche is significantly more crowded in 2012.

middle-rotation songs, and a “tail” of less frequently played songs. The dozen songs in highest rotation during the sample period are an equal mix of Western and Arabic, while the mid-tier and tail rotations are progressively more Arabic-focused.

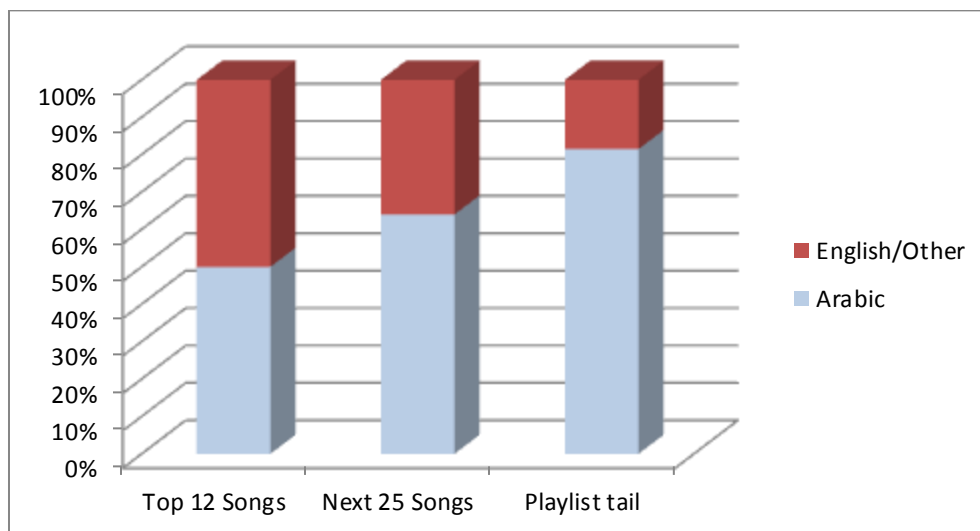


Figure 4.3: Language Percentage by Song Frequency (Based my analysis of the January 2012 sample.)

All of the high-rotation English language songs were new releases currently charting in the US, Europe, or Australia, and out of the complete English playlist, almost two-thirds were new releases from the past year, with the other one-third were songs released between 2005 and 2012.

This finding confirms the descriptions applied by the OIG report in Table 4.3 (page 254), where the Arabic playlist includes “Gold”, “Current Hit”, and “Current Super-hit[s]”, the Western songs come exclusively from the “Current Super-hit” category. This complete dedication to new songs, at least in the English-language playlist, is the result of a shift which has occurred in Radio Sawa’s programming over the

last few years. When the station first began broadcasting in 2002, and even when I began listening to the station casually in first time in 2007, Sawa programmed a high number of Western songs from previous decades, especially the 1980s ballads which are popular on local stations. In addition to moving its playlist to newer songs and a presumably younger audience, the shift towards an entirely new English-language playlist has reduced the number of instances when an average listener would be able to identify a song definitively as American.

The Arabic-language playlist is similarly focused on the new if to a lesser extent, and when Sawa plays songs by long-popular artists such as Amr Diab or Najwa Karam, the focus is on their more recent recordings. One does hear older songs in the Arabic playlist, however, usually in the form of new recordings of older songs, such as Dina Hayek's recording of "*Tal as-Sahir*" with Tony Hanna, a dabke artist who first achieved fame in the 1970s.

The following chart shows high-rotation songs during the sample period.

Western Performer	Song	Arabic Performer	Song
Lady Gaga	Marry the Night	Melhem Zein	<i>Kabad Bad</i>
Madonna ft. Nicki Minaj/MIA	Gimme All Your Love	Tamer Hosny ft. Shaggy	Smile
Loick Eissan	Me Without You	Hani Shakir	<i>Ahlā a-Dhikriyyāt</i>
Selena Gomez & the Scene	Love You like a Love Song	Mohamed Kelany	<i>'Albī ala Eidī</i>
Rihanna ft. Calvin Harris	We Found Love	Marwan Khoury	<i>Bi 'Ashq Ruhak</i>
Shakira	Je l'Aime a Mourir	Pascal Mesh'alani	<i>'Am Tahaddadnī</i>

Table 4.5: Twelve songs in the high-rotation “Superhit” category on Radio Sawa

Rather than attempt a song-level analysis of the station however, it is more useful to employ the taxonomy discussed in Chapter 3 to form a rough characterization of the station’s playlist as a whole.

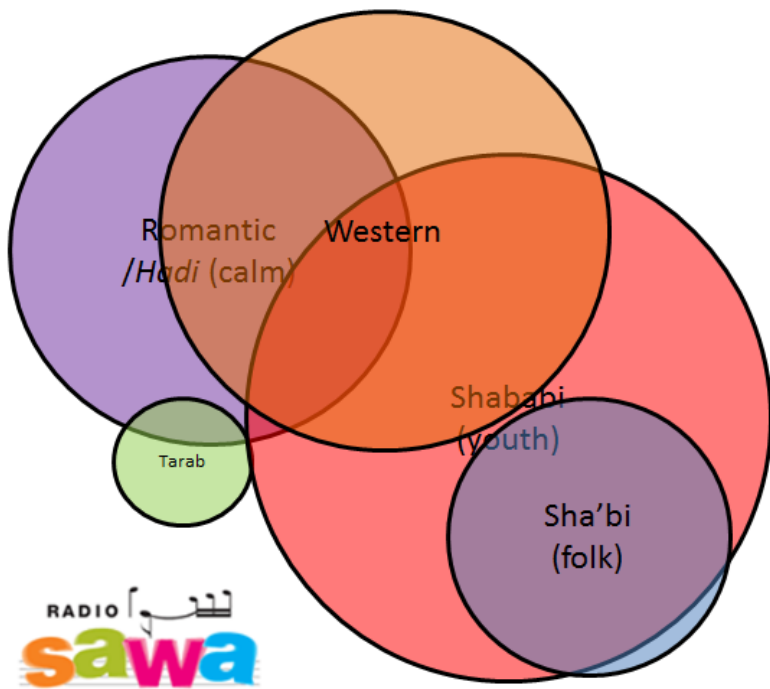


Figure 4.4: Graphic Representation of Radio Sawa's Levant playlist

Certain musical features are solidly correlated with the language of the lyrics. Orchestration is the most obvious of these, with the Arabic songs relying heavily on the string orchestra as well as traditional Arabic instruments the ney, mizmar, argul, 'ud, and qanun, or as often, synthesized electronic versions of these instruments. The use of a piano or Spanish style guitar is also extremely common, especially in introductions to pieces. The Arabic songs on Sawa also commonly feature instrumental breaks and solos of 30-40 seconds, in contrast the Western songs which almost never let that much time pass without vocals present.

The Arabic language songs on Sawa are generally longer than the English-language songs. Though often cut down from the full length found on albums or in full video clips, the Arabic songs still clock in at nearly four minutes on average, versus about three minutes and twenty seconds for the English language playlist. In terms of the

averages of music broadcasts in the Middle East, this is on the short end. A station like Arabesque FM in Syria might fill up a block of romantic music with songs clocking in at around eight minutes each, while stations that focus on older *ṭarab* styles and stars like Umm Kulthum, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahāb, or ‘Abd al-Ḥalim Ḥāfiẓ, frequently play single records lasting upwards of half an hour. Even the songs on other purely pop stations tend on average a bit longer than Radio Sawa.

As mentioned above, although I argue that Radio Sawa is organized around a theory of music as a medium of exchange as opposed to one in which its value is primarily communicative, that doesn’t mean that *listeners* necessarily perceive these musical selections as bereft of meaning. With that in mind, I want to provide a brief interpretation of Sawa’s playlist and show how that might in fact reinforce rather than detract from the overall impression of music as commodity.

Gender

One noticeable difference between the English and Arabic language playlists which becomes clear through a statistical breakdown is the difference in gender composition between the two sets of songs. For the Arabic playlist, 63% of songs were performed by men, 30% of songs were performed by women, and approximately 7% were duets. Many songs with a single featured singer also included a backup chorus, which can be of either gender. This includes women singers backed up by a chorus of men, a combination which is extremely rare in Anglophone pop music. The basic gender breakdown for the English-language songs was nearly opposite the Arabic playlist, with

58% female to 28% male singers, and the rest made up of combinations of men and women.

With this divergence in the gender composition of its musical broadcast, Radio Sawa conveys a version of Western pop music that is mostly woman-focused, in direct contrast to a Middle Eastern pop world which is more heavily male-centered (an outcome that might be surprising to anyone familiar with the focus on female pop stars and their videos in the Arabic and Anglophone press). The breakdown by performer's gender is not the extent of the differentiation in gender information presented by the selection of songs; the stylistic content of the music also points to a differentiation in gender norms in the Arabic and Anglophone samples.

The English-language playlist is typified by performance techniques with specific gendered associations. Specifically, the majority of male performers in the sample employed either rapping or falsetto, both vocal technique with specific kinds of gendered associations. Despite the presence of women MCs in hip hop from the first days of the culture's inception, "rapping" as a form of vocal production in the mass media is typically gendered as a masculine practice. On Radio Sawa, and in Anglophone pop music in general, one often hears the combination of a female singer, employing an R'n'B vocal style, paired with a male rapper.⁴⁶

The second technique employed by a large number of male singers in the Anglophone playlist is falsetto. This is a technique which is explicitly male, in that the

⁴⁶ The particular sample of Radio Sawa I logged for this analysis happened, somewhat refreshingly, to include a greater than usual number of instances of women rapping for American radio (mostly Nikki Minaj and MIA). This doesn't detract from the association of rapping with masculinity however, and as hip hop scholars have mentioned, female MCs negotiated a complicated performance of gender in performing in a vocal style associated primarily with performances of hyper-masculinity.

See, for example, Imani Perry, *Prophets Of The Hood: Politics And Poetics In Hip Hop*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 160.

difference between head voice and chest voice is typically much more pronounced for men than for women (at least in Western vocal culture), for whom the term falsetto isn't normally applied. Despite its maleness, it is also a technique that allows access to a range of performance associated with femininity. Thus Western singers who ascend into their head voice do not simply continue in the same vocal style of their chest voice in a higher register, rather they often mark the shift by increasing the level of ornamentation or melisma, or by dropping into a softer, less aggressive style.

An example of this comes in the song "Me Without You" by Loick Essien, one of the "Current Superhits" on Sawa during the sample period. For most of the song, when Essien moves into the high register, such as the bombastic "Tryin'a be the me without you, It's like driving in a car with no wheels..." he remains in chest voice belting out a mostly syllabic chorus. The few moments in the song when he moves to a falsetto are points of increased melisma and moderated dynamic. This isn't a direct invocation of femininity, but it does separate head from chest voice in terms of vocal performance practice. The bifurcation of Anglophone vocality into gender-associated performance styles extends to the relatively infrequent 'rock' songs which appear on Radio Sawa.⁴⁷ When Radio Sawa plays a song by a band playing rock instruments, as opposed to a solo singer with anonymous backing musicians, the lead vocalist of that band is disproportionately likely to be male.⁴⁸

In a contrast to the gender associated vocal practices in the English-language sample, in the Arabic sample, the singing styles performed by men and women are

⁴⁷ Following the practice of most American top 40 stations, the rock songs which appear on Radio Sawa are often "radio mixes", which de-emphasize guitars and bring the aspects of the rhythm (bass drum) forward in the mix to emphasis the beat.

⁴⁸ This isn't particular to Radio Sawa of course, but is true across the genre, and in the presence of rock songs on top 40 radio.

largely similar. That is, the general singing style is melismatic, frequently includes melodic sequences, and utilizes cry-breaks, vocal turns and ornaments, and timbral signifiers to convey intense emotion. The difference in tessitura between male and female singers, so strongly naturalized in the West, is less significant in this sample. While men tend to sing in a lower range than women, there are few extreme highs or lows, and little “falsetto” is employed as such. That is, while male singers certainly move into their upper registers frequently, this isn’t marked by the same shift in sound and melodic style which so often accompanies the falsetto in Anglophone pop. This particular European history of falsetto as a performance practice developed by men performing as female characters in opera does not exist in the Arab performance context.

Certain linguistic traits in song lyrics, such as the standard practice of both male and female singers using the masculine conjugations, *ḥabībī* (my darling) rather than the feminine form *ḥabībīti*, also tend to reinforce the impression that vocal practices of men and women (if not necessarily the social consequences of the act of singing) are more similar than different.⁴⁹ But this isn’t to say that the role of male singer and female singer are interchangeable. On the contrary, there are profoundly different expectations placed on men and women within both traditional performance and the pop industry, and the pressures and incentives involved in musical and televised self-presentation are entirely different for women than men. This dichotomy is not just present in videos, interview, and live performances, it is also played out in areas outside of visual presentation, such as

⁴⁹ The issues around gender and vocal practice in Arabic pop are of course much more complicated than presented here. For an introduction to some of these issues see Frishkopf, *Music and Media in the Arab World*; Danielson, “New Nightingales of the Nile”; Virginia Danielson, “Min al-Mashāyikh: A View of Egyptian Musical Tradition,” *Asian Music: Journal of the Society for Asian Music* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 1990): 113–127; Shereen Abdel-Nabi et al., “Pop Goes the Arab World: Popular Music, Gender, Politics, and Transnationalism in the Arab World,” *Hawwa* 2, no. 2 (2004): 231–254.

song topics and lyrics. It would for example, be difficult to picture a male star singing Haifa Wehbe's "*Bous al wawa*" (Kiss the Boo-boo) or Nancy 'Ajram's songs for children. Both of these examples come from a subgenre of songs either directed to children, or ostensibly directed towards children with a sexualized presentation revealing an adult audience. This subgenre is, I would argue, based to a large extent on the simultaneous pressures encouraging women in the Arabic pop industry to present both as sexual objects and as respectable family women.

Nevertheless, women are fundamental to the understanding of mass-mediated Arabic song to an extent which perhaps belies the ratio of male stars to female ones. On the one hand, technologies of mass media music distribution allowed the possibility of women's public performance without the same level of public criticism on religious grounds. Virginia Danielson describes the impact on women singers in Egypt:

The media had a profound effect on the careers of women singers.

Whereas formerly their audiences had been restricted primarily to other women, with the advent of recording and radio, they could now sing to everybody, which greatly enlarged their audiences, not to mention their incomes. They could also do so without setting foot in the more disreputable venues of public entertainment.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Virginia Danielson, "New Nightingales of the Nile: Popular Music in Egypt Since the 1970s," *Popular Music* 15, no. 03 (1996), 302.

Simultaneously, the development of Arabic mass-mediated song is to a large extent the story of women, and the individual voices heard most often in Syria and the Arab world on both historical and contemporary radio belong to women.

As Racy has stated in regards to *ṭarab* performance:

Notwithstanding the historical centrality of the male perspective and the tensions that have surrounded female artistry, the *ṭarab* culture grants women qualitative importance in an area considered quintessential to affective *ṭarab*-making, namely singing.⁵¹

Perhaps because of the persistent reality that women must in many (but not all) cases defy gender expectations and societal pressures in order to perform in public, and in doing so enter into a still male-dominated public space, general differences between men and women's singing styles are much smaller in Arabic popular than in many Western styles. Men and women who want to engage with the twentieth century canon of Arabic vocal performance sing many of the same songs, often without even the need to change the gender in the lyrics, and without the assumption of gender-crossing that occurs in the West when a man performs a song made famous by a woman.

Within the Radio Sawa playlist, a listener is presented with a division of gender roles in the English language musical aesthetic that is very different from one presented within the Arabic language one. What's interesting isn't necessarily that the gender roles

⁵¹ A.J. Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Ṭarab*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18.

assigned in Arab and Western popular musics diverge; it is what those contrasting gender roles say about pop songs as labor. By creating a sonic definition of pop singing that involves specialized, gendered vocal techniques, I would suggest that the English language playlist on Radio Sawa has the potential to imply a musical division of labor between varieties of vocal practice that isn't present in the same way in Arabic song, where Racy has pointed out, vocal production and music is understood as an extension of the natural properties of speech.⁵² This division of labor in Anglophone song, wherein a performer engages in musical work precisely by differentiating pop singing from regular vocalization, carries with it the format of a musical consumer economy: musical labor is produced by specialists in order to be consumed by audiences.

This hermeneutic for interpreting the music on Radio Sawa as an expression of a consumerist relationship to music should not be read as an assertion that the Arabic music industry is *not* highly consumerist, or is not generally viewed as such. Criticisms of the commercial focus of the Arabic music are an ever-present aspect of the discourse about music industry, generally focused around music video clips and televised song contests. These critiques often explicitly link consumerism with gender and sexuality, as in the following passage from Egyptian literature scholar Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri's essay "Ruby and the Checkered Heart":

It is a well-known fact that escalating libidinal voracity is a function of consumerism...The viewer is implicitly encouraged to pursue individual

⁵² Ibid, 32.

pleasures through increased consumption – the unabashed pursuit of narrow self-interest through purchase.⁵³

Other criticisms of the televised music industry consider the music an entirely peripheral element of the economic process, as with the Syrian singer who describes singing contest shows as “Machines for attracting SMS messages.”⁵⁴

Much of the commentary on Radio Sawa has described it as the logical culmination of a certain history of music in American international broadcasting, an idealistic venture born out of a belief in music’s power to communicate and connect. A closer listen reveals a theory of music predicated not on the idea that it communicates American values or brings listeners closer to some idea of America, but rather on the notion that music is a commodity, traded to Arab listeners in the first step of the audience manufacture process.

This process of musical audience manufacture illustrates the concept of “metrology,” as defined by Bruno Latour:

Metrology is the name of this gigantic enterprise to make of the outside a world inside which facts and machines can survive. Termites build their obscure galleries with a mixture of mud and their own droppings;

⁵³ Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri, “Ruby and the Checkered Heart,” in *Mass Media and Music in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 168.

⁵⁴ “Adhina al-‘ālī: yajib al-istifāda min tajribat al-drāmā al-sūriyya wa isqāṭha ‘alā al-ghinā” *BaladnaOnline.net* October 4, 2010. http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=48320 (accessed June 10, 2012).

scientists build their enlightened networks by giving the outside the same paper form as that of their instruments inside. In both cases the result is the same: they can travel very far without ever leaving home.⁵⁵

What I hear with Radio Sawa is music as a metrological force, music creating the world within which music can make sense as a commodity, and within which listeners can be made into an audience for American political messages. The question of the efficacy of these broadcasts in “moving the needle” of Arab public opinion towards the US is somewhat separate from this discussion. However, it seems worthwhile to note that while the idea of turning listeners into consumers to inoculate them against communism might have made sense in the context of the Cold War, there is no particular reason to believe that being a consumer of American products in 2012 Baghdad, for example, makes one any more inclined to view American policy positively. On the contrary, as Timothy Mitchell argues in “McJihad: Islam in the US Global Order”, many groups on the other side of the ‘Global War on Terror’ have origins precisely in encounters with the particular deficiencies and the illogic of American capitalism in the Middle East.⁵⁶

In Radio Sawa’s daily segment *Hikmat al-Youm* (“Wisdom of the Day”), listeners are presented with a short saying or inspirational quotation from writers and celebrities such as Khalil Gibran, Magic Johnson or Henry David Thoreau. On the day examined in this chapter, the particular bit of wisdom was an Arabic saying “*al-kalāmu šifat al-mutakkallim*” (“Speech defines the speaker”). While this concept might be embraced by

⁵⁵ Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1987), 251.

⁵⁶ Timothy Mitchell, “McJihad: Islam in the US Global Order,” *Social Text* 73 (2002): 1–18.

Sawa's broadcasters for the news they broadcast, when it comes to music, Radio Sawa's musical communication is meant to say little about the speaker. Rather, we might say that *al-mūsīqā šifat al-mustami 'īn* - music defines the audience.

However, while broadcasters may engage in attempts to define their audiences, listeners also define the music through how they listen. The next section of this chapter describes some of the specific ways in which Western music, and in particular American music and the music played by Radio Sawa, is integrated into Syrian radio categories.

Western Songs and Arabic Radio Taxonomies

I have argued that foreign music is often understood in the context of Syrian radio as part of local categories for radio listening. As I discuss in Chapter 3, national origin can be a significant part of the way in which music is understood, but even for songs in language other than Arabic, the 'foreignness' or 'Westernness' of a song is not a constant determined by the biography of the performer or the location of its production. Rather the extent to which the playlist of a station sounds foreign, or in the case of Radio Sawa sounds 'American' depends not on the relative prevalence of foreign or American songs in its playlist, but rather on the prevalence of music that cannot easily be fit into established categories of Syrian radio listening. How then, does American music, and specifically the music played on the US-backed Radio Sawa, fit in with this musical taxonomy? I would argue that the most basic way in which Western songs are interpreted within the Syrian radioscope is by fitting into one of the musical and programming categories discussed in Chapter 3.

One of the significant ways is by conforming to some of the aesthetic and stylistic standards of these categories. A song that has English or French lyrics, but which also has some musical aspects which can be fit into one of these existing categories, is in some ways considered foreign, but not necessarily other. In Arabic one might say *ajnaḅbi* but not *ujnib* - foreign, but not to be dismissed or pushed away. In his book *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*, Marwan Kraidy describes this phenomenon in television genres in Lebanon and the ways in which “young Maronite viewers placed Mexican telenovelas within the “Arab” generic category” based on genre specifications like story structure, acting style, and the centrality of family relationships in plots, despite the fact that these programs were objectively foreign.⁵⁷ Admittedly, the population Kraidy was studying has a complicated relationship with the idea of “arabness” where “Arab” is sometimes a descriptor of the self and sometime an other. However, I would argue that within the Syrian radioscope all categories consist, to some extent, of these kinds of combinations of authenticity and hybridity.

An similar process to the association of Latin American telenovelas with Arab *musalsalāt* happens with Western music on Arabic radio. Thus a song like Celine Dion’s *My Heart Will Go On* is now considered fully *rūmānsī*, even to the point of being covered in Syrian colloquial Arabic. After hearing the Syrian version of the song, I asked one acquaintance who had previously mentioned to me that he liked Celine Dion’s recording if he had heard it sung in Arabic, and if so what he thought of the Arabic version. His reply “Why would we need that? We have Celine Dion’s recording?”

⁵⁷ Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, Or The Cultural Logic Of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 130.

illustrates the condition of a song which has been fully interpolated into a local musical framework. It might have come from another country, and be in a language that one doesn't fully understand, but it is familiar enough and fits well enough into an established listening pattern, that attempts to Arabize the song are superfluous.

Conversely, Western genre norms for popular music do not necessarily stand once a song enters the Syrian radioscope. Western listeners to Arab media often hear combinations and juxtapositions of Western music which can sound odd to our ears, and assume that these juxtapositions originate from an unsophisticated understanding of Western genre or a lack of knowledge of Western music. In fact, these juxtapositions can become perfectly understandable when heard within the context of locally relevant musical categories, rather than Western genre expectations. In the following section I will discuss a few of the basic musical parameters (of course there are social parameters as well) for genre construction that we are all familiar with from American pop music and address how they can end up with a different valence within the context of Syrian Radio.

In the context scholarly taxonomies of popular music, Fabian Holt has argued that stylistic analysis of musical qualities is insufficient to the task of illuminating the criteria by which music genres are created and understood:

A musicological method of defining music is the simple *style* analysis that registers musical qualities in parameters such as form, harmony and so on. This is useful for the purpose of giving technical descriptions of some aspects of genres and its range is broadest when dealing with a small genre. However,

simple style analysis confines itself to a rather limited range of aspects and has little conceptual space for psychological, aesthetic, and social aspects.⁵⁸

While acknowledging the limitations of stylistic analysis divorced from a context of social practices and values, the scholarship on mass-mediated Arabic popular music presents something of the opposite problem. Due to the dominance of music video channels and televised song contests, and the significance of the various political and religious battles over depictions of women and women's bodies on television, the discourse around mass-mediated pop music has tended to focus overwhelmingly on these visual issues in way which can sometimes obscure the differences existing within even the 'poppiest' of pop musics. As scholars of popular music like Ellie Hisama have shown, musical analyses addressing the specific sonic characteristics of popular music need not be divorced from the race, gender, class, and power issues embedded in the discourses and reception of popular music. On the contrary, these issues are socially instantiated and reproduced in music at the sonic level, in addition to the discursive level.⁵⁹

In the following pages, I will describe some of the musical elements that allow Western pop music to appear under an entirely different set of genre expectations and *not* seem out of place: timbre, rhythm, lyrics, song structure and melodic contour, and the "Spanish Tinge" in Arabic popular music.

⁵⁸ Fabian Holt, "Genre Formation in Popular Music." *Musik & Forskning* 28 (2003), 87.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Ellie Hisama, "From L'Étranger to 'Killing an Arab': Representing the Other in a Cure Song," in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland Press, 2000), 59-74.

Timbre

Within American pop music, timbre and orchestration are probably the most significant ways in which listeners identify musical genre and historical period.⁶⁰ Other factors such as song form, tempos, melodic contour etc. may vary a great deal between genres or specific songs, but I would argue that they don't have the same periodizing function within popular music. Timbre, however, allows radio listeners in the US to place a song with a remarkable degree of specificity and accuracy. To give a few examples from American pop radio, the guitar tremolo of Dick Dale's "Miserlou" (1963), the combination of guitar and synth patch on Tears for Fears' "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" (1985), or the post-Eddie Vedder vocal timbre of Creed's "With Arms Wide Open" (2001), are all immediately identifiable to certain American radio listeners as coming from very specific times and sets of genre associations, such that we don't need any prior familiarity with the individual songs in order to correctly identify when they were recorded, and what kind of station or program might play them. These timbre cues aren't sufficient to describe a genre, but they are often enough to signify a genre, and the larger set of associated musical and social ideas around it. While timbre is also significant to genre and temporal differentiation in Syria, Syrian listeners tend to have different timbre expectations.

One common way which the timbral expectations of American and Syria listeners differ is in responses to the synthesizer, or *org* as it is often referred to in Arabic. To take one example out of many, Nancy Ajram's 2003 hit "*Sahr 'Uyūnu*" begins with an *org* figure which, to someone who grew up in the US in the 1980s, immediately signals the

⁶⁰ For an overview of the music cognition literature on timbre perception, see: Stephen McAdams and Bruno L. Giordano, "The Perception of Musical Timbre," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology*, ed. Susan Hallam, Ian Cross, and Michael Thaut (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72–80.

middle years of that decade.⁶¹ Until the recent wave of 80s nostalgia in American pop culture, the only way that one would hear that timbre on American radio would have been in the context of an explicitly 80s themed playlist, though this type of synthesizers timbre is widespread in both pan-Arab *shabābī* music and various types of *sha 'bī*, more locally identified musics. Describing any timbre is inherently difficult without resorting to references or analogies. This particular song serves as a useful example however, as in addition to the synth tone, the actual line played by the *org* is reminiscent, at least to my ears, of a particular kind of keyboard playing popular in the 1980s, and thus a transcription might do a bit to imply the timbre.

⁶¹ Anne Rasmussen, "Theory and Practice at the 'Arabic Org': Digital Technology in Contemporary Arab Music Performance," *Popular Music* 15, no. 03 (1996): 345–365.

The image displays a musical score for the introduction of Nancy Ajram's song "Saḥr 'Uyūnu". The score is arranged in four staves: Organ (Org), Guitar, Bass, and Drums. The Organ part features a melodic line in the treble clef with a common time signature (C). The Guitar part is also in the treble clef and includes a section labeled "(Wah Wah Power Chords)". The Bass part is in the bass clef, and the Drums part is in the common time signature (C) with a drum set icon. The score is divided into two systems by a double bar line. The first system shows the initial instrumental introduction, and the second system continues the piece with more complex rhythmic patterns and melodic developments.

Figure 4.5: Transcription of *org* introduction to Nancy Ajram's "*Saḥr 'Uyūnu*"

Musicians don't use these timbres because they are 25 years behind in some Western teleology of the keyboard, rather there are specific reasons that these synth timbres have remained popular. As Anne Rasmussen has described in her work with Arab-American musicians, synthesizers have become remarkably prevalent in the live performance of Arabic popular music at weddings and events, partially as a result of the

ability to alter pitches to conform to the quarter-tones of *maqāmāt*.⁶² The *org* was originally popularized in Egypt by Hany Shenuda in the context of a series of Arabic-Western bands, and the ability of the instrument to play both Western associated music and Arabic-associated music (*maqāmāt* with quarter-tones) has been central to the popularization of the instrument.⁶³

The prevalence of these particular synthesizer timbres on the radio is not limited to the Arabic-language playlist. Western music which contains these timbres, often meaning songs from the “long 80s” as I discuss in the previous chapter, forms a disproportionate percentage of the total Western playlist on Syrian radio. English language songs also form a significant portion of the *hādi’* (calm) portions of the playlist on Version FM. Here however, they are mixed in with Arabic and Western songs from a variety of time periods, with a bias on the Arabic side for more recent songs. One thus hears songs grouped together on Syrian radio in ways which are baffling to western ears, but make perfect sense given this taxonomy. The result of this contrasting set of timbre expectations is that Western songs from decades ago often appear in blocks of new *shabābī* (youth-oriented) music, or *hādi’* music with sonic markers that to Western ears would place them in an 80s nostalgic radio format.

As in much of the world, the synthesizer is also valued for its ability to emulate other instruments. In addition to providing for a cheap substitute for a variety of instruments in live performance situations, this capability is especially valuable in recording television and radio theme music on a low budget. Television and radio music

⁶² Rasmussen, “Theory and Practice at the ‘Arabic Org’.”

⁶³ Michael Frishkopf, “Some Meanings of the Spanish Tinge in Contemporary Egyptian Music,” *Mediterranean Mosaic: Popular Music and Global Sounds*. New York, London: Routledge (2003), 11.

is especially important in Syria, which produces many of the popular soap operas viewed across the Arab World, and maintains a strong tradition of radio drama, especially during Ramadan. The theme music and underscoring for these programs often is often based on synth string patches, though in contrast to much television scoring in the US, relatively little attempt is made to disguise the “synth-i-ness” the sounds.

An example which combines of the prevalence of Western music from the 1980s and electronic timbres which dominate television and radio theme music, as well as the type of thing which tends come across as absurd to American ears, can be heard in the opening music to a program on Syrian state radio (*Ṣawt al-Shabāb* division) in which legal experts explain the meanings of new legal decrees. As one listens to the introduction to the program, and the welcome for the day’s expert, the following melody underscores the talk.

The image displays a musical score for two instruments: Keyboard and Drum Machine. The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of music. The first system is labeled "Teshri'at jadida..." and the second system is labeled "...i'adad wa taqdim marwan khadhir...".

The Keyboard part is written in treble clef. The first system shows a melody starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The second system continues the melody with quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F60, G60, 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The prevalence of music from this period is not restricted to the predominantly Arabophone stations. As one DJ for MIX FM, the largely Anglophone Syrian pop station put it: “This is the golden age of pop music.”⁶⁴

To make this discussion of timbre more complicated, readers who pay attention to popular radio in the US, or have seen the film *Drive*, will have noticed that 80s synth sounds have made a big come-back in Western pop music in 2011 and 2012. Thus to some extent American popular music has come around recently to a more Levantine timbral aesthetic.⁶⁵

Rhythm

One of the most contested but fluid distinctions in Arab popular music is between *shabābī* youth pop music, and *sha‘bī* music which maintains a closer relationship to folk dance genres (Syria this means primarily *dabke* and its relatives.) These two categories exist on a continuum where a variety of factors including instrumentation, lyric style, and melody can all shift a song one way or the other, but one common distinction is rhythmic, with a straighter European style dance beat associated with *shabābī*, and the more syncopated patterns of *dabke* dance forms connecting a song with a “*baladī*” or rural, country feeling, specific to the Levant.

⁶⁴ “Reasons why 80s and 90s music is still alive in Syria” *Baladna English*, March 10, 2011, available at <http://damascusian.wordpress.com/2011/03/12/reasons-why-80s-and-90s-music-is-still-alive-in-syria/> (accessed June 5, 2012).

⁶⁵ It is notable that many Syrian *ṭarab* performers largely reject the org. (Thanks to Jonathan Shannon for pointing this out.) Further research might explore the extent to which the resurgence of these timbres in Western pop has to do with an engagement with non-Western pop music from the Arab world and South Asia, in addition to the standard explanation of nostalgia for the music of the 1980s.

informs the latter, more *shabābī* recording. The use of more syncopated or elaborate *īqā'āt* moves a song further down along the *sha'bī-shabābī* spectrum towards the *sha'bī* side, and is this associated with more authentically Arab folk styles.

According to Silverstein, the most common rhythmic pattern in Syrian dabke is *nawari*.⁶⁷ Arabic rhythmic patterns are usually described in terms of bass strokes (*dum*) and treble strokes (*tak*), and thus the basic eight-beat construction of *nawari* would be depicted [tD-t D-t].

She states:

“In performance practice, the first *tak* is rarely played and the first *dum* is emphasized as an offbeat. *Nawari* most often occurs as a repeating 4-bar phrase. [-D--D-t-] [-D--D-t-] [-D--D-t-] [-DDDD-t-].”⁶⁸

In contrast, much mass-mediated music emphasizes a strong downbeat, [DD-t D-t-] or [Dt-t-D-t-] Although these are two of the most common *īqā'āt* in all sorts of *dabke*, they are particularly common in more *shabābī* Arab pop, as the 8 beat figures integrate easily with Western pop elements.⁶⁹ In many mass-mediated pop songs, as in more *sha'bī* *dabke* performances, the use of these *īqā'āt* varies throughout the course of a single song. In general, I would argue that the use of more syncopated rhythmic forms, without the underlying straight-eighth pulse which characterizes *shabābī* dance tunes, is indicative of a performance which would be considered further along the *sha'bī* end of the *shabābī-sha'bī* spectrum.

⁶⁷ Silverstein, *Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging*. 126.

⁶⁸ Silverstein also describes a number of other *īqā'āt* as widespread in *dabke* performance. *Ibid.* 126.

⁶⁹ More on this in Chapter 4.

Two recent examples of this rhythmic signification being employed by singers with backgrounds in the televised popular song come from Nassif Zeytoun and Mohammed Daqdouq. Daqdouq, was a contestant on *Star Academy* in 2008, and Nassif Zeytoun was the first Syrian winner on the program in 2010.

Both of these songs employ highly syncopated rhythms which at certain points leave a great deal of musical space between beats, a style which differentiates them from more *shabābī* songs which tend to fill in the meter with continuous eighth-notes even when employing or alluding to *sha'bī* rhythmic *iqā'āt*.

The figure displays a musical score for the song "Wenweit" by Nassif Zeytoun. It consists of a vocal line and three percussion lines (Treble, Bass, and Snare) in common time. The vocal line features a syncopated melody with lyrics: "wen - way - t gha - ir 'a - da - ti we - n-sa - y - t kul al bin - at". The Treble Percussion line shows a complex, syncopated rhythm with various note values and rests. The Bass Percussion line follows a similar pattern, and the Snare line provides a steady, simple accompaniment. The overall style is characterized by highly syncopated rhythms and significant musical space between beats.

Figure 4.9: Syncopated rhythmic pattern of Nassif Zeytoun's "Wenweit"

These examples are not the *sha 'bī* music that would generally be performed live at weddings and feasts, and these songs do appear on Syrian radio, as opposed to existing primarily in the physical distribution networks of cassettes and cds. However, they do hold a similar kind of position in the musical life of Damascus. One would hear these songs in a *servīs*, coming from the cab of a truck, or played by a group of young men, but probably not in an upscale café or shop, where the dominant programming category is more likely to be *hadi'* or *rūmānsi* songs. In the case of Zeytoun and Daqdouq, there is probably a level of career calculation in releasing music in this style. While the *shabābī* and *rūmānsi* pop songs allowed them to succeed in pan-Arab singing contests, in order to make money playing Syrian weddings, where big stars can command sizeable fees, one needs to demonstrate the ability to make music to which people can dabke.

Naturally, there aren't many foreign or American songs which fit into the "*sha 'bī*" or folk category, but this type of rhythmic distinction between folk or regionally affiliated pop music does have significance for the ways in which American music enters this taxonomy. When it comes to hip hop and hip hop influenced pop music, for example, one often hears rapping vocalities on both Radio Sawa and on local Syrian and Lebanese radio. However, songs which include rapping over a straight-4 dance beat enter the *shabābī* or youth category more easily. Conversely, hip hop with a more syncopated beats, such as this Timbaland beat, tend not to get as much radio play.

The image shows a rhythmic transcription of Lil Wayne's "Up and Way" by Timbaland. It consists of four staves: Voice, Synth, Bass Drum, and Snare. The Voice staff has lyrics "up up and a-way" and "up up up and a-way". The Synth staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes. The Bass Drum staff shows a pattern of eighth notes. The Snare staff shows a pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 4.10: Rhythmic transcription from Lil Wayne’s “Up and Way”, produced by Timbaland

Hip hop fans still listen to this type of music, but not fitting into the general conventions of shabābī, it does not appear as often on regular pop radio, and remains more foreign.⁷⁰

LYRICS

Another aspect of Western songs which has a significant impact for how they are interpolated into Syrian radio is lyrical content, and not just for listeners who speak English. While the number of English speakers is growing rapidly as the elite send their children to foreign universities, and the middle-class graduates more and more University students from English-intensive fields, English language knowledge is much lower in Syria than in its immediate neighbors Lebanon and Jordan.⁷¹ Still, most Syrians know at least a few words of English; if one knows even a few words of English, these are likely to include common love song staples like *Love, Heart, Baby, Eyes, Fire*, in the same way that anyone who has listened to a few Arabic pop songs can recognize *ya Habībī, Albī*,

⁷⁰ This distinction between songs with rapping over techno and euro-pop beats vs rapping over syncopated hip-beats also exists on a lot of US hip hop radio, but that is an areas for further research.

⁷¹ See Terc, “Syria’s New Neoliberal Elite: English Usage, Linguistic Practices and Group Boundaries.”

‘Umrī, or *Najm hayyātī*. Ballads in particular tend to have slower, more understandable lyrics, which help with the process of picking out occasional words, and identifying them with romance. The following figure takes a love song by Brian Adams and obscures all but the most common words.

Look into my eyes, you will see
 What you mean to me
 Search your heart, search your soul
 And when you find me there you will see
 ...
 Don't tell me I'm not worth loving for
 You can't tell me I'm not worth dying for
 You know I'm true
 Everything I do is for you
 ...
 There's no love, there's no love
 And no other words you know love
 There's nothing, nothing you're there
 All the time all the time

Figure 4.11: The lyrics from Brian Adams’ “Everything I Do” as heard by a listener with limited English.

One could argue that for many songs, even native English speakers consciously pick out only a percentage of lyrics. While for certain highly educated audiences and certain songs, the specific lyrics are central to their experience of the song (at a nightclub in Damascus I once witnessed a group of thirty wealthy young Syrians singing along with REM’s “Losing My Religion”) but for other audiences, a few recognizably romantic words are enough to help categorize a song as *rūmānsi*, even for listeners with barely any English language proficiency.

Orchestration and Melodic Contour

Two other aspects of Western songs which tend to ease their integration into the *rūmānsī* or *hādi*’ category are melodic contour and orchestrational style, especially when they combine in the romantic “power ballad” style associated with singers like Celine Dion and Whitney Houston. A slow piano introduction is for example is standard fare on either an Arabic or Western ballad on Syrian radio. Most Arabic pop arrangements have at least a foot in the world of chordal, functional harmony, but many listeners have a relationship with melody that includes maqam-based models of musical construction. This includes expectation of longer phrase lengths, an emphasis on melodic variation, and and a familiarity with parsing long, linear melodies.⁷²

In particular, foreign ballads that heavily feature repeated contours and melodic sequences tend to be featured prominently on Syrian radio. For example, consider the first phrase of Elissa’s “*A Bālī Ḥabībī*”:

'a ba-li ha - bi - bi 'a ba-li ha - bi - bi a-gham rek ma-a a-tril - e - k

i - sr - ek ma-a ra - j - 'a - k a-hib - sel ma ta - l-'ak min al-bi wa la youm

Figure 4.12: Elissa “*A Bālī Ḥabībī*” first phrase

⁷² Munthir Ayari has done interesting work on this in the field of music perception, with several collaborators. See Mondher Ayari and Stephen McAdams, “Aural Analysis of Arabic Improvised Instrumental Music (Taqsīm),” *Music Perception* 21, no. 2 (2003): 159–216; Olivier Lartillot and Mondher Ayari, “Segmentation of Tunisian Modal Improvisation: Comparing Listeners’ Responses with Computational Predictions,” *Journal of New Music Research* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 117–127; Mondher Ayari and Hamdi Makhoulouf eds. *Musique, Signification Et Émotion* (Sampzon: Delatour France, 2010).

The melody begins with two short repeated gestures (“a bālī ḥabībī” and “aghamrak ma atrakak”), built on stepwise motion. An elaboration of the second gesture concludes the phrase. The Western ballads in high rotation on Syrian radio similarly tend to be based on repeated melodic gestures and stepwise motion.

“Spanish Tinge”

In his article “Some Meanings of the Spanish Tinge in Contemporary Egyptian Music” Michael Frishkopf explores the role of Latin musical elements in Egyptian pop form the 1990s.⁷³ He employs an ethnohistorical methodology to describe some of the ways in which fans of Egyptian popular music conceive of this Latin musical influence. Through discussions with Egyptian listeners, he addresses a number of possible explanations for the “Spanish Tinge” in Egyptian and pan-Arab pop music; of those explanations, several are particularly relevant to the Syrian context.

The first is the historical relationship between Syria and *al-Andalus* (medieval Islamic Spain). Frishkopf addresses the “Andalusian argument” in his article, noting the historical connections with Arab culture, and stating that this interlocutors “hear the ‘ud in the guitar, flamenco’s ‘ole’ as a corruption of ‘Allah’.”⁷⁴ The music-historical connection between Syria and al-Andalus is even more fundamental than the Egyptian one. As Jonathan Shannon has noted, the quintessentially Aleppine *muwashshah* is of probably Andalusian origin, and al-Andalus maintains a powerful presence in the minds

⁷³ Frishkopf, “Some Meanings of the Spanish Tinge in Contemporary Egyptian Music.”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

of Syrians musicians and listeners.⁷⁵ This is true for popular as well as art music, and discussions of Spanish or Latin American music in Syria often refer to Al-Andalus.

A second, more historically recent avenue for the transmission of the “Spanish Tinge” (one not discussed by Frishkopf) is the huge Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian diasporic population throughout Latin America.⁷⁶ The connection between *bilad ash-sham* and Latin America is evidenced by innumerable cultural signs, from the countless *shabāb* in Damascus and Beirut who drink Argentinian *mate* tea through a metal straw, to the current Lebanese-Cuban group Hanine y son Cubano, which combines Arabic lyrics and vocal style with a Cuban son ensemble. The multi-directional musical flow between Syrian/Lebanon, the US and Europe, and Latin Americas has been a significant fact for decades; As Christopher Reed Stone notes of the early careers of the Rahbani brothers in the 1950s: “Much of what they wrote was of the Latin dance music variety that was so popular in Europe and the US at this time.”⁷⁷

There are also a set of musical overlaps, as Frischkopf notes:

The compatibility is timbral (both musics center on similar stringed instruments), rhythmic (Arab cycles such as *bamb* and *malfuf* mesh easily with clave), and formal. Unlike traditional Arab music, Spanish music is harmonic and does not [employ] quartertones; however since the 1970s

⁷⁵ See Jonathan Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006); and “Performing Al-andalus, Remembering Al-andalus: Mediterranean Soundings from Mashriq to Maghrib,” *Journal of American Folklore* (2007): 308–334.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the Syrian-Lebanese diaspora in Brazil, see John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2007).

⁷⁷ Christopher Reed Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 43.

Arab music has developed harmony, and gradually reduced the use of quartertones. Furthermore, two Arabic scales lacking quartertones are central to Spanish musics: *nahawand* (analogous to the Western minor mode), and *kurd* (analogous to flamenco's Phrygian scale); furthermore, these two modes stir musical emotion quickly, an important quality for short shabābī songs (in which there is no time for the longer modal developments and modulations of older *ṭarab* music).⁷⁸

Shayna Silverstein's discussion of the kinesthetic properties of the 3 against 2 rhythmic feel in dabke performance similarly brings to mind the Afro-Caribbean clave.⁷⁹

The result of these historical and musical connections between Arabic popular music and Latin American music is that a wide variety of Latin elements appear both in Arabophone popular music and the Anglophone popular music on Syrian and Lebanese radio. Many of the songs in frequent rotation on Radio Sawa during the sample period (for example Hany Shaker's "Ahla al-dhikrayyat", Tamer Hosny's "Smile", or Anwar El Amir's "Kiffō") feature Spanish or Latin-American style guitars.

The popularity of these musical elements extends to the Western music appearing on local radio. For example, the Eagles' "Hotel California" is an incredibly popular song throughout the Arab World. I've found that the guitar-heavy Gypsy Kings recording of the song appears even more often than the Eagles original on Syrian radio.

⁷⁸ Frishkopf, "Some Meanings of the Spanish Tinge in Contemporary Egyptian Music", 14.

⁷⁹ Silverstein, *Mobilizing Bodies in Syria: Dabke, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Belonging*, 139.

Listening to Radio Fann over the internet, between *fairūziyyāt* was a cover version of Michael Jackson's "Beat It", featuring an electric keyboard over a calm (*hādi*) bossa-nova beat. Though a "Western" song by most definitions, I would consider this one of the most representative songs that one could possibly hear on Syrian radio, a song that is by a performer so popular that his biography and place in an "authenticating geneology" (as the "King of Pop") and known to most listeners. The familiar keyboard timbres, the Latin rhythm, and the *hādi*' affect all combine to create a song that within the Syrian radioscope may be literally *ajnaḇī* (foreign) but is absolutely not *ujnib* (foreign, or to be pushed away).

Conclusion

Scholarship on globalization often explores hybridity and genre mixing at the intersections between transnational and local music. Rather than addressing a hybridity of musical genres, this chapter has proposed a hybridity of listening categories, by which listeners are able to make sense of a piece of music in multiple ways, and music does not have to be a hybrid in the nature of its constituent parts in order to fit into multiple cognitive categories.

The goal of this analysis is not to identify which songs the US government should broadcast to correspond with Syrian tastes. It is not even clear that such a task would bring Radio Sawa closer to its political goals. Rather, I contend that the extent to which the playlist of a station sounds "foreign", or in the case of Radio Sawa sounds "American" depends not on the relative prevalence of foreign or American songs in its

playlist, but rather on the prevalence of music that cannot easily be fit into established categories of Syrian radio listening.

This can be illustrated with a graphic map of Radio Sawa’s Levant playlist, using the categories introduced in the previous chapter.

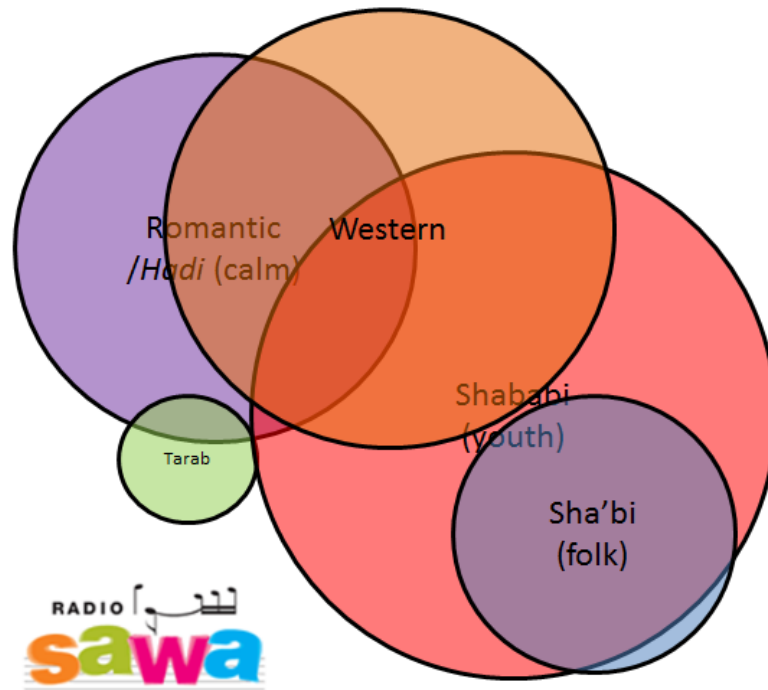


Figure 4.13: Graphic Representation of Radio Sawa’s Levant playlist

Within the graphic above, the music which programmers, broadcasters, and listeners would most readily describe as foreign is that segment of the “Western” circle which does not overlap with any other category.

Now, compare Figure 4.13 to the maps of Version FM from Chapter 3.

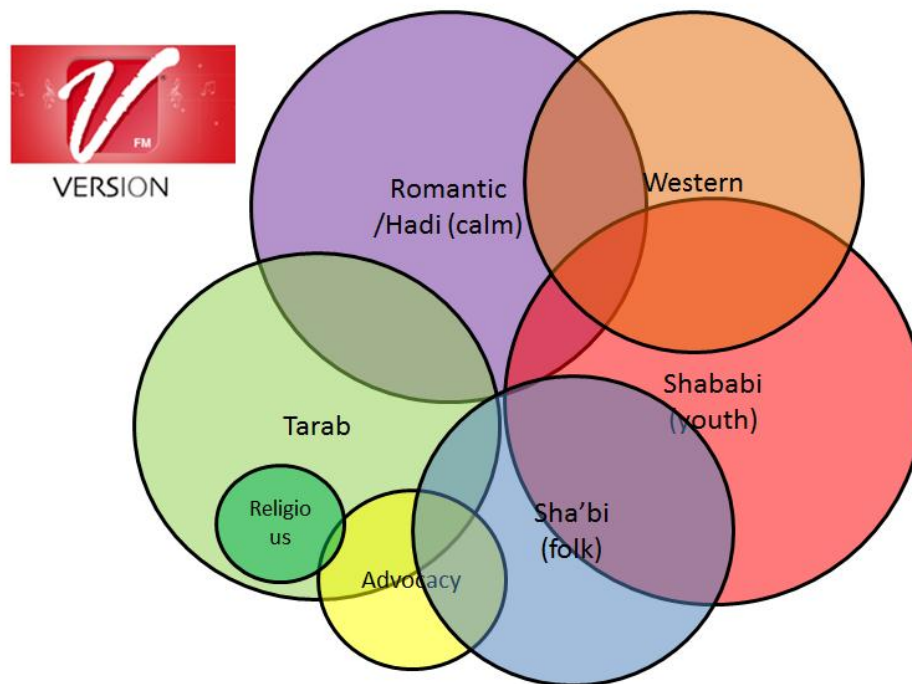


Figure 4.14: Graphic Representation of a typical private station playlist in Syria.

While Radio Sawa plays a higher percentage of Western music relative to its overall 24 hour playlist, Version FM, along with several other primarily Arabic language stations actually plays a similar amount of the Western music which doesn't fit into the other categories. In the case of Version FM this is largely late night sets of Western genres like blues, country, rock music, jazz, instrumental music, etc... Other Western music that appears on the station overlaps with *shabābī* or *hādi'* categories.

Other distinctions between Radio Sawa and private stations are more obvious. Aimed specifically at youth, the Sawa plays very few *tarab* songs, which would presumably attract an older audience. The station similarly plays almost no advocacy or religious music.

The most audible difference between the musical playlists of Radio Sawa and local Syrian stations is not shown in this diagram. Both state and private Syrian stations vary the focus of their broadcasts according to the time of day. Fairuz in the morning and Umm Kulthum in the evening of course, but there might also be an afternoon *ṭarab* block, or a special late-night block of rock or jazz for dedicated fans. In contrast, the playlist of Radio Sawa remains constant, in a 24-hour stream that varies only for the occasional long-form news magazine show, replacing the usual 5 or 10 minute news break. Within the Syrian soundscape described in Chapter 2, Radio Sawa is something of an outlier in that does not change to conform to any of the various patterns which regulate people's listening habits: Fairuz to wake up and get dressed, talk shows and hits on the morning and evening commutes on public transportation, *hādi'* music for working through the day, late night music as background for long conversation.

The very consistency of the station's formatting and musical content sets the station apart from other options on the radio dial. Even the Syrian English language station, MIX FM, which uses the distributed production model pioneered by Norman Pattiz' Westwood One (DJs record in Beirut and the Gulf), doesn't have the 24-hour consistency which characterizes Radio Sawa. This consistency might be an asset to the station or a detriment, but it does reveal a fundamental difference between Radio Sawa and local stations especially Syrian state radio, which goes beyond the news content that Sawa provides.

Although Syrian and American state-sponsored radio broadcasts are in some ways analogous in terms of their aims, the methods employed by the two states are completely different. Both stations are, to use an Arabic term, *idhā'āt al-muwajjaha* (directed

broadcasts), tasked with mobilizing public opinion and public practice in ways which favor the broadcasting state. In the case of Syrian state radio, this means both providing services that are immediately useful to citizens, “addressing the public as social and moral agents rather than as mere consumers,” but also creating listeners who in their public lives display an acceptance for the symbols of the state, and concomitantly an acceptance for the interpretation of events described by the regime.⁸⁰ While Syrian state radio attempts to create and capture audiences using similar methods to any other station, and unlike Radio Sawa actually accepts money in exchange for running advertisements, a completely consumerist relationship to state radio is antithetical to the nominal ideology of the ruling party’s “social market economy.” More significantly however, a purely consumer relationship would negate the type of public performances which the regime requires citizens to enact in relation to the state and its organs.

On the other side, the theory of music suggested by Radio Sawa is one that depends on a consumer framework for the creation of its audiences. Although the station makes regular appeals to listeners as moral actors (the “Sawa Chat” segments for example) a radio-listener interaction in which listeners act as “mere consumers” is both the process and the goal. A consumer relationship is the method used to create audiences who can, in turn, become consumer citizens in the American world and worldview. This comes out of a US Cold War mindset assuming that individuals who consume American products are *a priori* acting in a manner congruent with the social and moral goals of the United States.

⁸⁰ Cécile Boëx, “The End of the State Monopoly over Culture: Toward the Commodification of Cultural and Artistic Production,” *Middle East Critique* 20, no. 2 (2011): 140.

One of the fundamental debates that takes place around American public diplomacy and “soft power” (defined by Joseph Nye as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments”) is over what factors actually ‘move the needle’ of Arab and Middle Eastern opinion towards the US.⁸¹ Advocates for public diplomacy efforts argue that negative opinions of the US come primarily because of an inaccurate perception of its policies, goals and motivations, either through outright lies and distortion of local media, or an overemphasis on negative news coming out of Iraq, Gaza, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc.⁸² On the other side, the main criticism of American public diplomacy in the Arab World states that Arab public opinion is driven by US policies and their repercussions, the “facts on the ground.”

The latter position was expressed vociferously by journalist Moussa As-Sayyid in the Syrian daily *Tishreen*:

When an Arab hears that nearly a million Iraqi civilians have died between the beginning of the invasion and today, and witnesses it, and is shocked daily, does he get drunk on American freedom, and lose himself in the valleys of forgetfulness? Not a hundred American satellite channels, and not one channel speaking in Arabic, can accomplish the task of improving this ugly picture.⁸³

⁸¹ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x.

⁸² See for example Kenneth Tomlinson, “Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa: Advancing Freedom in the Arab World,” *Arab Media & Society*, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 1-8. <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=185> (accessed November 9, 2011).

⁸³ Moussa As-Sayyid “jedel fi washinton hawl qanaa al-hura al-fida`ya min yujemmal haṭam al-ṣura” *Tishreen* June 4, 2007 <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/111701> (accessed June 10, 2012).

Outside of a few extreme voices in the United States who claim that Arab views of the United States are completely unrelated to American actions in the region, most scholars and policymakers exist somewhere between the two sides. They maintain that while the mass-media (including government directed media) have the ability to drive narratives, illuminate or conceal events, educate and mislead, a fundamental disagreement with US policy cannot be turned into agreement by any spin or media frame.

Chapter 5 – *Idhā‘at Sawa* and Asymmetric Music Politics

The asymmetry of power and information involved in globalized interactions between the centers of power and the periphery, or from the centers of media production to the outlying consumer areas, is one that has obvious implications for two of the main areas of concern for this dissertation – the transmission of music around the world and across political and cultural boundaries, and the use of music and other forms of cultural production to achieve political ends.

Though some early instances of the literature on the cultural aspects of globalization were bogged down in polarized debates of local vs. global, homogenization vs. hybridization, domination vs. resistance, or techno-determinism vs. cultural practice, the best examples from this literature have grappled with the complexities of this asymmetry, describing both the effects of the cultural, economic, and political flows going from the center outwards, and the ways in which local actors in the periphery dam, divert, or float along this flow, using it to their own particular ends.¹

In the case of Radio Sawa and the larger relationship between the US and the Arab world, all sides of the interaction, including the station’s funders, reporters, producers, and listeners, are cognizant of these asymmetries to some degree, and grapple with them in various ways. In this chapter, after briefly describing a particular type of media asymmetry relevant to the relationship

¹ For excellent examples of work on music and globalization, see: Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Recording Studio*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Erlmann, *Hearing Cultures*; David Novak, *Japan Noise: Global Media Circulation and the Transpacific Circuits of Experimental Music*. (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2006) and *Japanoise: The Cultural Feedback of Global Media Circulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2013); Martin Stokes, “Music and the Global Order.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (October 2004): 47–72.

between the US and the Middle East, I will discuss the music of Kulna Sawa (All of Us Together), a rock group from Damascus which has achieved a great deal of success in what some local writers have referred to as Syria's new wave (*al-mawja al-jadīda*) or alternative music (*al-mūsīqā al-badīla*) scenes.² Through an analysis of Kulna Sawa's 2009 album *Idhā'at Sawa* (Radio Together), this chapter will explore the ways that their music explores an asymmetrical relationship to the US in the context of a local environment, and the implications these efforts might have for the propagandistic project of Radio Sawa.

I examine the group not because they are an especially representative example of musical life in Damascus (except for a slice of the population) but because *Idhā'at Sawa* is a useful case study in musical politics. Thus this chapter should not be read as a commentary reflecting musical tastes of the average young person in Damascus in 2009 and 2010; these musicians and most of their fans are members of a very specific, upper or middle-class, well-educated social group, which represents only a small minority of musicians and listeners in Syria.

Despite often playing a style of music outside the Syrian mainstream, Kulna Sawa makes a conscious effort to address both local and international issues from a specifically Syrian framework, and this is especially audible on *Idhā'at Sawa*. The concept album imagines a pan-Arab radio station broadcasting across the Arab World, and integrates a variety of Western and Arabic musical styles into a series of politically themed songs. In this chapter I argue that *Idhā'at Sawa* demonstrates a particularly Syrian understanding of radio, music, and politics, and one that is in stark contrast to that proposed by the American Radio Sawa. In a reversal of Radio

² Rama Qanawāti, "khatwa lil-baḥṭh 'an mūsīqā jadīda mawja musīqā 'ālimiyya jadīda" *Shorufat* Vol. 55 June 15, 2009, <http://www.shorufat.com/read.php?sid=1799&id=13> (accessed February 12, 2012)

Hoda Qadour, "kulna sawa... wa mawja al-mūsīqā al-sūriyya al-jadīda" *Tishreen* 20 September 2009, <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/239891> (accessed May 15, 2012).

Sawa's attempt to use a musical frame to move listeners to consider an alternate political reality, *Idhā'at Sawa* uses a political frame to posit a new musical reality.

Asymmetries and Directed Media

The most oft-studied examples of international broadcasting come out of the two largest conflicts of the radio age, World War II and the Cold War. It is useful then to highlight the distinction between the political situation around Radio Sawa, and those foundational examples out of which the use of radio as a political medium arose, and which have driven most of the scholarly work on the phenomenon.

The first conflict involved a number of competing states of roughly the same class in terms of wealth and international power; Italy, Germany, Japan, France, Britain, the USA and the USSR were each engaged in propaganda efforts directed squarely towards the opposing powers, in addition to broadcasts directed to less powerful client and neutral states. As such, though many if not most of the people who listened to international radio broadcasts during WWII were not citizens of one of these powerful broadcasting nations, the literature on wartime radio is most comprehensive in those areas where Axis broadcasters are communicating to Allied listeners, or vice versa. In Chapter 1 I discussed the history of international broadcasting to the Middle East. This literature on this area, however, represents a tiny body of work in comparison to the scholarship that has been done on WWII broadcasting within Europe and in the Pacific. Very broadly, most of the discussion of propaganda radio in World War II addresses competition amongst roughly equal players, though each is naturally constrained and advantaged by particular circumstances. These players - Germany, Italy, and Japan, Britain, the USSR, and the

USA – dominated both the airwaves during World War II and the subsequent historiography of wartime broadcasting.

In the case of the Cold War, though the period saw the total number of international broadcasts increase dramatically as smaller states joined the airwaves, the main radio competition was reduced to the two roughly equal superpowers of the US and the USSR, assisted by ideological allies, proxies, and client groups on both sides, most significantly Britain on the US side. Even more than in WWII, it is clear here that the vast majority of listeners were not American or Soviet citizens, but rather members of third party (or often “Third World”) polities. Even including the Eastern bloc countries, the median radio listener during the Cold War was probably not a direct subject of either superpower. Despite this, historical analyses of Cold War radio have tended to frame the discussion either in terms of great power conflicts over Eastern Europe, or a small number of proxy battles.³ While understandable given the significance of that ideological and political competition, this trend in the literature has given short shrift to many of the relationships that radio listeners in the rest of the world, outside the direct control of either of the superpowers, would have had with these broadcasts.⁴

³ See, for example, Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); K.R.M. Short, *Western Broadcasting over the Iron Curtain* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); George R. Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy: My War within the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁴ A great deal of recent scholarship on the Cold War, though not specifically focused on broadcasting, has complicated that narrative by exploring the impact of the conflict on other regions, including the Middle East.

See for example: Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Domination in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009); Arne Odd Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Two Paired US Media Asymmetries and Their Relevance to American Diplomacy, Musical and Otherwise

Since the end of the Cold War, the practices of public diplomacy, propaganda, national branding, etc., or the various efforts by which states attempt to influence opinion outside of their borders, of which Radio Sawa is one example, are in the case of the United States invariably conditioned by two related asymmetries.⁵ The main asymmetry of wealth and power (both “hard” and “soft” varieties) between the US and any receiving nation of lesser power status (for the period since WWII up until the present, this means any other nation), advantages the US, while a converse asymmetry makes the job of influencing public opinion more difficult.

The first asymmetry, and the primary advantage that the US has in its efforts at cultural diplomacy, comes from its status as the lone economic and mass media superpower. The concentration of wealth and media networks controlled by the US allows American cultural products a level of preexisting market penetration around the world that is unequalled by any other country. In economic terms, the effort required to deliver an American product to almost anywhere in the world today is significantly less than the inverse, since the marginal nth film, song, or TV show is cheaper to market and sell than the first or second.⁶ The process of selling the US through American cultural products is in theory made easier by the fact that so many people are used to consuming American products in one way or another, and a certain level of demand already exists.

⁵ In retrospect, since the end of the Cold War it has become clear that this too was an asymmetrical battle, at least in economic terms, though for much of the period policymakers in the far wealthier United States were unaware of their sizable advantage over the USSR. See John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 84.

⁶ This equation is of course shifting rapidly as more and more media is consumed in digital form.

However, the very level of familiarity with products and culture from the metropole that this asymmetry engenders creates a complication for states attempting to exert political influence over periphery through non-coercive means. Since the flow of cultural information proceeds so strongly from rich countries towards the poorer ones, or, to restrict the discussion to the case at hand, from the US and Western Europe to the Middle East, the population of the Middle East is inevitably more familiar with the culture and politics of Western countries than vice versa.

This second asymmetry is the counterpart to the one mentioned above, and is especially significant for the practice of diplomacy, both “public” and otherwise. Around the world, but especially in the Middle East, the local counterparts to American diplomats are often Western educated, English-speaking people who are fluent in both the culture and politics of the US to an extent the reciprocal equivalent of which would be unimaginable to all but a few highly specialized experts. To generalize: wherever in the world American policymakers look they will find a governing elite, and probably a local population, against whom they are at a relative information disadvantage. Specifically in the Middle East, the higher up the social and economic ladder one travels, the more likely one is to come across a person whose familiarity with the US and Western Europe is of a near native fluency.⁷ The list of the European or American-educated amongst recent Arab political figures includes Bashar Al-Assad, King Hussein of Jordan, Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon, Saif Al-Islam (son of Muammar Gadhafi) and many, many more. In contrast, the fact that President Obama briefly attended elementary school in Indonesia was considered nearly a disqualifying factor during his first campaign.⁸

⁷ See Terc, “Syria’s New Neoliberal Elite: English Usage, Linguistic Practices and Group Boundaries.”

⁸ The fact that many of the Arab leaders in question never had to stand for a real election no doubt accounts for some of this discrepancy, but as I write this the Muslim Brotherhood candidate for President of Egypt, Mohammed Morsi, is a man who studied at the University of Southern California and is the father of two American citizens, though one of the earlier candidates was legally disqualified because his mother had become an American citizen.

Efforts at non-coercive influence, especially over elites, are made more difficult for US by the fact that these efforts will be practiced upon people who know more about Americans and how they work than Americans do about them and how they work. The equation is slightly different when attempting to influence a general population, which will not have the same level of familiarity with the US that the elite possess, but the asymmetry is still in effect here. Though the highest level of this asymmetry is displayed among the wealthy, it extends to all segments of society; an average media consumer in the Arab world will inevitably have a greater familiarity with American culture and politics than the average American has about any other country, much less those in places as distant culturally and geographically as the Middle East. Even within the State Department, institutional structure mitigates against an equivalence of expertise, since Foreign Service Officers will usually rotate out of a position after two years, while many of the people they are directly dealing with in the Arab world might have studied English (and inevitably American culture) for many years, often in the United States.⁹

American attempts at radio diplomacy and propaganda, at least since the early years of the Cold War, have largely conceded this asymmetry, and attempted to combat it by acknowledging that the only people who consistently express a native level of cultural fluency in a target region natives to that region. Thus the most direct and forceful attempts to influence public opinion, such as Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, tended to rely on foreign nationals

Kristen Chick, "Egyptian Presidential Candidate: Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 1, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0601/Egyptian-presidential-candidate-Mohamed-Morsi-of-the-Muslim-Brotherhood>. <accessed June 13, 2012>

⁹ Public diplomacy scholar R.S. Zaharna has argued that many American efforts, due to a lack of sufficient knowledge of target cultures, employ an American style which is ineffective within foreign cultural settings. See her "Asymmetry of Cultural Styles and the Unintended Consequences of Crisis Public Diplomacy," in *Intercultural Communication and Diplomacy*, ed. Hannah Slavik (Geneva: Diplo Foundation, 2004), 133–144.

(including expatriates or defectors), a model that Radio Sawa has followed in hiring a mostly Lebanese staff.¹⁰

This basic asymmetry in information and cultural familiarity in favor of members of target countries complicates one of the basic tenets behind the various concepts of “broadcasting American values” and “branding America”. Stated plainly: Why are American policymakers and broadcasters so sure that inculcating more knowledge about American culture, politics, and history (or music) will create listeners with more favorable attitudes towards US policies, when those listeners already know much more about America than America knows about them?¹¹

With this question in mind we now turn to Kulna Sawa, a group whose members are certainly fluent in Western music and culture, but whose use of that musical expertise reflects a particularly Syrian set of concerns and interests.

Kulna Sawa

In 2009, the Damascene rock group Kulna Sawa released their fourth full-length album, *Idhā'at Sawa* (Radio Sawa/Together). The sprawling, 18-song concept album imagines a pan-Arab radio station, broadcasting from Damascus to Gaza, Baghdad to Tyre. Individual songs are interspersed by news clips, sound effects and dialogue from DJs and callers, critiquing the existing blend of regional and international media, while creating a new soundscape to replace it with their own brand of Syrian rock music, a political message centered on the band’s particular vision of Arab youth in relation to the West, and a criticism of American and Israeli policy. The

¹⁰ Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 109.

¹¹ One dramatic example illustrating this asymmetry was recent leak of a number of Bashar al-Assad’s emails detailing his iTunes purchases of American and European popular music. Max Fisher, “Sanctions Hurt Syrians, but They Can’t Even Keep Bashar al-Assad Off iTunes” *The Atlantic Online* March 15, 2012 <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/sanctions-hurt-syrians-but-they-cant-even-keep-bashar-al-assad-off-itunes/254567/> (accessed March 16, 2012).

terms “radio” and “*idhā’a*” (broadcast) are used almost interchangeably in Arabic, and one is just as likely to hear “radio” as “*idhā’a*”. Both translate to “Radio Together”, but for the purposes of (relative) clarity I will use “Radio Sawa” when referring to the American broadcast and “*Idhā’at Sawa*” when referring to the Kulna Sawa album or the fictional radio station it describes.

According to an interview with the band in Al Madina FM:

The artist Iyad Rimawi is the one who came up with the idea of launching the album in the form of a radio station, and we began after this idea to write the songs on the album together. After finishing, we discovered a common message among the songs that we wrote, and all of them carry a critical political orientation towards what happened in the world of current events and wars. We chose to present these songs in the form of radio, because of its suitability for political ideas.¹²

In a separate interview, Rimawi stated that the album covers:

The most important events which affected the fate of the world in the modern period beginning with the events of September 11th, and ending with the July War. The album resembles a historical document for this period, but it a young (*shabābī*) style.¹³

The lyrics to *Idhā’at Sawa* combine political commentary on regional issues with a discussion of the problems and aspirations specific to the young middle and upper class of Damascus. Voiced in Syrian colloquial Arabic, songs are sometimes addressed to Arab listeners

¹²Basi Hamwi “kulna sawa tubath irsalha min idha’a al-madina ...” *Baladna* 12 February 2009, http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23505&Itemid=63 (accessed May 15, 2012).

¹³ The “July War” refers to the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Alā’ ‘Amr, “kulna sawa tanāwalna al-aḥdāth al-siyāsiyya bi-qalb shabābī” *Baladna* 3 January 2012 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20731 (accessed May 15, 2012).

to the imagined station, and sometimes to an audience outside of its broadcast and linguistic range, whether to an imagined American public (“*Anā Irahābī*”) or to a thinly disguised “Ruler of the world” (“*Abd al-‘Azīm*”).

According to keyboardist Marwan Nakhleh:

The album is distinguished by the presence of songs presenting a single connected story, the songs discuss linked events. It is the first Arabic album which advances in this style, and whoever listens to the will hear songs in the form of a virtual radio station.¹⁴

Despite the coincidence in name with the American-financed pop music station that is the main subject of this dissertation, according to members of the band the album is not a direct response to America’s “Radio Sawa.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the format of the concept album, and the political content of the lyrics, makes *Idhā‘at Sawa* a remarkable refraction of Radio Sawa’s attempts at musical diplomacy. It is in this context that this chapter will examine the album, as a counterpoint to Radio Sawa’s attempts to create a class of listener who is more amenable to American policy through the intermediate step of making listeners fans of American music. By describing a version of their own radio station, Kulna Sawa presents one possible response to Western broadcasting, a response created by precisely the sort of listeners who are supposed to be most susceptible to its political message, young Arabs with a deep interest in American music and culture.

The stark differences between Radio Sawa and *Idhā‘at Sawa* are so great as to make any direct comparison ludicrous in its asymmetry. Where Radio Sawa is part of the \$112 million a

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵ Interview with Marwan Nakleh and Hazim al-Ani, Kulna Sawa band members, January 2009. Nakleh and al-Ani stated that they hadn’t heard of the station until after the record came out and someone mentioned it to them. They claimed that while it was possible that one of the other band members might have heard of it, the name of the American station certainly wasn’t the impetus for the album.

year Middle East Broadcasting Network, broadcast across the breadth of the Arabic-speaking world, backed by the most powerful state on Earth, *Idhā'at Sawa*, is an imagined station, instantiated only on a single album, recorded by a group of mostly part-time musicians in a small Damascus studio.¹⁶ As both a synecdoche and extreme case of the larger disjuncture between American and Syrian broadcasting and cultural production, however, this example is useful because it prompts us to explore the nature of the greater asymmetry between American cultural, economic, and state power, and the reciprocal weakness of even the elite members of the states which feel the brunt of this power.

The musicians of *Kulna Sawa*, along with their fans, are part the demographic targeted by Radio Sawa: young people with an interest and affinity for American cultural products. Moreover, members of the Syrian rock scene in particular have a vested interest in recreating some aspects of the American cultural industry in Syria. Though many of these musicians and fans are enthusiastic consumers of rock culture from the US and Europe, there is not a successful economic model for a Syrian rock band, and in terms of the pure functional basis for a music scene, they are often envious of the opportunities in other countries (more on this later).¹⁷

In Chapter 1 I describe two general theories of music's political utility within American international broadcasting, one based on the communicative power of American music to create an affinity with America, and the second based on the idea of music as a medium of exchange. With their familiarity and audible love for American and Western European musical genres, combined with the political acumen and familiarity with Western news sources demonstrated by *Idhā'at Sawa*, it would appear at first glance that groups like *Kulna Sawa* and the fans who

¹⁶ Broadcasting Board of Governors, *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request*, (Washington, DC, 2011).

¹⁷ While in Syria I conducted several informal interviews with Syrian musicians, attended concerts (limited by the infrequency of performance opportunities in Damascus), and spend several evenings listening to music and chatting with rock fans.

constitute the Syrian rock scene would represent one aspect of the ideal imagined listeners for the first theory. Reinforced in statements such as Willis Conover's famous quote that "Jazz is its own propaganda" musical diplomacy, this basic idea is expressed below:¹⁸

Exposure to American Culture → Acculturated Listeners → US sympathetic listeners.

Given the intermediate goal of American broadcasters to foster a class of listeners who are familiar with American music and culture, the members of Damascus' rock scene would represent almost the idealized form of music listeners in this intermediate step. Fully conversant, even fluent, in American musical forms and idioms, powerfully and sometimes obsessively engaged in the economic structure of music collection, they are, according to this theory, more likely to hold views sympathetic to US foreign policy. However, as my analysis of *Idhā'at Sawa* will show, Syrian listeners and musicians such as the members of Kulna Sawa are able to integrate a deep level of facility with and affinity for Western music into a particularly local worldview which expresses their own personal, local, and political concerns that are often completely antithetical to the policies of the United States in the region.

This by itself is nothing new, and much of the musical literature on globalization involves the ability of local populations to integrate, hybridize, coopt, or rework foreign or hegemonic forms to suite local purposes. The particular relevance of *Idhā'at Sawa* to the American Radio Sawa broadcasts is not simply as an example of this kind of resistance. Structured around the idea of a pan-Arab radio station, *Idhā'at Sawa* provides a direct counter-narrative to American

¹⁸ Quoted in Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 16.

broadcasting. Though it is full of the specific concerns of a group of real people, it can also be heard as a response, as the imagined listeners steeped in American music in turn imagine a broadcast of their own. The following section will examine the album in detail to describe some of the ways that the band positions themselves musically and socially in relationship to America.¹⁹

Station Identification

The album begins with sounds of a busy office and a receptionist connecting a caller to the station's request line, followed by a musical greeting.

Welcome to all listeners
 Thank you for your choice of our station
 ...
 Our message is to the new wave
 Our focus is the land
 ...
 Radio Kulna Sawa (All of Us together)
 Thank you for your choice of our station.
 Stay with us.
 Live over the air
 To the last moment our signal comes to you
 Stay with Radio Kulna Sawa²⁰

After the musical introduction a friendly female radio voice introduces the first full song "*Youm elli tghair al-'ālam*" (The day that changed the world). The song, which begins with synthesized

¹⁹ The album does not address issues of Syrian domestic politics, and I am not interested in the individual political views of the members of the band. Rather I am interested in the international musical politics represented on the album.

²⁰ For Arabic lyrics, see Appendix 3.

horn hits and four-on-the-snare rock drum propulsion, describes waking up on the morning of a momentous event.

The Day that Changed the World

The day that changed the world
 I was in bed dreaming
 Just late like usual
 Under my eyes the newspaper
 The day that the world changed

Halfway through the song the lyrics drop out and over a descending piano vamp the sounds of airplanes and English news clips weave in one on top of the other.

“America came under attack today from international terrorists...

What we can see here is the sections of the other tower are also crumbling....

More news is coming in...

Crashed airliner in Pittsburgh...”

Terrorist also struck with remarkable ease, at the heart of America’s defense...”

Newscaster voices cascade over one another, and the sound of plane gets louder and louder until the engine screeches into the wail of a guitar solo.

The day that changed the world
 Not one of us could understand
 What was changing, what was beginning?
 How will the story change?
 The day that changed the world²¹

²¹ Appendix 3

“The Day that Changed the World” referenced here is clearly September 11, 2001. Using this date as a narrative starting point makes intuitive sense to many Americans, and certainly corresponds to American political rhetoric about the “Global War on Terror,” but the idea that September 11th was the fundamental turning point in the relationship between the Arab world and the US is by no means a universally accepted truth in Syria or the larger Arab world. Kulna Sawa’s choice to begin with those attacks as “The Day that Changed the World” reveals a great deal about the way in which the band conceived of this relationship.

“The Day that Changed the World” as an introduction to the album immediately marks the group as fundamentally unsympathetic to the narrative provided by Al Qaeda and similar radical groups, who saw the attacks of September 11th as a counterattack in an ongoing war, one said to have begun on different dates according to the political goals and historical ambition of the particular rhetorician (1991, 1948, 1492, 1096, etc.) Though to anyone remotely familiar with the social scene of young Damascene rock fans it is unnecessary to have to point out the gaping disjuncture between middle and upper class Syrian youth and Saudi extremist jihadis, as we shall see with the next song on the album (*Ana Irhābī*) the group has had experience dealing with the assumption that “young Arab = terrorist” and is acutely aware of the prevalence of this perception in the US.

The historicizing move of this song also places the group in disjuncture with the neo-colonial narrative of US policies in the region sometimes espoused by the Syrian government in regards to the US. The Syrian government routinely, and with some logic, employs rhetoric describing the Iraq War and other instances of US military presence in the Middle East as part of a history of US interference which has included, to name just two examples, an attempt to

orchestrate a coup within Syria, and a long and involved history of interference in the internal politics of Lebanon, oft seen as the bailiwick of Syrian power. Two of the broad political/ideological movements that characterized Syria's international politics during the Cold War, and continued subsequently to hold significant sway in Syrian public discourse – Ba'athist Socialism and Anti-Zionism – also provide long and intricate histories of US/Syrian or US/Arab relations, histories in which September 11th is not seen as a day that fundamentally changed anything.

Kulna Sawa has certainly used their music to express solidarity with Palestinian Resistance and to strongly criticize Israel: dedicating the song “*Kul Youm b'ul*” to the people of Gaza, recording a version of “*Wain 'a Ramallah*” (“Where? To Ramallah”) and performing it in live concerts, writing a thinly veiled attack on Ariel Sharon in “*Nā'im 'alā Shaṭ al Baḥr*”, and expressing an emotional connection to Southern Lebanon in the song “*Ra'ih 'a al-Janūb*” (“Going to the South”), an area associated in the Syrian public consciousness with resistance to Israel.²² However, the narrative expressed on *Idhā'at Sawa* is not however the oft-heard line tying America inextricably to Israel often expressed on stations like the (Hizballah affiliated) *An-Nour* or (PLO-GCC affiliated) *Al-Quds*, nor is it that of Egyptian *sha'bī* musicians like Sha'ban 'Abd Al-Rahim, who James Grippo has detailed as advancing a view in which the US and Israel are just “two sides of the same coin.”²³

In adopting the notion of 9/11 as the “Day that Changed the World”, *Idhā'at Sawa* begins a critique of the US based policies of the last decade and their impact on the Arab world, rather than its history with Israel or even with Syria. In this, the band reflects a relationship with the

²² The association of the “*Nā'im 'alā Shaṭ al-Baḥr*” with Sharon was confirmed to me in an interview with members of the band in 2009.

²³ James R. Grippo, “‘I’ll tell you why we hate you!’ Sha’ban ‘Abd al-Rahim and Middle Eastern Reactions to 9/11” in *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 268.

US that I encountered frequently while in Syria, where young people were often highly critical of US policies and shortcomings, but viewed the countries through their own relationships with cultural products, or through personal experiences, more than through the ready-made historical frameworks presented by the local media entities which are most critical of the US.

Ana Irhābī

In conversations about Syria and Lebanon, where I was often asked the question “What do Americans think about Syria?” I have frequently experienced consternation from young men who know from their consumption of American media the simple formula “young Arab male = terrorist” in American movies and news, and yet still could not quite believe that anyone would confuse them with the Saudi extremists with whom they identified not at all.²⁴ This is doubly confusing as the overwhelming majority of Syrian youth not only don’t identify with the men who attacked the US, many of them, especially in middle and upper-class Damascus, display a level of distain and resentment for Saudis. This is both political and economic resentment which manifests in Saudis being stereotyped amongst certain groups in Syria and Lebanon as both religiously fundamentalist and as rich, lecherous, interlopers interested in visiting the region for prostitutes, alcohol and weather, in that order. This stereotype is of course as reductive and ill-conceived as any other, but it explains why to a young Damascene man the conflation with al-

²⁴ I specify young men here partially because, as I discuss earlier in this dissertation, the majority of my interactions in Syria were with men. In addition, depictions of Arab women in the American media differ greatly from those of men. See Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the US* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Qaeda is nonsensical.²⁵ However, beyond the usual media conflation of all Arab youth, the members of Kulna Sawa have personal experience being mistaken for terrorists.

In 2004, a story appeared on the website womenswallstreet.com about a flight from Detroit to Los Angeles in which several passengers became nervous about a group of Syrian musicians onboard.²⁶ By the time the story was picked up by a group of popular right-wing blogs, the musicians were now “almost certainly (judging from her description) conducting a dry run for a repeat of September 11”.²⁷ Based on speculation from a reader, the conservative aggregation site littlegreenfootballs.com published a post entitled “Syrians on Jacobsen’s Flight: Kulna Sawa”, and another conservative site quickly jumped in with a post titled “Searching for Kulna Sawa.”²⁸

The group of presumed terrorists who were thought to be behaving suspiciously a flight (speaking to each other across aisles in Arabic, laughing, getting up in pairs or groups to stretch their legs), were a group of Syrian musicians, though not, as it turns out, Kulna Sawa. The members of Kulna Sawa, who were coincidentally planning a “Concert for Peace Tour” in the US for November of that year, were in Damascus at the time, witnessing this internet hubbub from afar.²⁹ As the members of the band waited in Damascus, practicing for their upcoming tour

²⁵ This broad stereotype about Saudi’s which I observed among some Damascenes in 2010 should not be confused with the extreme levels of sectarian and political animosity that have been displayed during the Syrian uprising.

²⁶ The site that published the original article no longer exists.

²⁷ Charles Johnson, “Terror in the Skies Again” *Little Green Footballs*, July 15, 2004, <http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=11733> [Terror in the Skies Again](http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=11733).

²⁸ Charles Johnson, “Syrians on Jacob’s Flight: Kulna Sawa” *Little Green Footballs*, July 17, 2004, <http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=11754>

Scott Johnson, “Searching for Kulna Sawa” *Powerline*, July 19, 2004, <http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2004/07/007155.php>

²⁹ The group played 20 shows at spots including a Quaker meetinghouse in Philadelphia, and a number of Mennonite, Episcopalian, and Methodist Churches.

“Kulna Sawa Concert for Peace Tour Schedule” <http://www.kulnasawa.com/schedule.html>

of US churches, they realized that on the internet at least, they had already gained a degree of fame in America, unfortunately as presumed terrorists.

The band's musical response to this event is recorded as the fourth song on the album, and is entitled "*Anā Irhābī*" ("I am a terrorist"). The song is prefaced by the sound of a newscaster discussing the band's alleged hijacking attempt (in Arabic), as the band breaks into the first line of the chorus: "*Anā Irhābī lākin Ṭayyib*" (I'm a terrorist but a nice guy).

I'm a terrorist but a nice guy

A terrorist, ascending in the plane with my friends
 My weapon is my guitar, my melodies and my words
 Immediately they know me from the first that they saw me
 The guitar rose and I stood with half the plane, singing

I'm a terrorist but a nice guy
 I play for you before you die

Listen to the last melody of your life and you will travel with us happily

Everyone who was in the plane was afraid of the music
 Afraid of my voice, afraid of the truth

If my art now had left me a terrorist

I will sing at the top of my voice....³⁰

³⁰ Appendix 3

“Anā Irhābī” is a lighthearted, upbeat song, befitting the mocking attitude taken towards Kulna Sawa’s experience of racial band profiling. The chorus is a sing-song, almost childlike group vocal, with a memorably simple melody that cheerfully ends phrases on the rhymes “you die” (*tamūt*) and “happy” (*mabsūt*).³¹

G D Em Bm C D C/E D/F#

An-a ir-hab-i la-kin tay-yib b3a-zif lek 'a - bil ma tmout sma3a -khir lehn bi - hay-ya-tek wa hat-sa-fir m3 na mab-sout

Figure 5.1: Kulna Sawa, “Anā Irhābī” (“I’m a terrorist, but a nice guy, I sing for you before you die. Listen to the last melody of your life, and you will travel with us happily.”)

“Anā Irhābī” ends with a series of scalar guitar runs ascending over snare-drum quarter-notes in a bombastic moment powerfully reminiscent of Queen.

5

Figure 5.2: Ending guitar solo on “Anā Irhābī”

³¹ On a more commercial note, the song’s composer and lyricist, Iyad Rimawi, is probably familiar with the song “Meen Irhābī” (Who’s the Terrorist) by the Palestinian hip-hop group DAM, a song which became one of the group’s biggest hits. DAM, “Meen Irhābī” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqbDiN2uYcQ>

Guitar and drums slow towards the end of the figure, holding the final note as the voice of George W. Bush enters over the sounds of a cheering crowd: “We wage a war to save civilization itself.”

The metaphoric use of music as a weapon here is partially simple mocking of the furor around Kulna Sawa’s supposed terrorist episode on America, but the metaphor of “music as weapon” allows us to explore what might be different about Kulna Sawa’s musical weapons in contrast to the US’s Radio Sawa. Even if we are reluctant to give credence to Kulna Sawa’s metaphor, there is a level at which the music is, if not a weapon, at least being deployed as countermove against the mix of American military and media policy which created a War on Terror, and then somehow defined the band as part of the “terror” with which it was at war.

‘Abd al-‘Azīm - Waşlu al-‘Askar - Nā’im ala Shaṭ al-Baḥr

The song which follows “Ana Irhābī” on the album is similarly upbeat and sarcastic, horn-heavy over a ska beat, but delivers a more general political critique, rather than mocking a specific event.

“Abd al-‘Azīm” (Servant of the Great) begins with George W. Bush’s voice, recorded from a news broadcast. “We did not seek it, but we will fight it, and we will prevail” triumphantly booms over a wah-wah guitar, horn hits, and an optimistic funk-lite bassline. The singer enters, voicing the praises of a vaguely described ruler - the just and well-spoken ruler of the world - but protesting humbly that the average people aren’t worthy of his protection.

The just ruler

He is generous

But we aren't worthy

The name “Abd al-‘Azīm” is a common one, meaning “servant of the Great” (one of the names of God), but in the entirely secular context of the song, we can hear another meaning, where the name implies “servant of the great”, a ruler who works in the service of the rich and powerful as opposed to the people. Though the introduction clearly marks the great ruler being mocked as President Bush, the lyrics are general enough that they could apply to any number of heads of state bent on “humanitarian” uses of violence. The final verse of the song, however, can easily be read as a direct critique not just of American policy, but specifically of American counterinsurgency in Iraq. As the music moves from a bouncy bassline and wah-wah guitar to a few moments of mid-tempo swing and walking bass, Bashar Moussa sings:

His eye is upon us, and our protection is on his mind
 He comes to us, he and his men
 The wheels roll on the terrorists
 We don’t know...Who the terrorists are³²

Like the previous song, this one remains upbeat and positive sounding the entire time, and the last lines are delivered absolutely without anger, just an air of almost amused confusion. There are two ideas worthy of mockery here, first that the “just ruler” actually has “our protection is on his mind”, and second that the singers would know who and where the terrorists are.

At the end of the track a reporter calls in to Idhā‘at Sawa, trying to deliver the news of “tens of deaths” over sounds of a battle. Again Bush’s voice cuts in though, saying “We did not seek it, but we will fight it, and we will prevail” as the next song “Waslu al-Askar” (The Army Arrived) begins.

³² Appendix 3

The use of President Bush speaking directly, in English, about the War on Terror, specifies a great deal about the potential listeners to whom the album is addressed. Most of the members of *Kulna Sawa* have studied English, with a range of facility that goes from halting to near-fluency.³³ Rock fans in Damascus tend also to have a much better than average grasp of the English language, coming primarily from the middle and upper classes with the accompanying access to education and travel. The use of this clip, presented with the speaker unidentified, assumes a greater than passing familiarity with the English language; it presumes a level of engagement with American politics and international news in English which would be considered extremely remarkable were the nations reversed.

The lyrics to *Idhāʿat Sawa* are in Arabic, but listeners are also presented with clips that presume that they possess not only the ability to understand the basic meaning of sentences spoken in English, but also to recognize the individual voice of the former president of the US. The presumption tells us something about the makeup of *Kulna Sawa*'s audience, but it is also a perfect example of the information disconnect embedded in the relationship between the Middle East in the US.

Style and “Al-Aṣḃaʿ Al-Banafsaĵi”

Kulna Sawa's website features seven core members of the band: Hazem Al-Ani (keyboard and piano), Marwan Nakhleh (keyboard), Rafel Haffar (bass guitar), Bashar Moussa (lead vocals), Iyad Rimawi (guitar and vocal), Sonia Bitar (vocals), and Ayham Al-Ani (guitar and vocals). However, the band performs and records with a larger number of musicians, including two percussionists, trumpet, saxophone, clarinet, and occasionally cello or other

³³ For example, Bashar Moussa sings in English part his 2006 solo album “Baladi” (My country). <http://www.basharmoussa.com/> Sonia Bitar performed Celine Dion's “I Will Always love you” and Aretha Franklin's “Angel” in a flawless English accent during an interview with Crystal TV.

instruments. A May 2010 performance at the Moustapha Ali Gallery in Damascus featured at least 12 musicians on stage at all times.³⁴

The large number of musicians gives the band the ability to move between very different styles quickly, with a level of stylistic competence and fidelity that is somewhat jarring to American ears. In “Al-Aṣḥab ‘ Al-Banafsajī” (“The violet finger”) the group moves between horn-driven pop-funk to a children’s commercial jingle sound, to a convincing smooth jazz organ solo all in the same song. Sonia Bitar’s excited voice mockingly celebrates of the Iraqi elections, when voters marked their choice with a violet painted finger.

People in the streets
 Their numbers in the hundreds
 In a country bedecked in ash
 That is all of this
 They say it is a new age
 And we pay its price in fire and iron
 In the end you will definitely paint
 Your finger violet³⁵

The chorus is sung by what sounds like a children’s choir, in a style very popular with commercials on Syrian radio.

Oh God what’s the sweetest color?
 Forget the world and my cares

³⁴ Kulna Sawa “Monte Carlo Doualiya – Concert [Part 1]”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sE7NqGdsyZE&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PL552575CDDD1747DE

³⁵ See appendix for Arabic lyrics.

It deserves, in its honor they die
 My family, my sisters, my uncles

The section is a style parody, but a remarkably effective one. Much of the album was recorded at guitarist Iyad Rimawi's studio in Mezzeh, where he also produces commercials and television music, often using many of the same musicians who play with Kulna Sawa.³⁶

As was discussed in Chapter 3, the stylistic cues associated with specific genres in the West take on different meanings when they appear in the very different musical environment of Syria. Within a listening context conditioned entirely by Western rock music, two most immediate impressions of *Idhā'at Sawa* would be that the album includes very competent recreation of styles which have gone out of fashion, and it is stylistically incoherent. However, in contrast to the examples in previous chapters of American music being integrated into preexisting Syrian listening categories, on *Idhā'at Sawa* the variety of different musical styles are used for effect, highlighting their foreignness and their difference, rather than integrating them into Syrian styles. While the abrupt shifts in styles can be jarring, it also serves to reinforce the conceit of the album. The combination of dialogue from the station, and songs and even sections of vastly different style, and diegetic sound effects creates a coherent effect out of quick changes in affect.

Though the use of Western music on display here is very different from that described earlier in the dissertation, there are any number of moments which stand out as typical of the Damascene rock scene, precisely for the ease with which one can recognize their predecessors in American or British rock songs. The album is littered with moments that are easily associated

³⁶ Rimawi Studios, along the Nexttone Studios of Omar Harb (bassist for the band Gene) serve as two of the main hubs for rock music in Damascus.

with well-known metal and hard rock songs. As mentioned previously, the end of “Ana Irhābī” evokes Queen. The beginning of “Waşlu al-‘Asker” (“The Army Arrived”) uses the reverb-heavy picking of Metallica’s “Enter Sandman, and the last third includes a military snare drum figure which builds into a wailing guitar solo, reminiscent of the last few minutes of Guns N Roses’ “November Rain.”

Among the rock musicians and fans I met while in Damascus, the most oft-cited groups were hard rock, metal and prog-rock groups. At a concert I attended by the popular rock-band Gene in April of 2010, one of the group’s best received moments was a medley of songs in English by Dream Theater, Queen, and Rush. Bon Jovi, Dream Theater, Metallica, Rush, and Queen, all come up quite a bit in conversations with fans about favorite bands. Kulna Sawa tends more towards the pop side of the spectrum, borrowing as well from funk, disco, reggae and jazz, but a number of the musical aspects of the album *Idhā‘at Sawa* display the affinity for the 1980s rock that characterizes much of the world of Damascus rock fanship.

Potential problems inherent in the focus on Western Musical Styles

It is important to acknowledge that Kulna Sawa, along with similar rock groups in Syria, play a form of music with limited popularity, and a small local audience. Anas Abu Qaws, a Syrian rock musician and son of Sabah Fakhri, one of the most famous traditional Syrian singers from the twentieth century, estimated in a conversation with me in 2009 that “there are only maybe five or ten thousand fans of this kind of music (Syrian rock) in Damascus.”³⁷ When one includes nearby Lebanon and Jordan, the regional market for Arabic language rock, and the Syrian diaspora around the world, audience for grows significantly, but the more explicitly rock

³⁷ Anas Abu Qaws, personal conversation, Damascus, January 2009

side of the band's output has a much smaller audience than the bands arrangements of more traditional Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese music, like "Almaya" or "Wayn? 'a Ramallah", although according to guitarist Iyad Rimawi, their arrangements of traditional songs amount to only "3 songs out of 50" recorded by the group.³⁸ The well-known singer Lena Chamamyán, for example, who comes from the same musical scene, records with many of the same backing musicians, and has performed in concert with Kulna Sawa, has achieved a far greater level of success both inside and outside of Syria by performing a repertoire of modern jazz arrangements of well-known Arabic songs, using a relatively familiar (though also original) Syrian singing style to great acclaim.³⁹

In interviews, band members blame their relative lack of fame with the difficulties involved in coordinating such a large group of musicians, and state that fame is not their primary goal, also acknowledging that "The assiduous music which Kulna Sawa produces doesn't normally receive the distribution that 'pop music' (*mūsīqā al-būb*) benefits from."⁴⁰ Both Kulna Sawa and Gene distribute their music through a company called "Mais al-Reem for Media Production and Distribution." CDs distributed by the company, which is based in the old city of Damascus, "near Al Mariameyah Church", are identified by the bright red sticker placed over the outer edge of the CD case. The sticker ensures that each purchaser has received an original print of the album, as opposed to a pirated copy. Members of Kulna Sawa have spoken out in interviews about the opinion that piracy represents a significant problem for Syrian musicians, and stated in one interview that the income from one interview that the income from Idhā'at

³⁸ Ala' 'Amr "kulna sawa tanāwalna al-aḥdāth al-siyyasiyya bi-qālib shabābī" *Baladna* January 3, 2012 http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20731 (accessed May 15, 2012).

³⁹ Chamamyán is discussed in Chapter Three. By way of comparison, as of June 2012 Chamamyán's most viewed video on youtube has been watched over 900,000 times, compared to just under 100,000 for Kulna Sawa's most popular clip, their video for the traditional song "Wayn a Ramallah."

⁴⁰ 'Amr "kulna sawa tanāwilna al-aḥdāth al-siyyasiyya biqālib shabābī"

Sawa did not cover the cost of printing the small run of CDs.⁴¹ Despite this lack of financial success, the band has received a remarkable amount of positive media exposure in Syria. They have been interviewed and profiled in the Damascus papers (*Baladna*, *Tishreen*, *al Thawra*), and been interviewed on a number of radio and television stations.⁴²

Stylistic criticisms of Kulna Sawa that one might hear in Syria are exemplified by a comment found on the youtube video of “Kul yūm ya’ul”, where one poster stated that the song was “beautiful, but sadly there is nothing in it – no melody or performance – that is Arab. You feel like you are listening to a song that was originally translated.”⁴³ The band is fully aware that a certain portion of their audience will feel this way, and during live performances in Syria includes a mix of traditional or well-known songs in more traditional styles. At their concert in May of 2010, the band’s new rock songs were well received, but the greatest applause and audience participation came when they performed a series of arrangements of famous songs from Algeria, Lebanon, and Palestine.⁴⁴

There is a significant and growing body of films, academic literature, and journalism which deals with Arab musicians in Western genres, which includes the documentaries “Heavy

⁴¹ Abdel Rahman Taqi, “al-musīqīyyūn al-shabāb fī sūriyya” *Shorufat* No. 50 (6 April 2009), 57.

⁴² See, for example, Ala ‘Amer. “kulna sawa tanāwalna al-ahdāth al-siyyāsiyya biqālib shabābī” *Baladna*, January 3, 2012. http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2073; Brooke Anderson. “Kulna Sawa readies for breakout success in Arab world and Europe.” *Daily Star Lebanon*, April 11, 2003. archived at <http://www.kulnasawa.com/dailystar.htm>; Basil Hamwi, “kulna sawa tubath irsālḥā min idha’ a al-madīna ...” *Baladna*, February 12, 2009. http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23505&Itemid=6; Hoda Qadour, “Kulna Sawa... wa mūja al-mūsiqā al-sūriyya al-jadida.” *Tishreen*, September 20, 2009. <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/239891>; Lena Deyub. “Kulna Sawa taghani li-l-salām wa tarsūm šūra sūriya al-mashraqa...” *al Thawra*. July 21, 2005. <http://thawra.alwehda.gov.sy/archive.asp?FileName=99056184420050721225932>;

⁴³ My translation: جميلة بس للاسف مفيهاش ولا لحن ولا اداء عربي....تحس انها غنية مترجمة اصلا "جميلة بس للاسف مفيهاش ولا لحن ولا اداء عربي" It is worth noting however, that at least on this page, the negative comment was voted down.

⁴⁴ The layers of musical propaganda behind this concert were fascinating, as the band (Kulna Sawa) performed music from their concept album about a radio station which has the same name as the American Arabic-language pop music station, at a concert sponsored by the famous French-funded Arabic-language station radio Monte Carlo.

Metal in Bagdad”, “Slingshot Hip-Hop”, and books including Mark LeVine’s *Heavy Metal Islam*.⁴⁵ The discussion of Arab musicians who perform in these genres tends to come from a particular liberal political direction which, with excellent intentions, hopes to counter negative media narratives about Arabs and emphasize their humanity by detailing musical expressions of that humanity that are understandable and digestible for Western audiences. The positive reception of these studies publicly and in the academy reveals that the demand exists for precisely this kind of humanizing gesture, and a great deal of this work is excellent. However, in journalistic accounts especially, the humanizing, de-othering move is often combined with an emphasis on the political valence of certain musical genres, hip hop and rock especially, which not coincidentally flatter a Western audience by allowing the West to remain the source of musical tools for political uplift, democratization, feminist reform, etc.

As the post-Said discourse on Orientalism and Middle Eastern historiography makes clear, this kind of focus on Western associated aspects of Middle Eastern culture and society carries with it a profound risk of distorting the realities of Middle Eastern subjects on order to make their cultural output serve certain Western liberal or neoliberal purposes. One man from North-Eastern Syria with whom I spoke, who preferred more “Eastern” styles over the Damascus rock, commented on a song by the progressive rock band Gene which deals with the problem of so-called “honor killings”: “Those guys don’t come from families, from towns, where there are honor killings. They come from Mezzeh (a wealthy neighborhood of Damascus, near the university). What do they know about honor killings? Who do they think is listening to them?”⁴⁶ This listener wasn’t critical of the need to discuss violence against women; rather he

⁴⁵ Mark LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2008); *Slingshot Hip hop*, directed by Jackie Salloum (Fresh Booza Production, 2009), DVD; *Heavy Metal in Baghdad*, directed by Eddy Moretti and Suroosh Alvi (Arts Alliance America, 2008), DVD.

⁴⁶ Personal conversation, March 2010.

was suspicious of people whom he perceived as taking an easy political stance which might seem brave to outsiders, but had little to do with their actual lives. Regardless of the accuracy of this listener's perceptions of social class as it pertains either to the band Gene or to "honor killings" (and certainly the phenomenon of culturally sanctioned violence against women exists in various forms, including legal ones, across a much broader swath of society than is generally acknowledged), the comment does illustrate one of the potential problems that can accompany Western attention on non-Western performers of Western-associated musical styles.

The "concerts" page of Kulna Sawa's website lists past performances going back to 2003, averaging about two a year. This is typical for Syrian rock bands, due the extreme difficulties involved in organizing a rock concert (discussed in Chapter 2). The fact that Kulna Sawa has been able to put on concerts with a relatively high level of visibility, such as performing for Radio Monte Carlo, or performing at the MTN sponsored opening ceremony for the public World Cup viewings at the Damascus fairgrounds, is indicative of the class of people and social contacts that the band associates with, rather than a measure of their popularity.

Travelling in Syria in January of 2009 I saw large number of billboards for *Idhā'at Sawa* on the road between Damascus and Beirut, a route travelled by the wealthy of both countries for both business and pleasure, as well as Syrians looking for work. At the time those posters seemed like blatant attempts to cross the distance between the very different soundscapes, and different rock music scenes. Where as the most successful rock bands in Damascus play a few concerts a year, Beirut has a thriving rock and experimental scene.⁴⁷ Though Kulna Sawa has access to quality recording studios and well-organized, if occasional, high-profile performances in Syria, the cultural capital required to operate a rock band in Damascus does not necessarily

⁴⁷See Burkhalter, "Mapping Out the Sound Memory of Beirut. A survey of the music of a war generation"; Thomas Burkhalter, "Between Art for Art's Sake and Musical Protest: How Musicians from Beirut React to War and Violence," *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 01 (2011): 55–77.

transfer over into the Lebanese music scene, and it is worth further discussing the larger relationship between Syria and Lebanon.

Globalization, Asymmetry and Syria

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai states:

...it is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, and Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics. Such a list of alternative fears to Americanization could be greatly expanded, but it is not a shapeless inventory: for polities of a smaller scale, there is always a fear of cultural absorption by polities of larger scale, especially those that are nearby. One man's imagined community is another man's political prison.⁴⁸

With Appadurai's point in mind, it is important to take into consideration Syria's particular historical relationship to both of the concept of coloniality and post-coloniality, and its place in the culture industry. Specifically, the cultural history of Syria since independence has been conditioned not just by its relationship to France and Turkey, its former colonizers, but by a number of other relationships, both regional and worldwide. These include the extremely important regional relationships with Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt, a country with whom it shared a brief union from 1958 to 1961.⁴⁹

Syria and Lebanon

⁴⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 244.

⁴⁹ See for example Elie Podeh, *The Decline of Arab Unity: The Rise and Fall of the United Arab Republic* (Brighton, UK; Sussex Academic Press, 1999).

Most significant of Syria's regional relationships for the purposes of popular musical culture is with Lebanon, its most politically, economically, and culturally intertwined neighbor, and a place that has had at various moments in recent history, a greater impact on popular consciousness than the US, Russia, even Turkey, or any large but more culturally distant powers.

In his biography of Hafiz al-Assad, Patrick Seale describes the historical relationship between the two countries:

Syria's interest in Lebanese affairs [in the 1970s] did not arouse surprise in either country, for in the general perception Syria and Lebanon were members of the same body. Within living memory, the French had enlarged autonomous Mount Lebanon, the home of Maronite Christians and Druzes, to create the Republic of Lebanon by the addition of territories inhabited, as it happened, mainly by Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. The inhabitants of the coastal cities – Tripoli and its hinterland, Beirut itself, Tyre and Sidon – as well as the Bika' valley and the south thought of themselves as belonging to a larger entity which they called Syria. In culture, religious diversity, ethnic background, spoken dialect, even in what they ate and drank, Syrians and Lebanese were much of a piece. The populations of the two countries were thoroughly intermingled, with countless families straddling the French-drawn frontier.⁵⁰

Despite the affinities of the two countries, the relationship between them has been asymmetrical, though not in a way that fits into a center-vs-periphery paradigm. In recent decades the economically weaker but far larger and more militarily powerful Syria has taken the role of occupier and most significant foreign power, a position maintained most directly by the 30 year presence of the Syrian Army in Lebanon from 1976 to 2006. Despite this, the much higher per-capita wealth of Lebanon, and its status as a cosmopolitan center for Arab and Mediterranean culture has allowed it, even with hardships of the Civil War, to maintain a cultural and economic influence over Syria disproportionate to its size and population.

Military

⁵⁰ Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 269.

The initial entry of Syria into the Lebanese Civil War was profoundly shocking to many, as Assad positioned Syria against the Palestinian fighters in Lebanon, who he had previously armed and given vocal support of in the context of resistance to Israel. Seale writes of Assad's motives that "Asad sent the army into Lebanon to teach the Palestinians a lesson and to keep the Christians Arab",⁵¹ but perceptions of the Syrian reasons for the initial incursion vary; the public pretense given by the Syrian government was to defend Maronite Christian communities,⁵² and the "defense of Lebanese" explanation is persuasive to a certain segment of the population. Meanwhile Syria's most fearful critics both in Lebanon and in the US presume behind every move a goal of establishing a "Greater Syria" *Bilad Ash-Sham*, the stated goal of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party,⁵³ though scholars of Assad and the Syrian Ba'ath maintain that pan-Arabist affinity, resistance to Israel and purely Syrian real-political interests motivated Syrian policy more than any dreams of Greater Syria.⁵⁴

Regardless of the leadership's real vision for Lebanon, Syria maintained a large military presence through the duration of the Civil War. The Syrian military influence in Lebanon only increased with the end of the war, the signing of the Taif Accord in 1989 and the failed rebellion against Syria led by Michel Aoun in 1989-1990.⁵⁵ The Syria's place within Lebanese borders was formalized in 1991 under the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination" and "Defense and Security Pact", wherein Syria was granted the right to station troops in the Baqa'a

⁵¹ Ibid, 283.

⁵² Naomi Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 209.

⁵³ For an example of the "Greater Syria" explanation of Syrian foreign policy, see: Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵⁴ Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 349.

⁵⁵ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 3rd Edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 393.

Valley.⁵⁶ The occupation and political domination of Lebanon continued until the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in 2005, whereupon popular pressure within Lebanon, backed by international pressure such as United Nations Resolution 1559, forced Bashar Al-Assad to remove Syrian troops entirely from Lebanon in April of 2006.⁵⁷

The impact of this military occupation of Lebanon on Syrian culture is multiple. In Syria, where every male must either serve in the military or buy his way out of it, countless members of the population have served or trained in Lebanon, in a variety of contents ranging from rural stations in the Baqa'a Valley to the front lines of an occupying army. These former soldiers have some familiarity with Lebanon, and are cognizant of being perceived by some in Lebanon as threatening.

Economic

Culturally and economically, the asymmetry between Syria and Lebanon is reversed, as the music, literature, film, and from Lebanon has had more regional and global success. The much higher per capita GDP of Lebanon means that a huge number of Syrian workers earn their livelihood in that country, where a Syrian accent is associated with low economic status. Despite the military influence of Syria in Lebanon, the economic and cultural capital of Lebanon often inverts the relationship in cultural domains. The astounding popularity of Fairuz in Syria, for example, has no reciprocal equivalent in Lebanon.

⁵⁶ Translated text of these documents can be found in Appendixes to *Middle East Contemporary Survey*. Ami Ayalon ed Vol. 15 (1991), 570.

⁵⁷ "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004) (The Situation in the Middle East)," *International Legal Materials*. Vol. 44, No. 3 (May 2005), p. 798.

Al-Bayt - Adsiyya

Though the political focus of the album travels around the Arab world, only one song is directly set in Damascus, “Adsayya” (or Qudsaya the name of a neighborhood in Damascus, it means roughly “holy”). It is one of the few love songs on the album, along with “Shabbākak Matfy” (Your window is dark) a song dedicated by an Iraqi woman to her love who had fled Iraq, and “Samā” (Sky), a lullaby written for the son of Hazem Al-Ani. In an interview with the *Daily Star*, singer Sonia Bitar stated: “We sing about things that relate to our generation in the region, such as social and economic difficulties,” says Bittar. “We rarely sing about love.”⁵⁸ Despite this claim, the songs above especially are among the more popular from the album, and “Shabakek Matfy” was sung on an episode of the popular “Star Academy Lebanon” by Syrian contestants Zeina Aftimos and Nassif Zeytoun, who went on to win in 2010.

While “Adsiyya” is named for a specific part of Damascus, the song which is most reminiscent of Damascus might be “al-Bayt”, a song which is simultaneously a very clear metaphor for the political situation in Lebanon, and a description of a quotidian problem facing Damascus’s upper-middle class.

The song tells the story of a father who died without leaving a will, leaving behind the house he was born in and in which he lived his whole life. Meeting at the house after his death, his three sons disagree over who should inherit the home. The first two claim ownership for themselves, and the third wants it divided and sold. The story is a clear allegory for the political situation in Lebanon, and the ongoing fights over its control by various confessional groups, in this case told by a group of Syrians whose one country has (until recently) been able to maintain a façade of secular unity over a set of sectarian divides with the potential to cause similar

⁵⁸ Brooke Anderson, “Kulna Sawa readies for breakout success in Arab world and Europe” *Daily Star Lebanon*, April 11, 2003. Archived at <http://www.kulnasawa.com/dailystar.htm>

problems if managed incorrectly. The song also describes a very real situation that exists amongst certain classes of Damascenes, especially the older families for whom the dispensation of valuable homes combined with the need to find housing for sons wanting to start families is a pressing problem.⁵⁹

Despite its relatively small audience compared to video clip friendly pop singers, the band does receive some airplay on Syrian radio (I have personally heard their music on Version FM, al Madina FM and Radio Fann for example), but it does not fit easily into the taxonomy described in previous chapters. While Kulna Sawa is part of a “Syrian new wave”, and is extremely engaged with addressing the deficiencies of the local music scene, and the issues of the “Syrian song” described in previous chapters,⁶⁰ much of the band’s music registers as Western or foreign to most listeners, as is made clear by the way that the music is presented on Syrian radio. I was listening to Sham FM via the internet one evening when I heard the opening horn hits for “The Day that the World Changed” underneath an advertisement for a medical advice program called “Mubasharatan min Amreeka (Direct from America) with Doctor Hany Haidar.” Since several members of Kulna Sawa work in music production for radio and television, I initially thought that this might have been the case of some musical recycling to speed up a production job for an ad. However, Iyad Rimawi confirmed that Kulna Sawa’s music was used without their knowledge or permission.⁶¹ The fact that Kulna Sawa’s music has, unbeknownst to the group, been made by one station into a musical signifier for America, indicates the complicated situation that they find themselves in within the Syrian radioscope.

⁵⁹ According to Bassam Haddad, “Real Estate in Damascus is now among the most expensive in the world, certainly making the top-ten list. Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 15.

⁶⁰ See for example the proposal for a music venue/studio/mentoring space put together by vocalist Bashar Moussa’s arts management agency Ninawa Creative Units. “Music Shelter <http://music-shelter.com/> (accessed June 10, 2012).

⁶¹ Iyad Rimawi, personal correspondence, May 2012.

Conclusion

The radio station described in *Idhā‘at Sawa* is one that combines Western and Arabic musical styles with news reports from across the Arabophone world, encourages and features calls and feedback from listeners, is basically secular in orientation, consisting of Muslim and Christian members, and is predicated on a critique of the existing media landscape in the Middle East. Boiled down to that kernel description, and absent all of the context of its reality as an idea dreamt up by a few musicians in Damascus, rather than by a few legislators, officials, and businessmen in Washington, the station seem remarkably similar to Radio Sawa.

A kaleidoscopic refraction of the idea behind Radio Sawa, seen through the lens of a particular musical scene, *Idhā‘at Sawa* displays all of these similarities, while at the same time managing to present a political viewpoint in direct opposition to the policy priorities defended by the American broadcast. While refusing to place itself into the role of the US’s opposition in the Global War on Terror, *Idhā‘at Sawa* repudiates the Iraq War (Waṣlu al-‘Askar), and mocks the US run constitution and election process (al-Aṣba‘ Al-Banafajī), criticizes the confessional government system in Lebanon (al-Bayt), calls US ally and former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a War Criminal (Nā‘im ‘ala Shāṭ al-Baḥr) romanticizes resistance to Israel in southern Lebanon, and mocks the Arabophobia of American media (Ana Irhābī).

At the same time, the creators of *Idhā‘at Sawa* demonstrate an understanding of American culture and musical styles that is far beyond what any advocate of “Brand America” could hope to achieve through radio broadcasts. The very act of reproducing a variation of Radio Sawa’s form and concept, and the style and forms of American music, with completely antithetical political content calls into question some of the principles behind the use of music in Radio Sawa and American international broadcasting.

The two “stations” both employ a mix of music and political content, but the roles of these two elements, and the presumed listening pattern associated with the two sources, couldn’t be more different. The political content on *Idhā‘at Sawa* - antipathy towards US and Israeli policies, sympathy for victims of war in Iraq, Gaza, and Southern Lebanon, desire to end sectarianism in Lebanon – are all built around areas of agreement with the band’s young Arab audience. Not trying to persuade or convince skeptical listeners, Kulna Sawa addresses a local audience who will presumably have similar views and sympathies on these issues. Instead, the task for the band is to convince a larger Syrian audience of the relevance of its musical style, in a region where there exists is a larger audience for the band’s political message than for its mix of Western rock styles. The members of Kulna Sawa are fully aware that rock music is not the best way to spread a message (political or otherwise) to the general populace, and yet they envision a pan-Arab station which does exactly that, broadcasting across the breadth of the Arab world.

Idhā‘at Sawa is certainly an example of a resistance to Western narratives about political justice and just force, but it is more than simply an inversion of the Radio Sawa and America’s political positions. In a reversal of Radio Sawa’s attempt to use a musical frame to move listeners to consider an alternate political reality, *Idhā‘at Sawa* uses a political frame to posit a new musical reality. It crystallizes the essential differences between American and Syrian historical conceptions of the radio. Americans tend to imagine radio as fundamentally musical, and only occasionally political. In the penetrated system of Middle Eastern politics, radio is fundamentally political and often, simultaneously, musical.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion: Sound Shifts and the Syrian Uprising

في دمشق
تسير السماء
على الطرقات القديمة
حافية حافية
فما حاجة الشعراء إلى الوحي
والوزن
والقافية

*In Damascus:
the sky walks
barefoot on the old roads,
barefoot
so what's the poet's use
of revelation
and meter
and rhyme?...*

Mahmoud Darwish – from *The Damascene Collar of the Dove*¹

At the weekly poetry night in Damascus, *Bayt al-Qasīd*, a long-running event popular amongst poets, actors, university students, and foreigners looking for a fix of formal Arabic, the poem “*Tawq al-Hamāma al-Dimashqi*” (The Damascene Collar of the Dove) by Mahmoud Darwish, was a recurring refrain. The city of Darwish’s ode is the Damascus not just of Damascenes, but of travelers, strangers, and pilgrims. On the many nights I attended Bayt al-Qaseed in 2009 and 2010, those who brought the poem to the podium were usually from outside of Damascus, and often outside of Syria. Visitors from Aleppo, Amman, Beirut and Baghdad all came prepared with at least a few of the twenty-two stanzas, each beginning with “*Fī Dimashqa*” (“In Damascus...”).²

¹ Mahmoud Darwish, *The Butterfly's Burden*, trans. Fady Joudah (Port Townsend, Wash.: Copper Canyon Press, 2007), 105.

² I attended Bayt al-Qaseed approximately fifteen times in 2009 and 2010.

The city of the poem is also the city of a listener and music-lover, where “speech softens, and I hear the sound of blood in the marble veins,” where “the dialogue goes on, between the violin and the oud, about the question of existence, and about endings,” and “the flute completes its habit, of longing for what is present in it, then cries in vain.” Spoken aloud at Bayt al-Qasīd, the poem was brought into being in an interaction between text, voice and listeners. Depending on the respect afforded to the visiting reciter, and the mood of the crowd, the opening lines could incite anything from respectful silence to mocking group recitation along with the speaker, to gleeful corrections of grammar should a speaker drop his or her vowels).³ Few readers would recite the full poem, and with each new selection of lines, new voice, and new interaction between speaker and audience, a fresh portrait of the city was created from Darwish’s sketch.

In Damascus 2012, in the midst of the crisis, Bayt al-Qasīd has been shut down, the stream of foreign visitors has dried up, and some of the regular attendees have fled the city or the country, but the sound of this particular poem can still be heard every day on the radio.⁴ On Sham FM, the most overtly nationalistic of the Syrian private radio stations, a recording of Darwish reading “*Tawq al-Hamāma al-Dimeshqi*” is in high rotation, used along with a number of poems about Damascus and Syria as interstitial material between music programs and newscasts. As the crisis in Syria has developed, the resonance of the symbols of Syria has shifted, and so has the sound of the Syria radioscape.

³ “Arā lughatī kulluhā ‘alā ḥubbat al-qamhi, maktūbatan bi ibrati unthā”

⁴ Based on personal communication with former attendees (May 2012.)

Rather than concluding with an overview of the ground covered in this dissertation, in the following pages I describe some of the ways that the Syrian soundscape has changed between spring 2011 and summer 2012. Given the current turmoil in Syria -- a situation which at this point can only be described as a civil war -- and the inherent problems in writing about the country from afar, this section can only be a gesture towards future scholarship. Nevertheless, I hope to point towards some ways that the previous chapters in this dissertation may be relevant to thinking about music and radio broadcasting in the midst of conflict.⁵

The Syrian Regime and Media Responses to Threats

The Syrian revolution began in earnest in March of 2011 over a year after the beginning of the Arab Uprisings in Tunisia, a period in which many foreign observers predicted that the revolutionary wave would leave the Asad regime unscathed.⁶ Between March 2011 and August 2012 (the time of this writing), the crisis progressed through a series of demonstrations and violent crackdowns by the regime to a state of civil war between the Syrian army and a variety of rebel militias.⁷ Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled, more have been internally displaced, and significant parts of the country, including areas in the largest cities of Aleppo and Damascus, are in a state of

⁵ Radio listening for this chapter was conducted via the internet from the US, as well as on trips to Lebanon in May 2011, and Jordan in July 2012.

⁶ Bassam Haddad, "Why Syria is not next...So far" *Jadaliyya.com* March 9, 2011 <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/844/why-syria-is-not-next-.-.-so-far-with-arabic-tra> (accessed August 12, 2012).

⁷ Neil MacFarquhar "Syrian Opposition is Hobbled by Deep Divisions" *The New York Times* February 23, 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/24/world/middleeast/syrian-opposition-is-hobbled-by-deep-divisions.html?_r=1&ref=world (accessed August 20, 2012).

open war.⁸ The mere names of towns in Syria - Homs, al-Houla, Darāya – have become shorthand for the unimaginable violence perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its own citizens.

Before moving to a discussion of radio and music during the uprisings, it is useful to give a brief overview of Syrian media's public response to internal threats. Before the current crisis, the events which had presented the greatest domestic challenge to the Syrian Ba'thist regime and the rule of the Asads was the Muslim Brotherhood-led uprising between 1977-1982, which culminated in the 1982 massacre of Brotherhood forces as well as thousands of civilians in Hama. Writing about Syrian state-controlled media's depiction of the events at Hama, Lisa Wedeen states:

The ways in which events at Hama were portrayed exemplifies how the regime uses partial truth-telling, prohibitions against speech, and iconography to provide a consensually understood formula for proper articulations of the conflict. The events at Hama represent perhaps the most significant domestic conflict of Asad's rule. They could not be flatly ignored, and they prompted a public, official explanation that included the usual rhetoric accusing Zionists and Americans of intervening in Syrian internal affairs and marking the Brotherhood as agents of Western imperialism. However, the account went beyond these rhetorical conventions and divulged partial details of what happened. The choice of details reveals how the regime offers a formula for staying safe during

⁸ "Syria refugee numbers 'surpass 200,000'" *Al Jazeera* August 25, 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/08/20128252237209782.html> (accessed August 25, 2012).

especially troubled times, both communicating the official terms of national membership and also interpolating “citizens” in the narrative by occasioning their participation in its reproduction.⁹

While in the 1980s some media from outside of the country (significantly radio) were available within the country, and presented information and views conflicting with that of official outlets, it was possible for the state to create a media climate in which the official narrative was, if not the only one available, at least the only one which could be discussed in the public sphere. According to Wedeen, rather than aiming for strict “legitimacy”, or even necessarily for individual belief in state media’s version of events, the purpose of regime media is to regulate the public discourse and the practices of public communication:

The regime’s representation of events at Hama demonstrates the ways in which the official narrative clutters public space and provides a formula for public speech. The regime puts forth the exemplary rhetoric to be imitated and thereby orients would-be commentators. It also communicates its intolerance of alternative symbols, discussions, and language. The rhetoric’s flexibility allows definitions to remain slippery, and it uses paradox and hyperbole to construe events in terms of

⁹ Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 46.

preexisting categories, including assumptions of harmonious unity, Ba’thist control, and [Hafiz] Asad’s infallibility.¹⁰

One significant difference between the Syrian regime’s media response to the opposition of the early 1980s and the current crisis is in the relationship of official and de facto state-controlled media to outside media. In contrast even to a few decades ago, the addition of satellite television and the internet to the Syrian mediascape makes the illusion of a unitary depiction of events within Syria an impossible fiction to maintain. Syria has been accused (along with Iran) of attempts at jamming satellite signals, including those carrying Al-Hurra and the satellite stream of Radio Sawa, and pro-regime news outlets are forced to address the coverage by channels like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya, consistent advocates of the Syrian uprising.¹¹ The official website of the Syrian General Organization for Radio and Television acknowledges the reality of foreign media consumption, and even provides links to the website of some of the outside media outlets which have been blocked in the past, and lists the major Arabic-language Lebanese newspapers (al-Akhbar, An Nahar, As-Safeer), as well as the BBC, CNN, and the major pan-Arab dailies published in London (al-Hayat, ash-Sharq al-Awsat.)¹²

While the Syrian mediascape has changed significantly since the early 1980s, Wedeen’s insight that the regime-controlled media are not primarily concerned with

¹⁰ Ibid, 48.

¹¹“BBG Condemns Satellite Jamming: Adds Damascus, Syria to List of Sources,” *BBGStrategy.com* January 13, 2012 <http://www.bbgstrategy.com/2012/01/bbg-condemns-satellite-jamming-adds-damascus-syria-to-list-of-sources/> (accessed January 14, 2012); “Syrian regime deliberately jams Al Arabiya transmission,” *Al Arabiya* February 26, 2012 <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/15/194722.html> (accessed March 1, 2012).

¹² “Media Sites,” Syrian General Organization for Radio and Television <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=64> (accessed August 26, 2012).

achieving legitimacy or belief remains valid in the summer of 2012, with a difference being that to a greater extent than in previous crises, the public discourse is created with the availability of outside information sources as an openly acknowledged factor. Early on in the current crisis, several articles in the Western press described Syrian media outlets as attempting to ignore the situation, and provide an illusion of calm, but in sampling Syrian radio and television from the US (and more briefly from Lebanon and Jordan) via satellite television and the internet, I have not found this to be the case. Instead the Syrian regime has attempted to create a public narrative of the crisis in opposition to foreign news outlets, and discredit the pan-Arab satellite stations. With the majority of the Saudi and Gulf-financed media arrayed against the Syrian regime (and the financial assistance coming from these countries to some of the Syrian rebels), the Syrian media attacks not just Western powers, but pan-Arab media as part of a global conspiracy to wage a “psychological and media war” alongside the traditional US, Zionist, and Islamist enemies invoked in political rhetoric.

An examination of the state media rhetoric in regards to Syrian uprising is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but one can broadly describe the Syrian regime-controlled media in 2011 and 2012 as attempting to portray the demonstrators and (later) rebel fighters as foreign or foreign-backed terrorists, and a threat to the secular, multi-ethnic Syrian society. The relationship between Syrian minority groups (including Christian, Druze, Ismaili and Twelver Shia in addition to the Alawis, who form much of the military and security apparatus of the state) and the Syrian regime since the assumption of power by Hafiz al-Asad has been a complicated one. As numerous scholars of Syria have detailed, the regime has historically been forced to walk the fine line of portraying

the state as the secular defender of minority rights, while also appeasing the majority Sunni population.¹³ In terms of mass media, both of these efforts have intensified during the uprising. In an attempt to retain the loyalty of Sunni allies, the regime for the first time sponsored religious satellite television and radio stations (Nour ash-Sham), in a deal with Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan Al-Buti in 2011.¹⁴ While decrying sectarianism as part of an extreme Islamist plot to divide the Syrian state, and observing the general prohibition against the discussion of sectarian affiliation in public life, Syrian radio and television have made obvious attempts to stoke the fears of minority groups in the country. For example, after a bombing in a Christian neighborhood in Damascus in April 2012, Syrian state television preceded an interview with a local church official by broadcasting scenes of a beaten and crucified Jesus from the film *The Passion of the Christ*, directly linking the rebels and their potential ascension to power with the persecution of Christians.¹⁵ These fears of an Islamist takeover among many Syrians (including many Sunnis as well as religious minorities and secularists) have made it easier for the state to paint media coverage by pan-Arab satellite stations (backed by conservative Sunni-dominated Gulf states) as sectarian and ideologically motivated.

As Wedeen argues, the point of Syrian propaganda is not necessarily to convince or persuade citizens of the accuracy of its depiction of the world but instead to provide “a formula for public speech,” and at times Syrian television and radio stations do not even

¹³ See Leon T. Goldsmith, “The Politics of Sectarian Insecurity: Alawite 'Asabiyya and the Rise and Decline of the Asad Dynasty of Syria” (PhD dissertation: University of Otago, 2012); Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria-Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'ith Party* (London: IE Tauris, 1996); Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria Under Asad* (London: IB Tauris, 1997).

¹⁴ Phil Sands, “Assad Government Enlists Imams to calm Sunni Majority,” *LebanonWire.com* April 8, 2011 <http://www.lebanonwire.com/1104MLN/11040824TN.asp>

¹⁵ Syria TV, April 7, 2012. Mel Gibson (director), *The Passion of the Christ*, DVD (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Inc., 2004).

seem to be trying very hard to create a convincing narrative. The “paradox and hyperbole” in public depictions of events in Hama in 1982 is equally present in discourse about the current Syrian Uprisings, and much of what pro-regime media outlets have broadcast in 2011 and 2012 must be unbelievable even to ardent supporters of the regime. Rather than competing with outside media sources for the most believable narrative, part of its task is to create a climate in which all media is assumed to be propagandistic, or to use the terminology outlined in the introduction, all media is directed media (*al-’ilām al-muwajjah*). This skeptical view of media has the benefit of being true, both in the broad sense that all communication is political, and in the more narrow sense that it would be hard to watch or listen to the major Arabic-language news networks (al-Jazeera, al-Arabiyya, al-Hurra, etc...) without perceiving an editorial slant in favor of revolution in Syria.¹⁶

Embedded in L. Carl Brown’s “penetrated system” of Middle Eastern politics, Syrians are certainly more accustomed than most audiences to listening between the notes and assuming political motivations behind all media.¹⁷ In a context where the assumed dominance of state media and its narrative of reality has broken down, the task is not to convince listeners that, for example, the Syrian opposition consists of foreign jihadis.

¹⁶ In addition, Syria’s partial success in blocking access to the country for foreign journalists means that while local pro-regime reporters are able to travel to some of the locations in question and interview eyewitnesses (real or manufactured), reporter from networks outside of Syria have frequently been forced to rely on Skype and telephone interviews, YouTube clips, and other sources whose legitimacy may be questionable in the face of regime propaganda. On al-Jazeera, the repetition of a limited number of video clips could sometimes give the impression that producers are trying to expand the significance of events like anti-Asad protests beyond what they can confirm through regular reporting. This perception does not necessarily make the regime’s forced confessions and talk of “terrorists” and “global conspiracies” any more convincing, but it does make it easier to accept the argument that al-Jazeera is actively working against the Syrian regime. The frequently remarked upon counter-example is the relative lack of coverage of Bahrain.

¹⁷ Leon Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 5.

The goal of the state is to convince listeners that “acting as if” that were true is safer, or more directly in their interests, than acting as if it were not true, that associating with the public formula of the Syrian state’s directed media is a better bet than associating with (equally politically motivated) outside and opposition media. The assessment of this type of media environment requires a kind of skeptical listening on the part of the audience. The listener is primed to interpret not just the news content of a broadcast, but also the political position of the broadcasts, and the particular type of public performance desired by the broadcasters.

Radio during the Syrian Uprising

في دمشق
تشف القصائد
لا هي جسدية
ولا هي ذهبية
إنها ما يقول الصدى
للصدى...

In Damascus
poems become diaphanous
they’re neither sensual
nor intellectual
they are what the echo
says to the echo

Mahmoud Darwish – from *The Damascene Collar of the Dove*¹⁸

The shift in the Syrian radioscape has been gradual. Over the course of 2011 Syrian private radio stations began broadcasting more and more political news, a practice from which private stations are ostensibly banned under the licenses granted by the

¹⁸ Darwish, *The Butterfly’s Burden*, 112. (translated by Fady Joudah)

government.¹⁹ In the early months of the uprising in Syria, the news broadcasts on private music stations attempted to maintain a veneer of impartiality or objectivity, maintaining a level of brand differentiation from official state radio while simultaneously reinforcing the narratives espoused by official state outlets. Rather than directly report on official statements, the private radio stations would often cite Western or non-Syrian sources like the BBC or CNN, and quote politicians or officials from outside Syria (Russia, China, and Turkey especially) describing elements of the opposition as “armed terrorists.” For several stations including al-Madina FM, Syria al-Ghad radio, and Arabesque, the early response to the uprising took the form of talk shows where listeners could call in to report on the “real situation.” In April of 2011, the station manager of Radio Arabesque stated:

Radio Arabesque is in solidarity with the other domestic media agencies in confronting the false content broadcast by some unprofessional media organizations. Arabesque engages in this opposition in a number of ways, including by opening free lines to the citizens of all provinces to connect with “Syria, My Love” and speak about their situation, so that everyone can be reassured of the stability of the situation in all provinces.²⁰

As the crisis progressed and became bloodier, private radio has increased news coverage, and that coverage has come to more closely resemble the traditional regime-

¹⁹ *Daftār al-shurūt al-khāṣṣ bil-sharakāt al-idhā'iyya al-masmū'a al-tijāriyya al-khāṣṣa wa al-murāfaq bil-qirār raqm 4981*, Ministry of Information 8/10/2004, <http://www.moi.gov.sy/ar/aid5924.html>. (accessed March 12, 2012)

²⁰ Ala' Amr, “al-idhā'āt al-sūriyya daḥḍ kull al-akādhīb allatī lafaqathā ba'd al-qanawāt wa al-idhā'āt” *Baladna Online* http://www.baladnaonline.net/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=54241 (accessed April 20, 2012).

controlled news outlets. Sham FM, the station which embraced its new role as a news source most enthusiastically, broadcasts short news segments around the clock, in addition to longer daily broadcasts under the heading “*M’alūmāt Akīda*” (Accurate Information). Other stations, including Melody FM, Version FM, and Radio Fann, broadcast weekly political news and current events shows, or Q&A programs with the *mas’ūlīn*, government and party officials (literally: the responsible people).

According to Honey al-Sayed, a former morning show host for al Madina FM who fled Syria to the US in January of 2012:

My show turned political, and every show turned political because there was an elephant in the room you needed to talk about...but when you talk about it, you have to say, 'It's terrorists.' All media became state media, whether you liked it or not.²¹

These stations do not have an independent newsgathering infrastructure, and the broadcasts draw on the same government-run Syrian Arab News Association (SANA) that provides reporting for Syrian newspapers. The increase in demand for newsreaders on private radio has also taxed the pool of experienced broadcasting talent. As stations previously restricted to music and entertainment news began broadcasting current events and political news, a listener could frequently hear novice radio broadcasters struggling to maintain their control over the language and diction associated with a serious newscaster. Although it would be impossible for regime censors to monitor every station

²¹ Hannah Allam, “Radio Host Forced to Toe Regime Line Flees Syria in Fear of Rebel Violence,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 26, 2012, <http://www.freep.com/article/20120826/NEWS07/308260202>. (accessed August 26, 2012).

around the clock to ensure that the government line is followed, Article 15 of the Syrian law governing private radio states that stations must continuously record their broadcast and maintain a digital record of one month, to be delivered to the Ministry of Information upon request.²²

In contrast to the partial shift towards political news amongst Syrian private stations, Radio Sawa has retained the same format throughout the Arab uprisings, with the same ratio of music to news content, though revolutions across the Arab world have naturally dominated Radio Sawa's news broadcasts. The appearance of Radio Sawa in relation to local stations has shifted, however, in that the basic format of Radio Sawa, the combination of popular music and news, has been adopted by Syrian private stations, which for the first time are allowed and required to report on politics (albeit with a single perspective). With reduced public spending on advertising in the failing Syrian economy, the private stations have come to mirror Radio Sawa in another way, almost parodying consumer capitalism in the face of economic crisis through programming and format which aspires to the status of commercialism, but without the necessary commercials or income.²³

Music

Syrian private stations have also shifted on a musical level during the period since the beginning of the uprisings. Most audibly, there has been an unsurprising increase in explicitly nationalistic and patriotic songs (*Āghānī Waṭaniyya*). Already

²² *Daftār al-shurūt al-khāṣṣ bil-sharakāt al-idhā'iyya al-masmū'a al-tijāriyya al-khāṣṣa wa al-murāfaq bil-qirār raqm 4981*, Ministry of Information 8/10/2004, <http://www.moi.gov.sy/ar/aid5924.html>. (accessed March 12, 2012)

²³ Saddam Hussein, "al-idhā'āt al-khāṣṣa ghuruf lil-tanjīm wa al-sha'ūdha wa al-fan al-hābiṭ .. wa ṣalūnāt lil-siyyāsa wa al-akhbār" *DamasPost.com* December 20, 2011. (accessed June 6, 2012)

inclined towards patriotic slogans (even the English language, Western-music focused station Mix FM uses the slogan “Proud 2B Syrian”), stations have increased patriotic rhetoric and to a lesser extent shifted their playlists towards songs which explicitly reference Syria.²⁴ For example, for several months (between at least February and June 2012), the “Top Five Songs” listed on Al Madina FM’s website consisted exclusively of patriotic and nationalistic songs.

top 5		
	bddi ghazel soria	1
	Melhem Zain	
	ana-soury-rap	2
	Abd Ara7madn	
	7 aiou Souria	3
	wafe2 habeb	
	ba3 dak ya watny	4
	George Wassouf	
	zoro souria	5
	Rweda Attya	

Figure 6.1: Screenshot of the “Top 5 Songs” Al-Madina FM website (English page).

March 22, 2012²⁵

²⁴“Main Page” MixFmSyria.com <http://www.mixfmsyria.com/mix/index.php> (accessed August 12, 2012).

²⁵ “Main Page” (English) AlMadinaFm.com <http://www.almadinafm.com/new/index.php> (accessed March 22, 2012)



Figure 6.2: Screenshot of “Top 5 Songs” from the website of Al-Medina FM . June 5, 2012 (same five songs listed).²⁶

Some of these *āghānī waṭaniyya* have come from Lebanese or other non-Syrian singers, and were recorded well before the Arab Uprisings. Although the performers of these older songs have come under some criticism in their home countries, before the beginning of the Syrian revolution these songs were often understood to be the price of admission for artists wanting to perform concerts in Syria.²⁷

In 2011, before the violence in Syria had spread to Damascus and Aleppo in a large way, there was an explosion in nationalistic and directly pro-regime songs. The flood of pro-regime songs was particularly evident on the Arabic-language internet, where Youtube was flooded with both new songs and home-edited pro-Bashar videos set to old songs, and numerous websites like *Şawt el Ghad Syria* focused primarily on the

²⁶ Main Page” (Arabic) AlMadinaFm.com <http://www.almadinafm.com/new/index.php> (accessed June 5, 2012)

²⁷ The website HotArabicMusic.com has compiled a list of pro-Bashar songs by Lebanese singers which includes a long list of famous names. “Lebanon’s Finest Sing for Bashar” *Hot Arabic Music* July 2011 <http://hotarabicmusic.blogspot.com/2011/07/lebanons-finest-sing-for-bashar-2011.html> (accessed September 6, 2011).

distribution of Syrian patriotic and political songs.²⁸ There have been numerous articles in the Western press with titles like “the Soundtrack of the Revolution” since the beginning of the popular uprisings in Tunisia and their spread around the Arab world, and there are certainly a large number of songs expressing solidarity with the Syrian revolutionaries.²⁹ However, there has been very little mention of the counter-revolutionary or pro-regime music which, at least when it comes to Syrian mass-media and the internet, probably comprises a majority of that soundtrack. Of particular surprise to Western popular music scholars might be the significant number of pro-Bashar hip-hop, including for example the song “*did al-balad*” (“Against the Country”) by the group Murder Eyez, listed incorrectly on the Al-Madina Top Five chart above as “Ana Sūrī” by Abd al-Rahman (one of the members of the group). The song decries sedition (*fitna*), and namechecks “God and Bashar”, while accusing the opposition of hypocrisy and criminality, and the international media of propaganda.

...

You complain about cleanliness,
 You need to first clean up your door, your house, your history, and then your separatism
 You complain about bribes,
 You need to first stop your cheating,
 your piracy and your smuggling and tell me who will stop you

Al Jazeera, al-Arabiyya, and the BBC don't describe you
 A media war from the lobby, leading to your destruction
 You complain about security
 We are forcing a lesson upon you...³⁰

²⁸See <http://www.sawtelghadsyria.com/>

²⁹ For a sampling of these songs, see: <http://aghanisy.blogspot.com/>

³⁰My translation. Murder Eyez, “Syrian Legend” Big Change Recordz Aleppo, Syria <http://www.myspace.com/murdereyez> (accessed August 15, 2012).

The song “*diḍ al-balad*” is an interesting example in terms of where it falls stylistically relative to the standard playlists on Al-Madina FM and private radio. Arabic-language rap is very rarely heard on Syrian radio, and in periodic spot checks of the Al-Madina Top Song chart between 2010 and 2012, this is the only song found featured on the list featuring a rapped vocal style. Here as with the discussion of *Idhā‘at Sawa* in Chapter 5, we have an instance in which the political content of the songs allows for the dispersal of a less popular musical style

It is important to mention that one cannot use the prevalence of pro-regime songs at a given point in time, or the ratio of pro vs. anti-Bashar comments on YouTube, as a proxy for the political opinions of the Syrian people. Access to both recording technology and the internet is disproportionately available to Syria’s wealthy in Damascus and Aleppo, groups who are usually assumed to support the Asad regime at a higher rate than the poor and people outside of those two cities. In addition as with most public professions of allegiance to the Syrian regime, there are also multiple incentives at play here beyond the articulation of political affiliation. For example, in an April 2012 interview with al-Watan, composer Sadiq Dimeshqi criticized the “wave of patriotic songs” as largely comprised of transparent attempts to achieve fame while there was interest and demand for that genre.³¹

As mentioned above, there have also been a significant number of musicians to come out against the regime, including both musicians like Samih Shuqair, and pop star

³¹ “ṣadiq dimeshqi lil-waṭan: al-i‘lām al-sūrī ba‘d kul ba‘d ‘an al-ihtimām bil-aghānī al-sūriyya” *Al Watan* April 25, 2012 <http://alwatan.sy/dindex.php?idn=121623> (accessed April 26, 2012).

Asala Nasri, who performed concerts in the US to raise money for the opposition.³² Shayna Silverstein has also written on oppositional performances in a summer 2012 article on “Syria’s Radical Dabke.”³³ While I don’t mean to diminish the significance of this oppositional music, pro-revolution songs are unsurprisingly absent from Syrian radio (nor for that matter do they appear with any frequency on Radio Sawa), and as such, have limited relevance to the current discussion. Artists are often pressed to make political statements, and blacklists are being kept on both sides.³⁴ Directly pro-regime music, though increasingly present during the Syrian uprising, does not actually comprise a very large segment of the playlists on Syrian private stations, or even the states’ *Ṣawt ash-Shabāb* for that matter, and instead there have been subtler shifts in existing playlists and programming.

The percentage of foreign language songs may have decreased slightly in relation to the playlists that were used when I was in Syria in 2010 as the regime’s rhetoric against foreign instigators and conspirators has increased, but not to a remarkable extent. There has however been a small but audible shift within the foreign language playlist, conforming to the process of Syrian genre assimilation described earlier. Though in my listening since Spring 2011 I have found foreign song prevalence only slightly lower, the number of foreign songs which might be categorized as fully Western, not fitting easily within Syrian radio genres, has decreased more noticeably. Thus while continuing to

³² Syrian American Council, “Syria Benefit Concert with: Asala Nasri & Malik Jandali” <http://www.sacouncil.com/index.php/events/> (accessed May 12, 2012)

³³ Shayna Silverstein, “Syria’s Radical Dabke,” *Middle East Report* 42 (Summer 2012), 33-37.

³⁴ See for example “qā’ima al-‘ār al-sūriyya” <http://www.facebook.com/Syrian.Blacklist> (accessed August 26, 2012).

program nearly the same quantity of non-Arabic songs, I would argue that the playlists on Syrian radio have become audibly less foreign.

Using the taxonomies and visualizations from Chapters 3 and 4, Figure 6.3 represents a typical pre-2011 playlist for Syrian private radio, while Figure 6.4 would represent a playlist with a slightly shifted content of foreign songs.

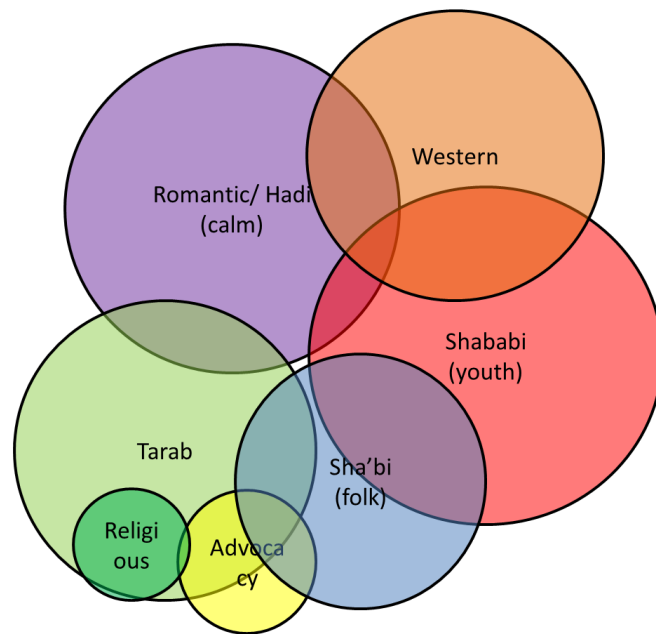


Figure 6.3: Graphic Representation of a typical pre-2011 playlist on Syrian private radio.

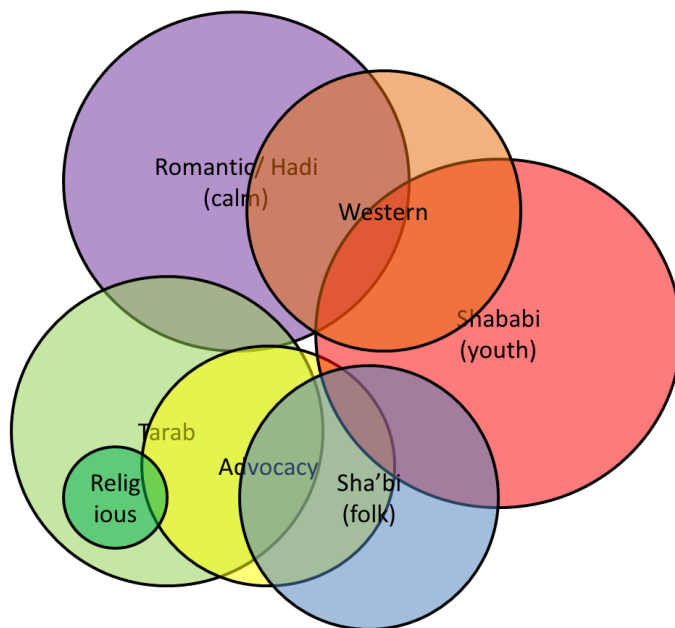


Figure 6.4: Graphic Representation of a playlist on Syrian private radio in 2012.

I would characterize the shift in the Western playlist as moving into a position of further overlap with *rūmānsī/hādi'*, and *shabābī* categories. To put this into familiar stylistic terms, more of the Western songs played in 2012 are familiar hits from the 1980s and 1990s, and fewer of them are new songs in Western styles (guitar-based rock and rhythmically syncopated hip-hop) which are less associated with other radio categories. While this analysis represents a subjective interpretation of an extremely large pool of musical data, there are daily uses of music on Syrian radio which are significantly less subtle. Listening to the Syrian radio since March of 2011 provides numerous cases in which the choice of existing music, even within a set of radio genre expectations, is meant to convey a clear political message.

Each morning on Sham FM a woman's voice greets listeners across the country, saying "Sabāḥ al- Khayr"(Good Morning) to a city over the introduction to each song. The station's morning playlist is typically *Fairuziāt* and music from the 50s, 60s, and 70s. On a particular Friday morning (September 6, 2011) she greets the following cities one by one over the course of the morning, each salutation moving smoothly into a love song by Fairuz or her male contemporaries:

Sabāḥ al-Khayr Ṭarṭūs...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr Qudsayya...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr Mhardeh...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr Baniyas...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr Sweida...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr Idlib ...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr Raqqa ...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr ya Sham...
 Sabāḥ al- Khayr ya baladi (my country)

The final two cities are greeted over the same song, a male voice backed by a chorus, a martial rhythm and stomping percussion. Wind instruments accompany the drums, and echoes of a marching army reverberate as the chorus repeats the words of the leader. The song is "Ṭallu Ṭallu As-Siyādi" ("They come, they come, the hunters") by Nasri Shams ad-Deen. The cities are Homs and Hama, two historical centers of opposition to the Asad regime, and two cities which on the day I was listening were in open revolt against the regime, and under constant threat of bombardment from the Syrian army.

Sabāḥ al-Khayr Homs

*They come, They come, the hunters, and their weapons are shining
 There is a gray bird flying and lolling about*

*From one valley to another, the hunters couldn't get her
I promise to get you oh little bird³⁵*

Sahab al-khayr Hama

This song can be heard as a love song, but paired with the cities of Hama and Homs, the effect is unquestionably threatening. A listener has a clear idea of who the symbols of the song represent, and is given a clear choice of identifying with the hunters, or identifying with the bird.

Conclusion

That Syrian commercial stations exist at the pleasure of the Asad regime is surprising to absolutely no one in Syria, but the fact that these stations are now making their political affinities audible through broadcasting news, and through their musical choices, has changed the radioscope significantly. Where does this leave Radio Sawa and America's attempts at musical diplomacy? Apart from the increased relevance of its news content, the programming aimed at the Levant has not changed all that much since the beginning of the Arab Uprisings. Where a listener might have previously differentiated Radio Sawa on the basis of its mix of music and news, the station now has no obvious format differentiation with local music stations. As such, the significant differentiating factor for the station becomes the news content, the direction of the "directed media," as skeptical listeners perceive the station as a foreign-funded version of local Syrian pop/news equivalents with a particularly American political thrust.

³⁵My rough translation. Naṣrī Shams Ad-Dīn "Ṭallu Ṭallu As-Siyādi" Youtube video posted by SaidaTV December 20, 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5HHjlQ7188> (accessed January 5, 2012).

In conversations with radio listeners in Damascus in 2010, the American Radio Sawa was occasionally confused with a local station entitled “Radio Samar” (the station has since changed its name Radio Nujoom), a name that isn’t really very similar, but can be confused in the context of a station bumper over loud, fast-paced backing music. It is hard to imagine listeners making that mistake now. Though increased news content on Syrian private radio has brought these stations closer to the format of Radio Sawa, the political distinction between the US and the Syrian directed media is made crystal clear by listening for more than a few minutes.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the question of how “American” a station sounds is determined not by the prevalence of American songs, but rather by the relationship of those songs to local contexts, local listeners, and local listening practices. Musically, the shifts during the conflict have had the strange effect of making the Western music in Syrian radio noticeably more “Syrian,” at least in terms of its relationship to Syrian programming categories, and the reciprocal effect of making American radio sound relatively more “American.” The combination of heightened musical contrast between the foreign playlists of Radio Sawa and local stations, and the increased awareness of all media outlets as politically motivated, creates a situation in which Sawa might be interpreted as advocating American culture more forcefully in 2012 than it did in 2010, relative to the background radioscope. The meaning of this music for listeners, and therefore its political resonance and its power to persuade listeners or “move the needle,” changes as the radioscope and political landscape changes.

As I write these final pages, drawn away periodically by the appalling news of the latest massacre in Daraya, it is impossible to predict what will happen in Syria.³⁶ As an analysis of the role of music and political radio in the Syrian Revolution, this short chapter can only point towards future scholarship. There are, however, signs in the Syrian mediascape that a tectonic shift is immanent. A spate of Syrian broadcasters from both state and private stations have recently abandoned the regime, and the important Syrian soap opera industry is shutting down, Addounia television has ceased broadcasting on Arabsat and Nilesat, and there are signs that the media elite in Damascus and Aleppo are falling away from Asad.³⁷ The state radio and television building in Damascus was attacked in early August 2012.³⁸ Musically, the wave of pro-Bashar songs has receded somewhat, and Al Madina FM's Top Songs chart no longer exclusively features *āghānī wataniyya*. I come across fewer pro-Bashar songs via the internet and social media in August 2012 than I have for the past year and a half, though it is impossible to tell whether this is the result of a shift in public opinion and the beliefs among music producers about who is likely to prevail, or because violence has forced studios and at-home producers in Syria to shut down; certainly both explanations are at play.

The shape that Syria will take in the coming months and years is unclear. So too the contours of the future Syria's media and radioscapas are impossible to predict. If the recent history of policy in the Middle East is any guide, however, we can confidently

³⁶ Anonymous employee of *The New York Times* in Syria and Damian Cave, "Mass Burials Held in Damascus Suburb Amid Army Crackdown" *The New York Times* August 27, 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/27/world/middleeast/dozens-of-bodies-are-found-in-town-outside-damascus.html?_r=1&hp (accessed August 27, 2012).

³⁷ Omar Adam Sayfo, "Another Casualty of War: Soap Operas" <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/17/opinion/in-syria-the-soap-opera-is-a-casualty-of-war.html>

³⁸ "Syria TV 'Hit by Bomb Attack' in Damascus" BBC News Middle East August 6, 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19145431> (accessed August 6, 2012).

predict that US policymakers will attempt to shape these future topographies through every means at their disposal, be it economic sanctions or incentives, traditional diplomacy, “coercive diplomacy” and the threat of force, or subtler means like the musical and public diplomacy of Radio Sawa. In this dissertation I hope to have shown that these efforts need to be understood not just in terms of foreign policy and political “facts on the ground”, but of local media and musical life, and ways of listening and understanding music. While these sonic projections of the state become less audible amidst the din of bombs and bullets, they are nevertheless a real part of the way that states exert power over their own people and the people of foreign countries. Taking cultural diplomacy seriously as an exercise of political power means taking listening seriously, and recognizing efforts to shape the practice of listening for what they are: efforts to control the political practice of living.

Epilogue

A large-scale project like this dissertation inevitably involves a distillation process, as one attempts to winnow research threads and trails of inquiry into a coherent set of arguments and ideas. Over the course of the five years since I began formulating my dissertation project my focus has shifted, from an interest in America's political broadcasts in the Arab World and the broader use of popular music as a political tool to a fascination with popular music in Syria and the ways in which it is packaged, broadcast, discussed and heard over the radio. To the extent that this dissertation represents a synthesis between the broad issues of music and political radio and the specifics of the Syrian radioscape, I hope to have shown that the meanings of these large-scale efforts at political broadcasting and musical diplomacy are contingent on the local radio environments, sounds, and practices which define popular music in any specific place.

In Chapter 1 (Learning to Broadcast) I began with the history of international broadcasting in the Middle East, analyzing the institutional theories with which music has been employed as a tool of American foreign policy. These theories became a focus again in Chapter 4 (Radio Sawa, Sonic Consumerism, and Western Music in the Syrian Radioscape), where I argued that Radio Sawa operates under a theory of musical utility in which the efficacy of music depends not on its communicative power, but on the possibility of conditioning audiences to hear music and cultural products in a consumerist mindset. I further argue that his theory of of musical utility is based on an American historical myth of the Cold War that understands consumer capitalism as inherently pro-American.

As a music scholar, one of my hopes is to bring an increased focus on sound to the interdisciplinary discussion of public culture. Most significantly in this dissertation, I have described some of the aural signifiers that differentiate and classify various types of popular music, both local and Western, as they appear on Syrian radio. Chapter 2 (Damascus Radioscape) addressed the auditory practices, histories of radio, and theories of music through which listeners in the sonic environment of Damascus create locally relevant meaning out of music and radio. I expanded this description of the Syrian radioscape in Chapter 3 (Popular Music in Syrian Mass Media Discourse) drawing on the Arabic-language public and mass-media discourse to outline a taxonomy of popular music in terms of how it is programmed, discussed, and heard over the radio. In the second half of Chapter 4, I returned to this taxonomy in order to describe some of the musical attributes through which Western songs fit into Syrian radio categories. In Chapter 5 (*Idhā'at Sawa* and Asymmetric Music Politics) I addressed the Damascus rock scene, and a specific case in which a Syrian rock band, in the act of reproducing a variation of Radio Sawa's form and concept – with the style and forms of American music but antithetical political content – called into question some of the principles behind the use of music in Radio Sawa and American international broadcasting in general.

In the final chapter of the dissertation (Conclusion: Sound Shifts and the Syrian Uprising) I detailed the changes that have taken place in the Damascus radioscape between December 2010 and August 2012, since the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Here I described the current radioscape in relation to a practice of 'skeptical listening', wherein listeners translate the message of music radio, decoding a variety of messages

which may be at odds with those meant by the producers, as the political valences of messenger and media become a fundamental part of both the content and the act of listening.

Moving towards post-dissertation research, I anticipate two contrasting directions for my future work: broadening the scope outside of Syria to explore contrasting examples of radioscapes within the Arab World, and zooming in to conduct more ethnographically-focused work with individual listeners. Towards the first goal, I have begun work on the radioscape in Beirut, Lebanon, a city where regulatory, linguistic, political, historical, and social frameworks for the production and consumption of radio music are very different than those in Syria. Having conducted some field recording in Amman, Ramallah, and Cairo as well over the past few years, I am also exploring the possibility of adding a third site and corresponding radioscape to my continuing analysis of Radio Sawa and international broadcasting.

The second goal, of incorporating a more individual, listener-centered analysis to supplement the media analysis of Chapter 3, has been complicated by the particularities of working on Syria. When I visited Damascus on my initial research trips in Winter 2008- 2009 and began focus on Syria as a primary research site, I was aware that working on Syria would present certain difficulties. In particular, the kind of ethnographic, listener-centered work which I consider to be a necessary next step for this project was made difficult for a number of reasons. The first was the danger of doing politically-focused research in Syria. I did conduct ethnographic work in Damascus in 2010, but despite the fact that this dissertation rests heavily on the guidance and insight of the people with whom I spent time listening in Damascus coffee shops, homes, storefronts

and nightclubs, these individuals by and large do not appear as characters in this dissertation, for a variety of reasons which I discuss in the introduction. The second factor, of course unanticipated at the time, was the political upheaval and subsequent violence which has precluded work in Syria since Spring 2011. When I left Syria in the summer of 2010, I anticipated making a research trip the following year to focus in on a few specific settings for collective radio listening, and the way that listeners interact with and describe the radio.

The dissolution of the Syrian state, and of the 2010 Damascus soundscape that I describe in Chapter 2, ended immediate plans for further research into listening within Syria. Not only has it become impossible to conduct research in the country, but many of the very people with whom I spent my time listening in Damascus are no longer there. Among the Syrians with whom I have kept in contact, I know individuals and families who have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Europe and elsewhere, not to mention those internally displaced within Syria. At the moment then, plans for research into personal listening habits include working with Syrians in exile, especially in Lebanon, even as their experiences of listening (to music, the news, recordings, radio, to each other) has been profoundly disrupted, and the act of listening takes on a variety of new meanings in the context of the catastrophe in Syria.

The ethnographic present in which parts of this dissertation were written has definitively ended in Syria, and as with any work of scholarship on contemporary life, the dissertation became a historical document as soon as it was completed. On a basic level, this dissertation documents a historical moment from the end of the approximately six-year period prior to the current civil war, in which Syria's radioscape opened up to

private radio, and retreated slightly from the state domination of public culture. As I hope that I have demonstrated, mass-mediated musical life in Syria during this period was much more complicated than the simple juxtapositions of state vs. private, Syrian vs. foreign that might be implied by that description. The radioscape that was accessible to a Syrian listener during this period involved more than a mix of local, international, and hybrid musical genres and styles, and a range of political goals behind the programming of music on the radio; it provided the site for a variety of complex listening possibilities and ways of creating meaning from popular music. The exploration of these possibilities for listening – hybrid and conservative, local and cosmopolitan, overt and covert – is fundamental to our understanding of what music means as it travels across borders and around the world.

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Glossary

adhān – call to prayer

ajnabi – foreign, foreigner

idhā'a – radio

Buq'at Dau' – Spotlight (Syrian comedy program)

al-Ba'th – Syrian ruling party (lit. renewal)

balādī – country (adj. i.e., simple, unsophisticated, folklike)

bilād ash-Shām – greater Syria

dabke - traditional Levantine group dance

dabkāt – (pl. of dabke) dabke songs or dances

fairūziyyāt – songs sung by or associated with Fairuz

fann – art

hādī' - calm

ḥadīth – new, modern (also the Islamic prophetic tradition)

al-ī'lām al-muwajjah – directed media

al-ikhtirāq - penetration

inshād (or *anashīd*, plural of *nashīd*) - a religious songs or chants

iqā'āt – rhythmic modes

isnād – chain of transmission of tradition (usually refers to the transmission of *hadīth*)

jeel – generation

lafẓ - pronunciation

maqām (pl. *maqāmāt*) – melodic mode

mawwāl – vocal improvisation on colloquial poetry

mudhī'in – broadcasters

mukhābarāt – secret police

mujaddad – new or renewed

mūsīqā – music (more often referring to instrumental music)

muṭrib/a – singer (of *ṭarab*)

nashīṭ - lively

nāy – end blown flute

org – electric organ, synthesizer

sawā – together

ṣawt – voice

Ṣawt al-'Arab – Voice of the Arabs (Egyptian transnational radio station)

shabābī – youthful

sha 'bī – popular (of the people)

Sharq al Ādnā – Radio Near East (clandestine British Station)

ṭabla – drum

ṭarab – state of musical ecstasy (also a descriptor for the associated music, singers and songs)

turāth –heritage

ughniyya (pl. *aghānī*) - song

wasṭa – social clout/connections (lit. mediation)

Appendix 1 – *Idha'at Nūr ash-Shām* Daily Program April 3, 2012. ¹

برنامج يوم الثلاثاء 2012 / 4 / 3			
نوع البث	الحلقة	المادة	التوقيت
عرض		الافتتاح بالنشيد العربي السوري	08.00
عرض		رول عرض الوقائع	08.02
عرض		تلاوة من القرآن الكريم	08.04
إعادة		برنامج عائلي	08.50
عرض		أكتان النور / جامع العثمان /	09.53
مباشر		برنامج صباح الشام	10.00
عرض	3	سلسلة محمد رسول الله / نساء النبي /	11.05
عرض		برنامج مع الشعر	11.52
عرض		برنامج علوم القرآن	12.00
عرض		برنامج أغاليط التاريخ	12.24
عرض		مواقيت الصلاة + أذان الظهر + دعاء	12.42
عرض		برنامج دراسات قرآنية	01.00
عرض	5	سلسلة عصر الخلفاء	01.35
إعادة	28	برنامج مآثورات عربية	02.26
عرض		برنامج روائع إسلامية	02.35
إعادة		ندوة احتضنتهم الشام	03.00
عرض		تلاوة من القرآن الكريم	04.00
عرض		مواقيت الصلاة + أذان العصر + دعاء	04.15
عرض	28	الأدب المفرد	04.28
عرض	4	درس الجامع الأموي / ولي الدين فرفور /	04.30
إعادة		برنامج مع الشعر	05.15
إعادة		برنامج روائع إسلامية	05.36
عرض		تلاوة من القرآن الكريم	06.00
إعادة		برنامج الشمائل المحمدية	06.32
عرض		مواقيت الصلاة + أذان المغرب + دعاء	07.02
إعادة		أغاليط التاريخ	07.10
إعادة		برنامج دراسات قرآنية	07.30
عرض		تلاوة من القرآن الكريم	08.00
عرض		مواقيت الصلاة + أذان العشاء + دعاء	08.18
عرض	28	الأدب المفرد	08.28
إعادة	7	درس الجامع الأموي / عادل أبو شعر /	08.30
عرض	52	برنامج يوميات اقتصادية	09.15
مباشر		برنامج القانون والناس	09.30

¹ *Idha'at Nūr Ash-Sham* Daily Program 4-3-2012. <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php?m=596> (accessed 4/3/2012)

عرض 1		سورة الإنشاد	10.30
إعادة		برنامج مع الشعر	12.00
عرض 1		برنامج أسماء الله الحسنى	12.10
إعادة		برنامج صباح الشام	12.37
عرض 1		تلاوة من القرآن الكريم	01.37
إعادة		برنامج روائع إسلامية	02.37
إعادة		برنامج دراسات قرآنية	03.01
عرض 1	5	سلسلة عصر الخلفاء	03.31
عرض 1		تراجم الفجر	04.22
عرض 1		مواقيت الصلاة + أذان الفجر + دعاء	04.52
عرض 1		تلاوة من القرآن الكريم	05.00
إعادة		برنامج تواصل	06.00
إعادة	4	درس الجامع الأموي / ولي الدين فرفور /	07.00
عرض 1		يخلق الله ما لا تعلمون	07.39

Appendix 2: Results of Two Polls of Radio Station Popularity¹

	<i>Tishreen (FM Syria Poll)</i>		<i>DamasPost.com</i>
1	Radio Arabesque	1	Sham FM
2	Syria al-Ghad	2	Al-Madina FM
3	Version FM	3	Farah FM
4	Al-Madina FM	4	Radio Arabesque
5	Al-Madina FM*	5	Radio Fann
6	Şawt ash-Shabāb	6	Syria al-Ghad
7	al-Quds Radio	7	al-Arabiyya
8	Radio Shabha	8	Rotana Style
9	Ninar FM	9	Melody FM
10	Rotana Style	10	Version FM
11	Farah FM	11	Ninar
12	Melody FM	12	Stars (previously Samar FM)
13	Radio White		
14	Mix FM		

*Almost certainly a typo in the original article, number 4 or 5 should probably be Sham FM.²

¹ Notice that the two surveys did not include the same stations, much less achieve similar results.

² Nour ash-Sheik, “Arabesk al-idhā‘a al-sūriyya al-oula li-‘ām 2011” *Tishreen*, April 3, 2011 <http://tishreen.news.sy/tishreen/public/read/225465> (accessed June 10, 2012);

Saddam Hussein, “al-idha‘āt al-khāṣṣa ghuruf liltanjīm wa al-sha‘ūdha wa al-fann al-hābiṭ .. wa ṣalūnāt lil-siyyāsa wa al-akhbār” *DamasPost.com*, December 20, 2011, (accessed June 1, 2012). www.damaspost.com/ملفات-إعلامية/الإذاعات-الخاصة-غرف-للتنجيم-والشعرة-والفن-الهابط-وصالونات-السياسة-والأخبار.html

Radio Kulna Sawa	Idhā‘at Kulna Sawa	إذاعة كلنا سوا
<p>Welcome to all listeners Thank you for your choice of our station ... Our message is to the new wave Our focus is the land ... Radio Kulna Sawa, Thank you for your choice of our station. Stay with us. Live over the air, To the last moment our signal comes to you Stay with Radio Kulna Sawa</p> <p>Words and Music by Iyad Rimawi</p>	<p>āhlan bikul al-mustami‘īn shukrān li ikhtiyarkun maḥaṭatnā ... ‘irsālnā ‘al-mūja al-jadīda markaznā huwa al-‘arḍ ... idha‘a kulnā sawā .. shukrān li ikhtiyarkun maḥaṭatnā khalīkun ma‘na mubashratin ‘al-hawā’ .. lakhir laḥḥa btwaṣṣlkun ‘ishāratnā khalīkun m‘a idha‘at kulnā sawā</p> <p>kalimāt wa ālḥan Iyad al- Rimawi</p>	<p>أذاعة كلنا سوا أهلا بكل المستمعين شكرا لاختياركن محطاتنا ... إرسالنا عالموجة الجديدة مركزنا هو الأرض ... إذاعة كلنا سوا .. شكرا لاختياركن محطاتنا خليكن معنا مباشرة عالها .. لآخر لحظة بتوصلكن إشارتنا خليكن مع إذاعة كلنا سوا</p> <p>كلمات وألحان إياد الريماوي</p>
<p>The Day that Changed the World</p> <p>The day that changed the world I was in bed dreaming Just late like usual Under my eyes, on the newspaper The day that the world changed</p> <p>The day the world changed Not one of us could understand What was changing, what was beginning How the story will change The day that the world changed</p> <p>Words and Music by Iyad Rimawi</p>	<p>Youm Ely Taghayyir al‘alem</p> <p>Yūm ellī taghayyir al-‘ālam kuntu btekhṭī ‘am āḥlam faqat m‘akhir mitl al-‘āda fataḥt ‘ayūnī ‘al-jarīda yūm ellī taghayyir al-‘ālam</p> <p>yūm ellī taghayyir al-‘ālam ma ḥadā minā qadr yafham shū ellī taghayyir shū ellī tbadl kayf al-qīṣa raḥ tathawwal youm ellī taghayyir al-‘ālam</p> <p>kalimat wa ālḥan Iyad al- Rimawi</p>	<p>يوم اللي تغير العالم</p> <p>يوم اللي تغير العالم كنت بتختي عم أحلم فقت مأخر مثل العادة فتحت عيوني عالجرية يوم اللي تغير العالم *** يوم اللي تغير العالم ما حدا منا قدر يفهم شواللي تغير شواللي تبدل كيف القصة رح تتحول يوم اللي تغير العالم</p> <p>كلمات وألحان إياد الريماوي</p>
<p>I'm a terrorist</p> <p>I'm a terrorist but a nice guy A terrorist, ascending in the plane with my friends My weapon is my guitar, my melodies and my words Immediately they know me from the first that they saw me</p>	<p>Ana Irhaby</p> <p>Irhaby wa ṭāl‘ ‘atṭiyāra m‘a rif ‘ātī slaḥī ghītarī wa alḥanī wa kalimatī faūrān ‘arfūny min āwal mā shāfūnī ṭāl‘āt al-ghītar wa waqft bnāṣ atṭiyāra ghanī</p>	<p>أنا إرهابي</p> <p>أرهابي و طالع عالطيارة مع رفقاتي سلاحي غيتاري و ألحاني و كلماتي فورا عرفوني من أول ما شافوني طالعت الغيتار و وقفت بنص الطيارة</p>

Appendix 3: Selected lyric translations from *Idhā‘at Sawa*.

<p>The guitar rose and I stood with half the plane, singing I'm a terrorist but a nice guy I play for you before you die</p>	<p>ānā irhābī lakin ṭayyib b'aziflak 'abl mā tamūt</p>	<p>غني أنا أرهابي لكن طيب بعزفك قبل ما تموت</p>
<p>Listen to the last melody of your life and you will travel with us happily</p>	<p>samī' ākhir laḥn biḥayyatak wa ḥatsāfir m'anā mabsūṭ</p>	<p>سماع آخر لحن بحياتك وحتسافر معنا مبسوط</p>
<p>Everyone who was in the plane was afraid of the music Afraid of my voice, afraid of the truth If my art now had left me a terrorist</p>	<p>kul ellī bil-ṭiyyāra khāfu min al-musiqa khāfu min ṣawṭī khāfu min al-ḥaqīqa īdhā fanī hela 'šār yakhalīmī īrhābī</p>	<p>كل اللي بالطيارة خافو من الموسيقى خافو من صوتي خافو من الحقيقة إذا فني هلق صار يخليني أرهابي</p>
<p>I will sing at the top of my voice....</p>	<p>raḥ ghanī b'a' lā ṣawṭī ..</p>	<p>إذا فني هلق صار يخليني أرهابي</p>
<p>I'm a terrorist but a nice guy I play for you before you die</p>	<p>ānā irhābī ānā irhābī lakin ṭayyib b'aziflak 'abl mā tamūt</p>	<p>.. رح غني بأعلى صوتي أنا أرهابي أنا أرهابي لكن طيب بعزفك قبل ما تموت</p>
<p>Listen to the last melody of your life and you will travel with us happily</p>	<p>samī' ākhir laḥn biḥayyatak wa ḥatsāfir m'anā mabsūṭ</p>	<p>سماع آخر لحن بحياتك وحتسافر معنا مبسوط</p>
<p>Words and Music Iyad Rimawi</p>	<p>kalimat wa alḥan Iyad al- Rimawi</p>	<p>كلمات وألحان إياد الريماوي</p>
<p>'Abd al-'aẓīm</p>	<p>'Abd al-'aẓīm</p>	<p>عبد العظيم</p>
<p>'Abd al-'Atheem The Just Sultan</p>	<p>'Abd al'ẓīm As-sulṭan al-'ādī</p>	<p>عبد العظيم السلطان العادل</p>
<p>He is generous But we aren't worthy</p>	<p>huwa karīm bas mā mnistāhal</p>	<p>هو كريم بس ما منستاهل</p>
<p>... His eye is upon us, and our protection is on his mind He comes to us, he and his men The wheels roll on the terrorists None of us know who the terrorists are.</p>	<p>... 'ayūnī 'alīna wa ḥaṭeṭna bibālu wajāiyya l'annā huwe wa rijālu da'r yadawwir 'al-īrhābiyyīn ma 'adnā na'rif al-īrhābī mīn</p>	<p>... عينو علينا و حاططنا ببالو وجاية لعنا هو و رجالو داير يدور عالأرهابين ما عدنا نعرف الأرهابي مين</p>
<p>Words and Music Iyad Rimawi</p>	<p>kalimat wa alḥan Iyad al- Rimawi</p>	<p>... كلمات وألحان إياد الريماوي</p>

Appendix 3: Selected lyric translations from *Idhā'at Sawa*.

<p>The Violet Finger</p> <p>The people dead in streets Their numbers in the hundreds</p> <p>In a country wearing the color of ash What is all of this</p> <p>They say that it is a new age And we pay its price, fire and steel</p> <p>In the end you will definitely paint Your finger violet</p> <p>O God what's the sweetest color Forget the world and my cares</p> <p>It deserves/in its honor they die My family, my sisters, my people ... Words and Music by Ayhem al-'Ani</p>	<p>Al-Aṣḥab ' Al-Banafsajī</p> <p>an-nās al-mātet 'aṭurqat ā'dādhun ṣāret b-al-miyyāt</p> <p>bi-balad lābis lūn ar-ramād shū kul ha-ashshay</p> <p>qālū inhu fī 'aṣr jadīd ḥa nadf'a thammu nār wa ḥadīd</p> <p>bil-ākhir btlaun akīd aṣb'atek banafsajī</p> <p>ya Allah mā āḥlā lounu nasānī addunya wa hamīmī</p> <p>bistahal karmālu yamūtu ahlī ikhwātī wa 'amūmī ... kalimat wa alḥan Ayhem al-'Ani</p>	<p>الإصبع البنفسجي</p> <p>الناس الماتت عطرقات أعدادهن صارت بالميات</p> <p>ببلد لابس لون الرماد شوكل هالشاي</p> <p>قالوا إنه في عصر جديد ح ندفع ثمنه نار و حديد</p> <p>بالآخر بتلون أكيد إصبعتك بنفسجي</p> <p>ياالله ما أحلى لونه نساني الدنيا وهمومي</p> <p>بيستا هل كرماله يموتوا أهلي إخواني و عمومي ... كلمات وألحان أيهم العاني</p>
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