

Sa'ad Zaghlul's Gramophone: The Effects of Popular Music on the Egyptian Nation

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Abstract

Egyptian music was affected by and had a significant effect on Egyptian politics, economics, and society prior to the 1919 revolution. In this paper, I explore the diverse musical traditions of Egyptian populations in the era prior to the fall of the Khedivate to give context to the changes that occurred during the years of the British Protectorate and World War I. I highlight the democratizing effect that the introduction of new recording technologies had on Egyptian society, demonstrating that the marketization of musical culture in many ways homogenized what was previously a culturally diverse population. Finally, I argue that the social networks created by popular song allowed Egyptians of all backgrounds to construct and participate in a public national consciousness, creating an environment ripe for the 1919 revolutions and the independence movement that followed.

Introduction

The years during and following World War I were a time of tumultuous political change in Egypt. The dissolving Ottoman Empire finally lost its hold of the Egyptian Khedivate when the British formally declared Egypt a British Protectorate in 1914. Increased British presence incited popular dissatisfaction and failed to squash growing nationalist movements. After the arrest of Sa'ad Zaghlul, leader of the Wafd party, in 1919, massive popular protests and strikes broke out around the country. Civil disobedience grew throughout the following years, weakening the British hold on the Protectorate, and in 1922, Britain declared limited independence for Egypt (Gelvin, 2011). The volatility of this era can be attributed largely to the emergence of the popular nationalist movements that upended the established balance of power between British occupiers and the local population. Unlike events of the previous century such as the 'Urabi Revolt, which were instigated primarily by the politically involved elite, new events such as the Denshawai Incident of 1906 and the popular uprisings of 1919 relied upon the mobilization of large diverse populations in opposition to British officers. In fact, both events might be seen as

harbingers of a century of Egyptian mass politics and the creation of Egypt as the nation-state that it is today.

The development of Egypt as a nation is inextricable from the development of Egypt as a state. This paper will adopt the culturalist perspective of nation-hood described by Benedict Anderson in his influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. This perspective perceives a nation as an “imagined political community... imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1983). Egypt did not represent a national community until the late 19th century; stratified by geography, class, dialect, religion, and race, communities in Egypt were fragmented and localized (Fahmy, 2007). The events of the early 20th century, characterized by cross-class, cross-country, and cross-religion popular participation, demonstrate the emergence of an Egyptian collective identity. This identity, like any other national identity, was not the “awakening” of some repressed or dormant Egyptian national consciousness. Rather, this identity was invented where it did not exist previously (Anderson, 1983). Anderson (1983) suggests that national imagined communities have historically developed in part due to the emergence of print capitalism, which allowed rapidly growing populations to “think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.” However, the 5.4% literacy rate recorded in Egypt in 1907 might indicate that the efficacy of print media as a nationalizing force was limited (Fahmy, 2010). In his book, *Ordinary Egyptians* (2011), Ziad Fahmy suggests another theory: the rise of non-print media and media capitalism in the early twentieth century, catalyzed by the entrance of the phonograph into the Egyptian market in 1904, had the same effect on the Egyptian nation that Anderson’s print capitalism had in other parts of the world.

Cultural historians and ethnomusicologists, including Marilyn Booth, Virginia Danielson, and Ali J. Racy, have explored the effects of the rapidly changing political, economic, and social environment during this period on musical culture. Building off Fahmy’s theory, I will argue that musical cultural production was affected by and also had a significant effect on the politics, economics, and society of Egypt and the Arab World. In this paper, I will explore the diverse musical traditions of Egyptian populations in the era prior to the fall of the Khedivate to give context to the changes that occurred during the years of the British Protectorate and World War I. I will highlight the democratizing effect that the introduction of new recording technologies had on Egyptian society, demonstrating that the marketization of musical culture in many ways homogenized what was previously a culturally diverse population. Finally, I will argue that the social networks created by popular song allowed Egyptians of all backgrounds to construct and participate in a public, national consciousness, creating an environment ripe for the 1919 revolutions and the independence movement that followed.

Nineteenth Century Music Tradition

Until the early 20th century, the musical culture of Egypt, like the population of Egypt, was heavily stratified. Egyptian musical life remained segregated and compartmentalized along ethnic lines; “the Copts, Jews, Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Ethiopians, and others” made use of different instruments and repertoires and appear to have only had limited cultural interaction (Racy, 1977). Additionally, music culture differentiated by class; upper class Egyptians had a musical tradition distinct from Egyptians of lower socio-economic strata (Danielson, 1997). To further complicate the matter, while many Western cultures can make a strong distinction between literary arts and music, conceptions of music among many of these groups existed along a spectrum from the purely melodic to simply spoken (Danielson, 1997). Melodic components alone could not define a genre as music within the Egyptian cultural paradigm; religious functionality, for example, seems to have excluded genres such as Qur’anic recitation from the prevailing conception of music. Alternatively, oral traditions such as *azjāl*, which is often spoken without melody, seem to have been conceptualized by listeners and performers alongside other musical genres (Booth, 1990). Because this wide array of musical styles, spread throughout different ethnic groups, led to an incredibly large number of folk genres, this paper will simply analyze the differences and relationships between upper-class traditions and the diversity of lower-class traditions.

In the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), “nothing more affirms one’s class, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music.” The musical norms of Egyptian classes cannot escape the judgment of Bourdieu’s remarks; the “dominant” classes, Bourdieu contends, claim to enjoy difficult and obscure forms of music, while the “dominated” consume “music whose simple, repetitive structures invite a passive, absent participation” (Atkinson, 2011).

Upper class Egyptians experienced music in a strictly structured process. Elite families provided patronage to male vocal performers, known as *al-mashāyikh*, who received religious training with Sufi groups based on Qur’anic recitation (Racy, 1977). These singers, members of hereditary guilds, would perform by contract at intimate, private events in which the performer and audience members were personally acquainted (Racy, 1977). Singers would perform as part of *takht* ensembles, groups made up of a solo singer and three to five accompanists (Racy, 1977). Due to the Sufi training of *takht* musicians, the music itself was characterized by “poetry-centeredness,” improvisation, repetition, length, low-fidelity, lack of fixed melodies, and was also closely bound to performance context, the active participation of the audience, and “an understanding of (if not subscription to) a Sufi world view” (Hamamsy, 2013). Because *takht* ensembles performed for elite audiences familiar with European cultural norms, *takht* musicians were exposed to westernization long before other Egyptian musical traditions. This exposure resulted in

musical changes such as the replacement of the the Arab *kamanja*, a two-stringed spike fiddle tuned in perfect fourths, by the European violin, which is traditionally tuned in both perfect fourths and major fifths, by the end of the nineteenth century, (Racy, 1977).

Middle and lower classes did not have access to expensive private performances; instead, non-elite audiences conceptualized music as “folk” songs and dances. From the perspective of elites, folk songs were not “particularly sophisticated” but were popular because they were easy for people to sing “in terms of text and tune” (Danielson, 1997). These pieces featured lyrics in colloquial Arabic and instrumentation ranging from drums and reeds to stick dances. Because musical styles reflected regional and ethnic divisions, colloquial dialects and musical styles varied among groups (Manuel, 1988). It is impossible to make many generalizations about the localized music of lower class Egyptians in this period both because of the extreme diversity of styles and because there is little documentation of these traditions.

Technology Transfer: The Phonograph and the Marketization of Music

The introduction of recording technologies to the Egyptian market irrevocably changed Egyptian musical culture. Invented in 1877, the phonograph entered the Egyptian market by the turn of the century; an advertisement for a Columbia phonograph in 1904 marks the earliest evidence for recording technology in the region (Racy, 1977). By the 1920s, the price of a phonograph had fallen enough to be accessible to middle-class buyers (Manuel, 1988). Even before prices fell to levels amenable to non-elite audiences, people listened to new records on shared gramophones in coffee houses and other public places (Danielson, 1997). As more Egyptian listeners gained access to this new technology, the demand for Arabic recordings rose. Egypt’s “musically tolerant population,” which was already under British political and economic control, proved a covetable market for European recording companies to capitalize on; by World War I, Odeon, Gramophone, Pathé, Columbia, and Polyphon all sold Arabic recordings to Egyptian audiences (Racy, 2004).

The entrance of American and European recording technologies into Egyptian markets completely restructured Egyptian musical society around monetary profit. Ziad Fahmy (2011) terms this driving force the “Egyptian media capitalist system,” and includes under this title the marketization of theater, literature, and the newly emerged press. In this system, the economic incentive to perform solely for elite audiences disappeared. Whereas previously it had been economically advantageous to market music as a luxury good, the advent of the record meant that more money was to be gained by producing in high quantity. Producers, performers, composers, and writers thus sought to capture the largest audiences in order to sell the most records and gain the highest profits.

The new economic environment transformed local musics into “commodities in a free-market environment” (Hamamsy 2013). The field of large-scale production, according to Bourdieu (1984), is “characterized by the subordinate position of cultural producers in relation to the controllers of production and diffusion media” and must obey “the imperatives of competition for conquest of the market.” In this new market, performers quickly abandoned the elite-based patronage system for the economic boons offered by contracting companies; according to Danielson (1997), by 1920, performers who contracted themselves through theatrical companies, recording companies, and theater management had replaced singers who contracted with individual patrons. To achieve monetary success, performers catered to the desires of these companies, which in turn, competed in the “conquest of the largest possible market,” or essentially market saturation of “the public at large” (Bordieu, 1984).

In Bourdieu’s (1984) description of large-scale production, the product, music itself, is “socially neutralized” to meet the demands of the median consumer. During this era, the marketization of traditional musics worldwide and the focus on the median consumer led to trends including “growing preferences for theater and concert formats over more informal music making; the tendency toward more formal organization of music activities...[and] a loss of spontaneity and variety in musical idioms” (Brunner, 1985). Additionally, with the advent of recording technologies, musics “could be perceived as objects separate from ourselves, existing independently of our active, contemplative, or interpretive stance toward them” (Ramnarine, 2013). Extricated from a performance context, music no longer acted as a discourse between performer and listener. In essence, the way music was performed became a one-way transaction; music was delivered to listeners predetermined and prerecorded instead of respondent to the circumstances of a specific event.

To meet the demands of a larger predetermined audience, musicians changed their products; instead of giving personalized shows to wealthy upper class families, performers created a less personalized musical product for a larger, public audience (Racy, 1977). Performers and producers alike attempted to design a musical product that could satisfy a diverse array of consumers (Fahmy, 2011). Instead of producing the classical *fushā* music previously favored by elite audiences, lyricists wrote songs and musical plays in colloquial Arabic, composers wrote shorter, catchier, and more repetitive tunes, and producers groomed individual artists for mass fame (Fahmy, 2011). The elaborate improvisation, “context-bound flexibility,” and “*tarab* aesthetic” that appear in Pre-World War I Egyptian music were replaced by pre-composed nationalist songs and musical plays (Racy, 1977). These shorter songs grew in popularity alongside the new genre of musical theater, for which many songs were written (Fahmy, 2011). Many of the same celebrity-authors who wrote top grossing songs were also playwrights.

Production companies ignored musics enjoyed by smaller audiences and instead adopted musics that more listeners could identify with. Sufi performers, for example, were “almost never recorded,” as the already marginal Sufi market grew smaller and smaller due to political perceptions of Sufism. (Hamamsy, 2013). It is unlikely that this discrimination or other production choices resulted from political motivations of producers. While most people who “worked on the frontlines of the Egyptian entertainment industry were literate” and songwriters may have been exposed to and influenced by “the discourses of the nationalist intelligentsia,” producers had extreme economic incentives to be faithful to the demands of consumers. Consumers demanded products that were entertaining and accessible, socially relevant to the political environment, and culturally and linguistically comprehensible across class and location. To meet that demand, producers structured the form and content of songs and the language of lyrics to reflect “the concerns and diversity of everyday Egyptian life” (Fahmy, 2007).

Appeal to mass audiences was so attractive to members of the music industry that elite artists would write in these new styles of music as if they were members of non-elite classes. *Zajal*, ancient colloquial strophic poetry, reemerged in popularity at this time as a form of expression for educated elites and often served as lyrics or monologues in musical plays (Fahmy, 2011). *Zajal* was traditionally an oral art until “Egyptian nationalist literati” appropriated the genre in the late nineteenth century, establishing the style as “a literary form identified with populist Egyptian patriotism and comprising a poetic anti-canon which, through its language, subject matter, and mode of publication, constituted a discourse of popular opposition to the hegemonic form of Egyptian national literary culture expressed in standard Arabic” (Beinin, 1998). Like the producers of other emerging popular genres, these literati *zajalūn*, or writers of *azjāl*, wrote in lower class colloquial Arabic, adopting traditional patterns and features of oral composition “with a certain superficiality and artificiality” to cater to “a non-elite audience” (Fahmy, 2011). The association of nationalist politics and reformation culture with colloquial literature and non-elite audiences is not new; Anderson (1983) describes the vulgarization of Latin as a key force in the development of European imagined communities. The elevation of a vernacular into a “national language” acted as a way for “the new middle class intelligentsia of nationalism” to “invite the masses into history; and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood” (Beinin, 1998).

A Constructed Identity

The marketization of music had another important effect on musical culture: in the process of seeking to capture mass audiences, this budding industry constructed a more homogenous national culture. Habib Hassan Touma (1996), the late Palestinian composer, laments in his writings that even the long-lived Ottoman and Sassanid empires “had a less disastrous

effect on Arabian music than has the recent influx of European musical culture, with innovations like radio, film, and recordings.” Recorded music, distributed to what had previously been culturally isolated communities, allowed Western tradition—from notation, instrumentation, and compositional techniques to instruction methodology—to penetrate Egyptian society more deeply than ever before. By World War II, many indigenous genres had either disappeared or been radically changed (Racy, 1977). In the place of these diverse genres, an increasingly national music identity emerged; the same songs, performed by the same popular national stars, traversed ethnic and regional lines to reach people of all social classes, genders, and ages. Fahmy (2011) goes so far as to claim that “it was the colloquial Egyptian song that elevated the commercial record industry into the most important player in shaping early twentieth-century Egyptian mass culture.”

James Scott (1998), in his discussion of the development of states, claims that the rise of “global capitalism is perhaps the most powerful force for homogenization” because “a market necessarily reduces quality to quantity via the price mechanism and promotes standardization; in markets, money talks, not people.” Consumers and producers engaged in a virtual dialogue through this standardization process, “strengthening the authenticity and insuring the popularity of these new productions” (Fahmy, 2007). The homogenization of Egyptian music can model Bourdieu’s (1984) process of the creation of “middle-brow art.” A productive system, according to Bourdieu (1984), cannot “content itself with seeking to intensify consumption within a determinate social class; it is obliged to orient itself towards a generalization of the social and cultural composition of this public” (Bourdieu, 1984). In the same way that politicians and political parties develop campaign strategies to capture a median voter, producers must develop goods that “represent a kind of highest social denominator” (Bourdieu, 1984). As a result, the product that grew out of the marketization of Egyptian music did not necessarily originate from any one ethnic group, but was a combination of various styles (Brunner, 1985). According to Brunner (1985), this process of “polishing away the distinctive qualities that tie the music to any particular place or political ideology” creates a piece that has nearly universal appeal. In addition, the “efficiency of information dissemination,” or speed at which new songs could saturate Egyptian society with the advent of the phonograph, allowed for homogenization to occur “in a larger section of society, and over a much shorter period” (Mannone, 2012).

One of the defining characteristics of this developing popular genre is the almost exclusive use of colloquial Egyptian, which regardless of actual intention often has been perceived as “a political act associated with a nationalist program of populism, anticlericalism (though not irreligion), and local Egyptian patriotism (*wataniyya*), as opposed to Pan-Arabism (*qawmiyya*)” (Fahmy, 2007). Until the early 19th century, provincial dialects geographically segregated the Egyptian population; Fahmy (2007)

credits the use of Cairene colloquial in new Egyptian songs, theatrical plays, and satirical periodicals as a homogenizing force in “transforming it [Cairene] into the de facto Egyptian dialect and provoking the gradual demise of other provincial dialects.” The use of colloquial Egyptian widened the market for the genre by making the new form of music palatable to both educated and uneducated audiences. Additionally, Colloquial Egyptian, acting as Bourdieu’s common denominator, distinguished between audiences that were Egyptian and non-Egyptian. One of the central tenets of Anderson’s definition of a nation is the idea that a nation is “limited and sovereign”: there are people who are in the nation and there are people who are not in the nation. The use of a distinctly Egyptian dialect of Arabic, as opposed to Fusha, defined Egyptian colloquial speakers as a unique grouping. This grouping contrasts the previous grouping of pan-Arab elite speakers of Fusha, to whom traditional Sufi-trained guild members catered.

The newly emerging popular culture did not deviate completely from tradition, but instead built upon folk heritage to create a style that was distinctly Egyptian, a category that represented a growing rallying ground for “revolutionary and post revolutionary action” (Burkhalter, 2013). As this Egyptian nationalist musical culture developed, pioneering artists played with different styles in an attempt to balance folk, Ottoman, and European cultures. Sayyid Darwish, for example, used colloquial Arabic to popularize the *taqtuqa* song style. Darwish diverged from traditional tonal structures used in Arabic classical styles, and notably used piano accompaniment in his songs (Burkhalter, 2013). Mohammed Abdel Wahab built off of Darwish’s short *taqtuqa* style and propagated the use of pre-composed pieces by introducing exact notated composition to the Egyptian music scene (Danielson, 1991). Umm Kulthum, on the other hand, is often associated with tradition in Arabic music because of her opposition to the adoption of Western musical styles (Danielson, 1991).

Because Egyptians from all classes, ethnic groups, and geographies were increasingly exposed to the same music, these previously atomized groups began to develop a national taste (Fahmy, 2011). These three artists, among many others, helped to shape this collective mass audience: popular songs created a network of people who recognized similar music, connected under shared emotions and experiences. This “semi-autonomous social network” could then carry “sonic, semantic, and pecuniary messages” quickly to a widening number of people (Hamamsy, 2013). Sayyid Darwish and Badi’ Khayri, the famous *zajalūn*, for example, often incorporated social and political issues into their music. One such piece, *Salma Ya Salama*, was written by Khayri as a *zajal* to celebrate the return of a large part of the Egyptian labor force from British-coerced involvement in World War I (Fahmy, 2011). Darwish set the *zajal* to music and created a song so popular and timeless that is still recognizable to Egyptians today. In Darwish’s 1920 recording of *Salma Ya Salama*, careful listeners can hear the musical modes of the Egyptian

streets and rhythms of Sudanese music; Darwish strategically incorporated familiar Egyptian sounds into his songs to create catchy, recognizable tunes. The lyrics of the song also portray a growing nationalism: “*bala ‘amrika bala ‘uruba mafish ‘ahsan min baladi*,” (neither America, nor Europe, nor any other place is better than my country) (Darwish, 1920). Within the network of listeners, those without any physical contact with one another could still share this nationalist feeling, and would be aware that others shared the same feeling. In this sense, this musical network formed the “imagined” aspect of Anderson’s definition of a nation: “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983). This knowledge is clear in Khayri’s lyrics by the use of the first person plural: “*Ruhna wa gayna bil-salama*” (we came and we went in peace), “*nazilni fi il-balad di*,” (we left this country), and “*shufna al-harb wa shufna al-darb*” (we saw the war and we saw the abuse) all indicate a collective memory of hardships that Egyptians of any background can claim (Fahmy, 2011).

The role of listeners in the creation of this collective identity cannot be discounted. Much of the sociological and political significance of songs like *Salma Ya Salama* derives not from the lyrics or tune, but from the song’s popularity. The Egyptians who heard *Salma Ya Salama* and incorporated it into their cultural repertoire made the piece a symbol of national unity, nostalgia for one’s country, and political expression. Instead of relying on objective political facts to form their songs, Darwish and Khayri draw from popular emotions, opinions, and the general zeitgeist of the state of Egypt in 1919. *Salma Ya Salama* describes not just the return of one million men from a foreign war, but the pain, homesickness, frustration, and feelings of oppression that the individual listener’s contemporary compatriots experienced. In turn, these emotions grew to become a symbol of national unity as people adopted the song and came together over collective emotions.

Popular Music Networks as a Political Street

Asef Bayat (2009) terms the network of collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people a “political street”; the shared musical taste of mass Egyptian audiences represents exactly this arena. While the British shut down political parties, censored newspapers, and criminalized public gatherings, it was much more difficult to stop ordinary people from sharing musical tastes and singing popular songs to each other (Fahmy, 2011). Even if record sales were stifled, the newly popular short, repetitive songs “could easily traverse from recordings and public performances to the ears of literate and illiterate listeners, who in turn could propagate those songs to an even wider audience” (Fahmy, 2011). In this sense, the powerful network of individuals created by popular music allowed previously atomized individuals, through “tacit

recognition of their commonalities in public spaces or indirectly through mass media,” to demonstrate a collective identity (Fahmy, 2011).

The content of songs also allowed more Egyptians to participate in the public sphere and led previously uninvolved populations to become “participants” in a modern, national society (Abu-Lughod, 1963). An increasing number of publicly-aware participants with shared musical identities began to exhibit tendencies that Bayat (2009) describes as social nonmovements: the “shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations.” These shared practices allowed for all Egyptians, instead of only politically active middle-class and elite men, to participate in protests and campaign for Egyptian independence. The reactions of increasingly insecure power holders give evidence for the strong effects of musical discourse on politics: Egyptian conservatives aggressively attacked new media. Punishment of artists, also, demonstrates the growing power of their musical product; Bayram al-Tunisi, esteemed writer and lyricist, was banished from Egypt in 1919 as “a troublemaker,” showing the destabilizing nature of his works. Activists also tapped into this powerful network: Huda Sharawi and her husband, for example, supported art as “an overt political statement” (Danielson, 1991). Popular music threatened the stability of the old social order by empowering the wider Egyptian population.

Additionally, popular music allowed networks of listeners to conceptualize of and reflect upon events in similar ways, in essence creating a collective memory. Mahmud Tahir Haqqi’ (1906), a young playwright, wrote a telling piece called ‘*Adhra’ Dinshawai* (The Virgin of Dinshawai) in 1906, reflecting upon the aftermath of the Dinshawai incident. Zachary Lockman (1994), in his discussion of the rise of the Egyptian working class, suggests that ‘*Adhra’ Dinshawai* epitomizes a discursive shift of “peasants into Egyptians.” In ‘*Adhra’ Dinshawai*, the villagers “are depicted as virtuous, hard-working, decent folk who, no less than members of Haqqi’s own class, are rational and endowed with individuality and an interior life,” and the *fellaḥīn* are portrayed as “egalitarian and democratic” (Lockman, 1994). Lockman (1994) documents this developing nationalist discourse as “hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community,” and notes the use of a comprehensive first person plural used to depict the collective identity of both classes with the educated reader. The text indicates, thus, that nationalist intellectuals had begun to perceive and portray the peasants and the urban lower class “as people “like us”—uneducated and uncouth, perhaps, but fellow Egyptians nonetheless” (Lockman, 1994).

Haqqi’s description of the Dinshawai incident as a nationalist mobilization is not simply a nostalgic or propaganda-based fiction; indeed, the incident has been recognized as one of the first truly nationalist events in Egypt. Unlike the ‘Urabi Revolt, which was led by the “nationalist”

elite, the Dinshawai incident and protests that followed saw the mobilization of masses of ordinary Egyptians demanding the removal of British forces (Beinin 1998). Joel Beinin (1998) suggests that this mobilization was enabled by preceding developments which informed the meaning of the event, stating that “a reconfigured market; a reactivated political movement featuring a *mélange* of Egyptianist, Ottomanist, and Islamist discourses; new social groups; revised ideals of gender relations; and new forms of culture and politics elaborated and legitimized one another.” The relative success of this incident in effectively distressing British forces set a precedent for future movements: new political parties would recruit larger constituency for nationalist politics, “confirming the legitimacy of mass urban political action” (Beinin, 1998). This popular constituency, according to Beinin (1998), was shaped by the production and consumption of newspapers, novels, and printed colloquial poetry that “articulated the existence of an Egyptian nation and its collective demands.” While Fahmy would disagree with this statement, citing the impediments of single-digit literacy rates, it is clear that oral colloquial poetry and popular song highly effected the creation of a popular constituency. One frustrated reviewer of the songs in a popular play complained that these “songs of the masses...have penetrated every house door and knocked down the walls of every inner sanctum” (Fahmy, 2007). Record industry exports from Western countries (far from the actual numbers, as home-produced records are not included in this figure), reached 143,785 from Germany in 1924, 41,856 from the United Kingdom in 1925, and 7,000 from France. By 1929, almost 730,000 records were exported to Egypt from those countries (Gronow, 1981). These high numbers, along with the spread of songs from person-to-person orally, indicate the penetration of new popular song into Egyptian society.

The effects of the homogenization of cultures due to technology and the coalescence of different peoples into a national society have been well documented around the world. Scott (1998) describes this coalescence in terms of legibility, claiming that the uniformity of customs inevitably leads to a greater community, and that this “abstract grid...would create a new reality,” which in Scott’s context, is “the French citizen.” Gellner suggests that new industrialization, or in our case, capitalism, produces a culturally homogenous society with egalitarian expectations and aspirations and exposes the society to the “painful and conspicuous inequality” that already exists, resulting in “latent political tension” (Mannone, 2012). Expanding upon Gellner and Scott’s theories with Ted Gurr’s model of civil strife, the basic precondition for civil strife is actors’ perceptions of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities (Gurr, 1968). Lockman (1994) documents this precondition in World War I era Egypt: the masses, “endowed with a potential for agency,” could be mobilized by the nationalist movement if their values were incorporated within the national struggle. At the same time, nationalists realized this “capacity for collective action and

organization...not in terms of "disorder" and an imported social "sickness," but rather as a sign of an emerging new constituency whose agency might (if properly defined and guided) serve the national project" (Lockman, 1994). In conversation with "collective anti-colonialist sentiment," (Beinin, 1998) large landholders and western-educated middle class leaders groomed urban working people for nationalist purposes, "transforming those formerly regarded by the educated and powerful as an uncivilized rabble into noble citizens of the Egyptian nation." The Wafd party, for example, "was fully cognizant of the need to appeal to the masses," and relied on public petitions and pamphlets spread throughout Egyptian provinces to advertise goals (Fahmy, 2007).

By the time of the deportation of Sa'd Zaghlul with his colleagues and the following nationalist uprising of 1919, not only did organized workers support the revolution through strikes and demonstrations, but workers and other previously subaltern groups were fully integrated into nationalist discourses (Beinin, 1998). Popular songs like *Salma Ya Salama* documented political events in nationalist terms, including new classes of "Egyptians" and excluding others (Jews and Greeks, for example) (Fahmy, 2007).¹ Mass audiences and producers also engaged in a dialogue within this revolutionary context: "some of the songs sung in the streets during the 1919 revolt taken directly from the records and plays of Egypt's vaudevillian mass culture," and, according to Fahmy, musicians mined the streets for "nationally authentic material" that "discussed the events of the revolution" (Fahmy, 2007). These songs and discourses invariably contributed to the strength and legitimacy of Egyptian masses as a political force.

Conclusion

Popular music, according to Lipsitz, Frith, and Biddle, "is perhaps the cultural product that has crossed (and continues to cross) boundaries and frontiers the most frequently, just as it has demarcated and consolidated local cultural spaces" (Biddle, 2007). The effects of Egyptian musical culture in this era are too often understated. Music, both for entertainment and for religious purposes, has long saturated Egyptian society and is an inextricable part of Egyptian, Arab, and Muslim culture. The emergence of European recording technologies at the turn of the century thus had a drastic effect on Egyptian nation building: music could suddenly traverse diverse populations and regional barriers, leading to the marketization of performers, commodification of songs, and homogenization of tastes. The network of listeners of this popular music crossed ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and geographic boundaries, giving common emotions, history, and purpose to a previously divided population. Listeners became a national community in an imagined, limited, and sovereign sense. In

¹ Ziad Fahmy, in "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," lists a number of revolutionary song transcripts, especially on page 243.

effect, popular music was instrumental in creating Egypt as a nation. In the fight to affirm this nationhood on an international level, popular music also became a tool to actively and passively protest British presence, creating a cohesive networked population ripe for political mobilization. This network was essential to the spread and strengthening of Egyptian nationalism and, thus, the building of Egypt as its own state.

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