WOMEN IN SHA'BI MUSIC: GLOBALIZATION, MASS MEDIA AND POPULAR MUSIC IN THE ARAB WORLD

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on *sha’bi* music, a style of popular music in the Arab world. More specifically, it discusses the role of women in *sha’bi* music, focusing on singers Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe as examples of female pop singers. I take a feminist approach to understanding the lives, images, and legacies of two of the most influential female singers of the twentieth century, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, and then I explore how these legacies have impacted the careers and societal expectations of Ajram and Wehbe.

Several issues are explicated in the thesis, including the historic progression of popular music, the impacts of globalization and westernization, and the status of women as performers in the Arab world. The fan bases of the various female *sha’bi* singers are explored to examine why people are drawn to popular music, how youth cultures utilize music to define their generations, and why some people in the Arab world have problems with this music and/or with the singers: their lyrics, clothing, dancing bodies, and music videos. My ethnography on these issues among Arabs in Bowling Green, Ohio, reveals how members of the diaspora address the tensions of this music and the images of female performers.

I posit that, while there are many thousands of *sha’bi* fans of such female performers as Ajram and Wehbe, the many critical voices are comparing these women to the constructed images and legacies of the luminaries, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, and rejecting the notions of globalization that are influencing the current generations in most Arab countries.
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PROLOGUE

What first drew me to this topic was pure curiosity. I was curious about how popular music was perceived in the Arab world, and especially how female pop stars Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe had been received by fans and non-fans alike. Most of my interest came from my dedication to highlighting the issues that women musicians face in countries with strict religious and moral codes.

Underlying my academic curiosity was my own, personal feelings as partially belonging to the culture. I was born in America and am of Lebanese and Italian descent. I am ¾ Lebanese and ¼ Italian. I grew up with a mixed culture combined from three nationalities: Lebanese, Italian and American. I have found it quite difficult figuring out where to position myself throughout my life and especially in the field of Ethnomusicology. To Arabs and Lebanese people, I am an outsider because I am not 100% Lebanese. I am only ¼ Italian, and that is definitely not enough in the politics of ethnicity to consider myself a part of that culture! And finally, I am American, which according to many people (mostly Arabs) I have met throughout my life exempts me from claiming Lebanese culture as part of my heritage, despite how vital and important a role the culture played in my growing up. And to Americans, I am not white, I am not all American, but I am a minority (despite Arabs not being considered minorities in the general census bureau).

In Ethnomusicology, I would be considered an insider and an outsider. I am an insider because I grew up with some semblance of Lebanese culture, but I am still an outsider because I did not grow up in the Arab world, and therefore did not experience life from that perspective. Where to position myself has been a constant struggle within the world of Ethnomusicology.
This thesis is an attempt to position myself within the field of Ethnomusicology as an Arab-Italian-American student.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the musical genre known as *sha'bi* music. It is an urban popular music phenomenon that emerged in Cairo, Egypt in the 1970s (Grippo 2010: 162). *Sha'bi* music literally means ‘traditional,’ ‘folk,’ and ‘popular’ in Egyptian colloquial Arabic (Ibid. 144). This thesis focuses mainly on the ‘popular’ form of the genre which “implies mass mediation—referring to this music’s enormous dissemination” (Ibid. 145). The origins of *sha'bi* music are believed to come from several backgrounds. The working-class population of Egypt desired music of their own, while at the same time it was “a reaction to the wide-spread depression, insecurity, or anger caused by several factors, including Egypt’s defeat by Israel in the Arab-Israeli war (1967), President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s death (1970) and several other causes (Ibid.).

According to Grippo, *sha'bi* music can be “considered a quintessential ‘music of the people’” (Ibid. 145). This genre is performed by both male and female musicians, however, for the purposes of this thesis, and in order to highlight certain issues, I focus mainly on female pop stars that are involved in *sha'bi* music.

The role of women in Arab popular music has long been historicized as controversial and notorious for taking cues from American popular culture and music. This thesis addresses the impact of westernization on popular music in Lebanon, the role of female musicians in this context, and the ideas on popular women musicians by some of the Lebanese (and Arab) community in Bowling Green, Ohio. The thesis is thus historical – examining the development of popular music in Lebanon and the developing role of women – and ethnographic.

My research explores the ways in which Lebanese popular music has evolved from the time of Umm Kulthum (active 1924-1973) and Fairouz (active 1950-present) to present-day popular stars, Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe. I look at the lives of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz
and trace their musical legacy and impact upon Middle Eastern music throughout their lifetimes. I then contrast their images with those of Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe, showing the similarities and differences as well as how female identity among Middle Eastern musicians has changed over the past several decades. For this work, I largely use feminist theory to explore the careers and reception of Ajram and Wehbe and the affects of globalization and westernization on the formation of Arab popular culture.

The thesis reveals the social, political, and religious issues that surround popular music and the roles and public personae of women in the Arab world. Successful women performers have garnered negative responses from religious and political groups as well as praise from a large fan base formed to promote female popular musicians in the Middle East. Through my research and fieldwork, I demonstrate how popular music and popular musicians are viewed by Middle Easterners. I also show that, despite the political and religious backlash from segments of society, the fans of such performers as Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe’s have stayed loyal to the pop stars, their music, and their images. I equate this large fan base and following to the generational divide that often accompanies music in Arab cultures. New generations, just as many before them, are attempting to find a basis for defining themselves, and music has become one major expression of self-definition.

Due to time constraints, I was unable to travel to Lebanon to conduct fieldwork. Instead, I conducted fieldwork among the Middle Eastern, and primarily Lebanese and Arab, diasporic community of Bowling Green, Ohio, among informants that have immigrated to the United States over the past several years. Considering the given community, this methodology assumed

1 “No universally accepted definition of ‘the Arab world’ exists, but it is generally assumed to include the twenty-two countries belonging to the Arab League that have a combined population of about 280 million” (Seib 2005, 604).
that most informants hold some knowledge of Arab popular music in general and of the famous Arab musicians, men and women, that have been active in Lebanon and across the Middle East as popular artists over the past several years.

This thesis demonstrates four central ideas: 1) how westernization and pan-Arab interaction have influenced the development of the popular music industry, and the position of women in that industry, within the Arab world; 2) how Arab society has absorbed these influences; 3) how this assimilation has led to the rise of a new generation of women stars; and, 4) how women performers have again been influenced by Western popular culture, which has given rise to both a backlash from more conservative Lebanese and Arabs and to a growing base of loyal fans in Lebanon, the greater Middle East, and the United States.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 is historical in nature. It provides a general overview of the lives of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, two of the most important women in Arab popular music. I highlight the main aspects of their lives and discuss how and why they remain in popular memory for many Arabs as two of the most influential women of the twentieth century. Next, I give a general overview of pop stars, Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram. As two of the leading female pop stars in the Arab world today, I juxtapose their images with those of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz and discuss how popular memory may be forcing them to live up to the personas of their foremothers.

Chapter 2 outlines why audiences enjoy Arab pop music, better known as sha’bi music. I begin by giving some theoretical background on popular music in general and its general appeal. Next, I talk about youth groups and how music is utilized as one of the main tools of helping to
define generations and differentiate them from previous ones. I also discuss how technology and the dissemination of mass media have affected popular music in general and how it has affected *sha’bi* music in the Arab world. Lastly, I discuss the fans of Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe and their firm commitment to supporting these pop star’s careers despite the negative responses from conservative members of society.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the issues and negative responses in regard to pop music in the Arab world. Westernization and globalization have greatly affected popular music and I attempt to show how these phenomena have affected *sha’bi* music in the Arab world. For the second section, I discuss how religion and politics in the Arab world have impacted the pop stars, Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe, and how the negative responses from religious critics have forced the music to be seen in a negative light. The third section of this chapter is presents a juxtaposition of pop stars, Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe with Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. I begin by talking about how these newer pop stars are possibly being subjected to criticism because they are being compared to the previous divas, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. I also discuss how the new pop stars are actually similar to Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. Lastly, I address how female pop stars today are coming under heavy scrutiny due to their gender.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to my ethnography and the participants of this study. I interviewed a number of Arabs (and often specifically Lebanese) in the Bowling Green area about their responses to *sha’bi* music and the female performers. I first discuss the participants and give some general background on who I chose, why I chose them, and how their participation has aided me with this thesis. Next, I analyze their responses and my reaction to their responses, and further discuss my methodology for this study.
Literature Review

The topics in this thesis are wide and varied, but all hold some semblance with one another, usually overlapping in themes of political, social, or gender issues. This thesis utilizes works from ethnomusicology, westernization and globalization, popular culture, feminist theory, and more.

The book that helped the most with the scope of this project was Michael Fishkopf’s, *Music and Media in the Arab World* (2010). This book presents information and research similar in scope to mine. This work focuses on music in the Arab world, as well as how the dissemination of mass media has affected popular music in these countries. This source served as a main tool for understanding the discourse surrounding popular music in the Arab world today.

Ali Jihad Racy’s work has been a great source for understanding popular music in the Arab world. Most notable to my work is his “Words and Music in Beirut: A Study of Attitudes” (1986), which discusses popular music in Lebanon and the presence of both eastern and western influences. Another Racy work, “Historical Worldviews of Early Ethnomusicologists: An East-West Encounter in Cairo, 1932” (1993), helped with understanding the historical background and how music was seen and utilized in Egypt.

Laura Lohman and Virginia Danielson have both written notable works on the life and legend of Umm Kulthum. Danielson’s works, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (1997) and “The Qur’an and the Qasidah: Aspects of the Popularity of the Repertory Sung by Umm Kulthum” (1987), contributed to understanding Umm Kulthum’s life and legacy as well as with biographical information. Lohman’s book, *Umm Kulthum: Artistic Agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend, 1967-2007* (2010), helped put into perspective the life of Umm Kulthum after 1967, as well as the
mythologization that accompanied her persona throughout the end of her life and after her death.

For information on Fairouz, Christopher Stones’ work, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation* (2008), helped immensely. This book gives general biographical information on Fairouz and the Rahbani brothers, with whom she worked. It also discusses nationalism in Lebanon and how Fairouz helped to shape Lebanese national identity during the civil war in Lebanon from 1975-1990.

There were several non-academic sources that helped to shape my thoughts for this project. Most of them were popular magazines that aided me in better understanding the popular discourse surrounding Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe and other female and male pop stars in the Arab world. Sebastian Usher’s various articles on pop stars in the Arab world have been distributed throughout the Middle East and the United States. Usher’s articles include “Arab Youth Revel in Pop Revolution” (2007), “ Beauties Around the Globe” (2006) and “Changing Times in a Changing World” (2008).

Online sources for all artists discussed in this thesis - Umm Kulthum, Fairouz, Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe - were also of great help in this project. Each of website provided biographical information as well as opportunities for understanding how fans view these singers. Their websites are, [www.Fairouzonline.com](http://www.Fairouzonline.com), [www.nancyajramonline.com](http://www.nancyajramonline.com), [www.haifawehbe.com](http://www.haifawehbe.com), and (for Umm Kulthum) [www.almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/umKoulthoum/](http://www.almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/umKoulthoum/)

There were several sources in critical theory and sociology that imparted postcolonial views of history and theories to help explore the social and political issues behind the music. For example, Edward Said’s introduction to his book, *Orientalism*, provided the historical context of relations between the western world and the Arab world. Crucial sources for the cultural theory

I explored several classical Arab music sources that are referenced in this thesis in order to understand the historical background of the music; however, these sources were not directly utilized because they fell outside of the scope of this study.
CHAPTER I: WOMEN IN ARAB POPULAR MUSIC

This chapter provides historical background on Umm Kulthum, Fairouz, Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe, which will allow me to compare the images and careers of these respective artists. I briefly discuss Umm Kulthum and Fairouz and their legacies in order to show how they came to represent Arab nationalism and Arab identity. I also discuss music traditions that accompany their music, lifestyles and performances. I then juxtapose the personas of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz with those of Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe. This information is important in order for me to explore how Umm Kulthum and Fairouz set many standards for female singers in the Middle East, and to question whether Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe are contemporary manifestations of these standards or not.

**Umm Kulthum: “Herstory”**

Figure 1: Umm Kulthum Performing in Concert

Umm Kulthum was born in 1904 in a small village in Egypt (Lohman 2010:1). At a

young age she began performing, often singing at weddings and other celebrations, and in 1912 she starting singing with her father and brother around Egypt (Danielson 1987: 29). By the mid 1920s, Umm Kulthum had reached stardom in Egypt and across the Arab world. She stared in several films that helped to catapult her career even further into stardom and strengthened her fame in Egypt and across the Arab world (Danielson 1997: 87). She utilized her musical ability to solidify her fame, and her legacy as a musician and social leader continued until her death in 1975. Even after her death, Umm Kulthum is still considered the most well respected and highly acclaimed singer in the Arab world.

There are many aspects of Umm Kulthum’s life that contributed to her fame. First and foremost was her singing ability and style of musicianship. Umm Kulthum was known for singing in the popular style of tarab. She has been credited as the one who solidified and canonized the genre. Tarab is a difficult term to define and carries many meanings and connotations. Therefore, I utilize Jonathan H. Shannon’s description, which is as follows:

Tarab is a difficult term to translate, for it connotes a number of concepts. In Arabic, tarab refers linguistically to a state of heightened emotionality, often translated as ‘rapture,’ ‘ecstasy,’ or ‘enchantment’ but can also indication sadness as well as joy. Tarab also describes a style of music and musical performance in which such emotional states are evoked and aroused in performers and audiences. Finally, tarab constitutes a general term in Arab aesthetics that describes a type of aesthetic bliss or rapture with respect to an art object: one may, for example, experience tarab when hearing a poem or even when regarding a painting, as well as through listening to music, though usually tarab is restricted to acts of listening. Historically, it was a term associated primarily with the recitation of poetry and the Qur’an. Given these different connotations of the term, some scholars refer to a ‘tarab culture’ of shared social, cultural, and aesthetic practices and sentiments related to performing and listening to music and other aural arts (Shannon 2003: 74)

In my opinion, Umm Kulthum encompassed every aspect that the term “tarab” is known for. Umm Kulthum was known for conveying the poetry and emotion behind the music through her singing ability. She carried phrases in order to emphasize the words; this also showed her
mastery over the genre.

As a child, Umm Kulthum studied Qur’anic recitation and she continued to utilize this training and artistry in her vocal style and music. I will go so far as to say that part of her fame can be attributed to her devotion to Qur’anic recitation, which is very important in Egyptian culture and sonic aesthetics; therefore, Umm Kulthum utilizing the styles of Qur’anic recitation appealed to the heart of the Egyptian population as well as the broader pan-Arab audience. Uncommon for most women at the time, Umm Kulthum also knew how to read the Qur’an, and this ability heightened respect from the Egyptian community. Danielson describes the importance of Qur’anic recitation:

The importance of the recitation of the Qur’an, and secondarily of the qasidah in Egyptian culture is beyond question. The recitation of the Qur’an is familiar and well-loved all over Egypt, in the public contexts of major commemorations and broadcasting, and also, less formally as a source of comfort and as part of religious expression and instruction everywhere (Danielson 1987: 27).

Another aspect that contributed to Umm Kulthum’s fame was her devotion to improving and perfecting her music. She cared deeply about how exactly the songs were executed and written, and her style of production made her a perfectionist. What made Umm Kulthum unique in this aspect is that she was considered to have total agency over how her career was handled.

The extent to which Umm Kulthum was involved in creating and preserving her artistry as a musician was unprecedented during her time. When her career is looked at closely, “one can discern in Umm Kulthum a remarkable degree of individual agency…” (Lohman 2010: 7). According to Lohman, Umm Kulthum “made her own artistic decisions, chose the musicians she wanted to work with, and handled financial matters shrewdly. She emerged as neither victim nor object to others’ control and decisions. Rather, she emerged as a calculating subject” (Lohman 2010: 7). During the 1930s and 1940s, women musicians in the Middle East were often
controlled and managed by men. Every step of women’s careers was controlled: from how they dressed to where they performed. Umm Kulthum made it a point throughout her career to handle and run her own matters, and this made her a unique woman in the Arab world at the time, and even in today’s terms.

**Characteristics of Umm Kulthum’s Performances**

According to Laura Lohman, Umm Kulthum was considered by Egyptian society to be the ideal woman. There are several features of her career that attributed to this image. I would first like to make note of key traditions that accompany Umm Kulthum’s performances and her life that shaped the “ideal” image that fans developed and how they contributed to her overall respect as a woman and musician. There were many reasons why Umm Kulthum was so widely respected, but it has been mostly attributed to her lifestyle and how she conducted herself on stage and in the public realm.

First, Umm Kulthum dressed conservatively. For stage performances, she usually wore long dresses that covered her legs and arms. Her hair was usually tied back in a bun. There are no public images to my knowledge that show her with her hair completely down. Also, the white scarf that she held during performances became her trademark. When she was in public, Umm Kulthum continued to wear dresses, but sometimes opted for the knee-length variety instead of full-length. However, she continued wearing long sleeves and tying her hair back. Her public persona was that of a refined and cultivated woman that everyone adored.

Lastly, Umm Kulthum’s fame can also be attributed to her unaltering support of the Egyptian national movement. She became involved in Egyptian national politics and supported many political and social leaders that were highly influential in Egypt and the Arab world. She
took this opportunity to build upon Egyptian nationalism by writing and performing songs to show her support for her country. Lohman explains, “Her high-profile charitable efforts and production of new patriotic songs redefined her relevance for Egyptian society and lent vital support to the Egyptian regime. Her efforts foregrounded the patriotism that remains one of the most conspicuous elements of her legend today” (Lohman 2010: 14). One specific aspect that highlighted Umm Kulthum’s career was her support of Egyptian leader and politician, Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein. Nasser was known for leading the Egyptian revolution in 1952 that overthrew the monarchy of Egypt and Sudan. Umm Kulthum strongly supported his efforts and in return the positive public perception of her grew even more.

“**The Voice of Arabs**: Mythologization of a National Legend

Umm Kulthum was not just famous, in the general sense of the word. She was an icon, a role model, and almost God-like in the way people followed and worshipped her. This lasting legacy has shaped the image that her fans remember, however contrary to how she actually lived her life. According to Laura Lohman, Umm Kulthum has been posthumously mythologized. In other words, after her death, her persona and status as a musician rose to that of a hero, and many aspects of her life may have been ignored or rewritten to fit this image (Lohman 2010: 6). The reason for this was due to how she was viewed by the public: as someone who “stressed her willingness to sacrifice herself for Egypt and the Arab nation” (Ibid.). Umm Kulthum has thus been remembered and memorialized as an “ideal citizen - and more specifically an ideal woman - in ways that sometimes contradict the events and choices of her life” (Ibid.). For instance, as mentioned above, Umm Kulthum was the one solely in charge of her career. Also, she did not marry until much later in her life and never bore children. At this time in Arab culture, “marriage
and motherhood were expected of all women” (Ibid.: 115). In fact, Umm Kulthum’s life mirrored that of men rather than fitting the pre-conceived notions of how women were supposed to go through life. According to Lohman, these aspects of Umm Kulthum’s life were often ignored or “erased” from public memory in order to further the mythologized image of Umm Kulthum as the ideal citizen and woman (Ibid.: 6, 115). Instead of acknowledging Umm Kulthum’s non-heteronormative lifestyle, her public image was altered. Rather than highlighting these aspects of her life as being against the norm, the public attributed to her the status of being a “third-sex” or someone not male or female. The category of “third-sex” was used at this time to compare her life to that of a hero or God. Her third-sex status was attributed to her, mostly after her death, as a way of framing her life as devoid of sexuality.

Although she was entirely dedicated to Egyptian life and nationalism, Umm Kulthum did not live her life by the pre-supposed rules often set upon women in Egyptian and Middle Eastern society. After all the myths are swept away and Umm Kulthum’s “real” life emerges, we begin to see how her legacy and image were shaped by media outlets. Despite her non-heteronormative lifestyle, media outlets and people in control of her image continued to posit her as the ideal woman. Umm Kulthum set a standard for women in the Middle East, but more so she set a standard for the women singers that followed her.

At the time of Umm Kulthum’s death, people across the Arab world mourned the loss of a national icon. Lohman states that, “Her death…was quickly cast as an Arab loss, and Arab authors claimed her musical contributions as part of an Arab musical heritage, rather than a strictly Egyptian one” (Lohman 2010: 5). Umm Kulthum’s legacy continues today, and her impact and music are still revered across the Arab world.

Fairouz: “Herstory”
Fairouz was born in 1935 in the Cedar Mountains of Lebanon. She began singing at a young age and her talent was well recognized among her small community. Much like Umm Kulthum, Fairouz also studied the Qur’an and the style of recitation. She began her singing career under the close watch of composer, Mohammed Fleyfel, who got her a job at the local radio station and began writing songs for her. At the radio station, Fariouz met the Rahbani brothers, Assi and Mansour, both noted for their artistry as musicians and composers. The Rahbani brothers began writing songs for her to sing and helped her to develop her style. Fairouz married Assi Rahbani in 1955. Soon after, Fairouz recorded a song written by the Rahbani brothers that catapulted her to fame. Her fame was further solidified by her first performance at the Baalbek festival in Lebanon in 1957. The public adoration for her rose quickly and she was soon considered one of the best singers in the Arab world. The Baalbek festival is now synonymous with Fairouz’s name, because this was the place where Lebanon’s national movement began. Folk music and Lebanese pride were both showcased at the festival and showed Fairouz’s dedication to her country and its people (Stone 2008: 41).

Figure 2: Fairouz Performing in Concert

http://gnh-fairouz.tripod.com/photos.htm
Unlike Umm Kulthum, Fairouz was not well known for her artistic agency. In fact, much of her fame and artistry has been attributed to the Rahbani brothers. After her artistic separation from Assi Rahbani, their son, Ziad Rahbani took over as Fairouz’s creative director and songwriter. Ziad continues to manage Fairouz’s career today. Exactly how much agency Fairouz has had during her career has often been debated and Fairouz has come under much scrutiny for what little she may have done to shape her career. However, Fairouz’s fans continue to uphold her as Lebanon’s most prized singer.

Similar to Umm Kulthum, Fairouz’s rise to fame mirrored Lebanon’s nationalist movement; at the time, the country was striving to find its identity and independence. Fairouz became the voice of Lebanon, singing patriotic songs that described Lebanon’s landscape and its importance to the Lebanese people. Fairouz is of the Christian faith; she comes from a Syriac Catholic and Maronite Catholic familial background. She is the only non-Muslim artist that will be highlighted in this thesis. The fact that a non-Muslim could achieve such fame says a lot about how she is viewed by people in the Arab world.

Her website, www.Fairouzonline.com describes her as many fans have for years: as “Neighbor to the Moon” and “Ambassador to the Stars” (www.Fairouzonline.com). Much like Umm Kulthum, the names ascribed to Fairouz indicate some otherworldly person, someone who is not quite human and elevated to the status of a hero or God. Another passage indicating this elevated image states, “The superstar acclaimed by millions as magical, brilliant, and angelic is our one and only Fairuz” (www.Fairouzonline.com). Noted scholar Ali Jihad Racy declares that "More than just a singer's name, Fairuz is a concept whose connotations are ethnic and nationalistic, as well as musical and poetic" (www.Fairouzonline.com). Her website describes her fame:
Yet to Fairuz, all the official acclaim and recognition that she has received over the years does not parallel the joy she experiences as she sings when she spots the absorbed attention of a single anonymous listener in a crowd. To her, singing is not merely a perfected profession, but a way of life. The Fairuz of today, like the Fairuz of yesteryear, continues to attend mass in the village church at Antilias. There, every year, during Holy Week she sings to the devout villagers with a dedication that perhaps is equaled only by their simple piety. It is this dedication that consistently refines her talent and continues to set Fairuz apart in a category all her own amid the chaotic trends of Middle Eastern music (www.Fairouzonline.com)

Lebanese people across the world continue to speak of Fairouz’s legacy and image. One participant of mine said, “I love Fairouz. She is our ambassador to the stars. She has been very proactive and reached the highest levels of professionalism and eloquence representing Lebanon in many venues all over the world.” Another participant said, “I do enjoy her music for the sole purpose that it unites the Lebanese people.” One other participant stated, “I consider her the symbol of Lebanon.” When speaking to other Lebanese people, I often hear them echo the same sentiments as above. Fairouz is considered a legend, a role model and leader for the Lebanese people. She continues to perform today throughout Lebanon and the world, and her legacy continues as Lebanon’s ambassador to the stars.

Nancy Ajram

Figure 3: Nancy Ajram

Nancy Ajram has been called the “Britney Spears” and “Madonna” of the Middle East (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uqEcl1Y, Reason magazine). Her music and image are

3 http://akelhawa.com/nancy-ajram-wedding-pictures
very similar to those of American pop stars, however her fame has taken a slightly different path than many pop stars.

Ajram was born in 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon, and is a Muslim (www.nancyajramonline.com). As a young girl she participated in several talent shows and won first prize at two of these competitions. Nancy Ajram’s father fostered her career by sending her to a music school to study voice and music theory (www.nancyajramonline.com). At the age of 12, Ajram participated in the “Noujoum Al Mostakbal” competition and won the gold medal for the Tarab category (www.nancyajramonline.com). She released two albums before she turned 18 years old, and her third album, Ya Salam, released in 2003, brought her to fame. Her website claims that this album is what made Ajram become the “Arab World’s sweetheart” (www.nancyajramonline.com).

It was the release of her first hit single, “Akhasmak Ah” (I’ll taunt you) that not only put Nancy Ajram on the Arab pop world’s map, but also brought her a lot of scrutiny. The release of the video for “Akhasmak Ah” depicted Ajram in a supposed sexually explicit fashion, with her dancing and flirting in a café filled with only men. In the video, Ajram is wearing a black tube-top dress whose hem stops just short of her knees. Throughout the video, she sings about how she will “taunt” the men and she sings to various men throughout the café as well as dances near them and towards the end of the video, she dances on a table.

Many considered the video to be too racy and sexual to be appropriate for television. The video was shown to be depicting Ajram as a sexual object. Usher describes, “She was dancing on the table and it was a room full of men and the men were just at her feet. And she was just commanding them. So in some ways it was seen as showing a woman as an object and in other ways it was seen as a woman being empowered” (Usher 2007: 3). To conservative members of
Arab society, the video was considered too sexual for public access and, soon afterwards, it was banned from television.

Ajram herself was then banned from performing in various countries throughout the Middle East because of this sexually suggestive video. Soon after the public scrutiny, Ajram’s image and persona were drastically altered, whether this change was on her own accord or that of her management is unsure. The initial images of Ajram as a young woman in the “Akhasmak Ah” video seemed to have been erased from public memory.

From my perspective, Ajram quickly began to change the way she dressed, from wearing revealing outfits to more conservative attire. Her music was even altered, from lyrics discussing sexual exploits to more conservative themes such as marriage, children and the ever-popular theme of love. She has since become the Arab spokeswoman for Coca Cola and UNICEF.

Currently, Ajram is considered to be a well-respected singer who often supplements her career by appearing to live a socially normative lifestyle. In other words, Ajram has conformed to the heteronormative lifestyle that is often expected of women in the Arab world. She follows her Muslim faith and she is married and has children. For example, on Lebanon’s Mothers’ Day 2011, Ajram appeared on television with her mother and daughter. Her appearance was marked by the performance of a song dedicated to all mothers. This new image of Ajram is far from the one depicted in her first commercial music video. The public seems to have forgotten her initial claim to fame and now considers her a well-respected representation of not only music, but life in the Arab world, as well.

Haifa Wehbe
Perhaps the most controversial performer in the Arab world is Haifa Wehbe. She was born in Mahrouna, Lebanon in 1976 to a Muslim family. Wehbe prefers to call herself a performer, not just a singer or actress, because she plays many roles. She won the Miss South Lebanon beauty contest at the age of 16 and was the runner up of the Miss Lebanon contest two years later (www.haifawehbe.com). Modeling and beauty contests helped to advance Wehbe’s career. In 2006, People magazine named Haifa Wehbe the Sexiest Woman in the Middle East (People, 120). During the interview for the People article, Wehbe was asked about the impression she portrayed, which she described by saying, “My image is a sensual, Arabic, exotic look, sultry sometimes” (People, 120.) Wehbe describes herself here just as many news reporters and journalists have done in the past. Her image has influenced not only the Arab world, but the international world as well. In 2010, Louis Vuitton chose her to be the new model for his annual collection. Haifa Wehbe’s website stated that this is the first time an Arab woman has been chosen to represent the Louis Vuitton name (www.haifawehbe.com). Conversely to Nancy Ajram supporting Coca Cola, Wehbe has taken on the role of spokeswoman for the competitive brand,

4 http://www.askmen.com/women/galleries/singer/haifa-wehbe/picture-1.html
Haifa Wehbe’s admittedly “sexy” persona has influenced many female pop stars entering the realm of Arab pop. Usher states, “The biggest phenomenon in the past few years has been Haifa Wehbe, a Lebanese singer whose image is that of a sex goddess. Her videos and songs have taken Arab pop into new areas of sexual suggestiveness, inspiring a flurry of flirtatious, scantily-clad imitators” (Usher, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6666725.stm). Usher’s description echoes the sentiments of many magazines and news articles from across the world. However, Wehbe’s persona has not gone unnoticed by conservative and religious members of society.

Wehbe’s image has come under much scrutiny, mostly for her sexually suggestive lyrics and the way she chooses to dress. However, despite the public scrutiny of her image, Wehbe has continued to stand by her persona. Unlike Nancy Ajram, Wehbe has ignored criticism from conservative and religious members of society. She continues to dress in clothes that she wishes, her songs and lyrics continue to echo the same sentiments of love and loss, and her beauty continues to be the topic of many discussions.

“Hasa Ma Bena” (I Feel There is Something [Between Us]) is a good example of Wehbe’s work. In the video, Wehbe has trouble with her car, and ends up stranded in the middle of the desert. After a few minutes a handsome man amazingly finds her in the middle of the desert and appears to “save” her. The video, like many others in pop music, does not support the lyrics to the song. Instead, the video seems to only function as a visual aid to complement Wehbe’s beauty. There is no indication in the song lyrics of her getting stuck in a desert and a random man coming to help her. Instead, the lyrics suggest that she “feels something” between herself and the token, handsome man.
Despite criticisms and backlash from society, Wehbe’s fan base continues to stand strong. For example, her official webpage is a site of much praise, stating, “To call Haifa a singer would be an understatement, an actress would not do her justice as well, a model- that’s just the tip of the iceberg- because Haifa Wehbe is a phenomenon in her own right” (www.haifawehbe.com).

Chapter Conclusion

Umm Kulthum and Fairouz have become legends in their own right, both in their respective countries and throughout the Arab world. Their legacies and the traditions that accompanied their personas set the groundwork for later female singers in the Arab world. The expression from much of the public seems to hold present-day pop stars to the same standards that were once expected of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. However, female pop stars today in the Arab world appear to be the antithesis of everything that Umm Kulthum and Fairouz were known for. In the next chapters, I show how pop stars, such as Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe, have been expected to live up to the images and personas of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. I also want to address how globalization, mass media, and consumerism have affected Arab pop and more specifically how these phenomena have affected women pop stars in the Arab world today.
CHAPTER II: SHA’BI MUSIC, YOUTH CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA

As the mediascape has expanded over the past several years, popular music has increasingly become a global phenomenon. It is almost impossible to find a country or region of the world that does not have some form of popular genres, including global pop forms. The relationship between mass media, globalization, and the upsurge of popular music will be discussed later in this thesis. For now, I would like to focus on several theories that will help to outline what attracts people from around the globe to pop music and more specifically, what attracts Arab youths to sha’bi music.

While most of the discourse surrounding female pop stars in the Arab world centers on the negative responses they have received, I want to take a different approach and discuss and highlight the reasons why Arab youth like this music (after all, there is quite a large fan base). I first discuss these theories in regards to popular music in general and then apply the same theories to Arab pop or sha’bi music. Next, I discuss several theories pertaining to youth culture and music, and again, apply these theories to sha’bi music.

Theories on Arab Pop Music (Sha’bi Music)

Underlying all the other distinctions critics draw between ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ music is an assumption about the source of musical value. Serious music matters because it transcends social forces; popular music is aesthetically worthless because it is determined by them (because it is ‘useful’ or ‘utilitarian’). This argument, common enough among academic musicologists, puts sociologists in an odd position. If we venture to suggest that the value of, say, Beethoven’s music can be explained by the social conditions determining its production and subsequent consumption we are dismissed as philistines-aesthetic theories of classical music remain determinedly non-sociological. Popular music, by contrast, is taken to be good only for sociological theory (Firth 2004: 32).
First, I truly believe that people cannot remove the social forces that have shaped music, no matter how transcendental it is held to be. This opinion may be considered common among ethnomusicologists, but I want to address this issue before I apply Firth’s theories to Arab pop. For instance, just because classical music is believed to be transcendental and can move through time without change does not mean that social forces have not helped to shape this type of music or help it remain transcendental throughout time. Firth writes, “In analyzing serious music, we have to uncover the social forces concealed in the talk of ‘transcendent’ values; in analyzing pop, we have to take seriously the values scoffed at in the talk of social functions” (Firth 2004: 32). In fact, I believe that the social forces that shaped the music are what make it transcendental, not the opposite, as many musicologists have posited. I believe that both transcendental and popular music must be looked at from a social standpoint to uncover the aesthetic qualities that draw people to the music.

In my opinion, Firth’s observations above apply not only to American popular music, but to popular music in the Arab world as well. For the categories of serious and popular music, I assert that Umm Kulthum and Fairouz both sang music, albeit popular, that can be placed in the category of “serious” music. Arab pop, or sha’bi, music is obviously considered popular music. If we take Umm Kulthum’s and Fairouz’s music as serious, and Nancy Ajram’s and Haifa Wehbe’s music as popular, then one can clearly see Firth’s theories and how they can be applied to Arab pop music. For instance, Umm Kulthum’s and Fairouz’s music is considered timeless by many people in the Arab world, similar to the transcendental role that some in the west have applied to art music, for example to Beethoven’s compositions. Sha’bi music, the style of music that Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram sing, is considered pop music, geared towards a young audience, and likely not considered to persevere. A higher aesthetic value should not be placed
on Umm Kulthum and Fairouz’s music just because it is considered to “transcend” trends in music. *Sha’bi* music, though not considered “serious” in Firth’s critique, deserves a serious approach to better understand why people like this music, without placing a judgment value upon it just because it is considered a popular genre.

Firth suggests that there are three main reasons that draw people to popular music.

Popular music,

1) Addresses identity and questions of identity

2) Gives people a way of managing the relationship between their public and private emotional lives

3) Shapes popular memory and organizes our sense of time (Firth 2004: 38-41).

The first reason that people enjoy popular music deals with aspects and questions of identity. Oftentimes, pop music is consumed by youth cultures and utilized to help cope with their lives and shape their identities. Firth explains, “We use pop songs to create for ourselves a particular sort of self-definition, a particular place in society” (Firth 2004: 38). Firth continues by discussing how pop fans are quite sure of their musical choices and even their non-choices. In other words, pop fans know what they like and will assert this firmly, and in the same regard they know very well what they do not like and will also assert this firmly. Firth calls this “possessing music.” People tend to think about music as “their music” and often end up feeling a sense of ownership over it; with this sense of ownership comes a feeling that they have to protect the music that they listen to. Firth explains further, “Criticize a star and the fans respond as if you have criticized them” (Firth 2004: 41). People utilize music, and especially pop music, in order to help define them and in turn take a very personal approach to this music. People, especially
youth, use music as a way to express what they cannot say in words. Therefore, it becomes a defining aspect of youths’ lives.

The second reason that people like popular music is because it provides a way of managing the relationship between public and private emotional lives. Firth attributes this to the fact that most pop songs are about love. Therefore, these songs give people a way to express themselves in ways that they otherwise could not, or they may feel too embarrassed to do so in the first place. Firth states, “these songs do not replace our conversations- pop singers do not do our courting for us- but they make our feelings seem richer and more convincing than we can make them appear in our words, even to ourselves” (Firth 2004: 40).

The third reason that people like pop music lies in the fact that it helps to shape popular memory and organize our sense of time. Pop music, according to Firth, gives us the sense that it can “stop time” and holds itself in our collective memory. The same goes for pop music giving us the ability to remain a “nostalgic form.” What Firth means by “nostalgic form” is that “music in itself provides our most vivid experiences of time passing. Music focuses our attention on the feeling of time; songs are organized around anticipation and echo, around endings to which we look forward, choruses that build regret into their fading” (Firth 2004: 40). Therefore, music invokes a nostalgic feeling within listeners that keep them listening and remembering and associating pop music with their everyday lives (Ibid.).

All three of these reasons point to the fact that popular music does, in fact, transcend and stay with people throughout their lives. It helps people remember specific times, such as what stage of life they were in when a certain song came out. Firth gives many examples of this phenomenon, but I wish to give an example from my perspective to help prove this point further. For example, when I hear a song by Britney Spears from her earliest days as a pop star, it
reminds me of growing up and being with friends. It also reminds me of specific events in my life (i.e., going to dances, etc.) and, in this way, popular music transcends time. Even though popular music is a product of here-and-now, it continues to hold great memories for us as individuals and helps build and maintain our collective memory.

“Youth, Itself, is Defined by Music”: Defining a Generation

One of popular music’s most important powers is the ability to shape identity, and this becomes most important when examining youth culture. As Simon Firth states, “youth, itself, is defined by music,” as music often functions as an expounding characteristic of youth culture. This section will address the questions of why and how youth culture is defined by music and, more specifically, how youth culture in the Arab world is being shaped by music today.

Youth culture and music are one in the same. In other words, part of defining the term “youth culture” needs to start with the characteristics and aspects that make up this consumer group in the 21st century. Music is just one of the aspects that define youth culture; however, I consider it to be one of the most important characteristics to define a generation and differentiate one from those previous. Denisoff and Levine define generation as “nothing more than a particular kind of identity or location, embracing related ‘age groups’ embedded in a historical-social process” (Mannheim 1951: 292; Denisoff, Levine 1972: 33). Therefore, a generation is defined by a certain identity or location and, more importantly, refers to a specific age group.

Youth culture is also described by the negative opinions often placed upon the group for going against cultural norms and redefining each generation along the way. Fuller states, “Most

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youth groups almost by definition tend to be impatient, idealistic, rebellious and anti-establishment” (Fuller 2003: 25). The real question that comes into play here is, why are youth groups portrayed negatively? Of course, youth groups will be seen as rebellious and anti-establishment if they go against the social norms. And, there is always a problem with generational gaps, where older generations see youth as being “impatient” and “idealistic” in regards to their norms. In other words, older generations are expecting younger generations to mirror their accomplishments and moral upbringings. Therefore, anything that contrasts with these values will be considered rebellious. Instead of seeing this group as “impatient,” I believe that youth cultures are generally more proactive and ambitious in their approaches, often wanting old and out-of-date popular culture to be swept under the rug and new information to appear just as quickly; this tendency is connected with the rise of technology. Similarly, the fact that most youth cultures are idealistic is not necessarily a bad thing for society. And, as stated before, being rebellious and anti-establishment just means that youths are transgressing social norms, questioning and deconstructing past ideologies, and are, therefore, deemed to act inappropriately. “Youths encounter new ideas from sources other than parental; views that often challenge those of their parents or other figures of authority” (Fuller 2003: 12). Basically, a large youth cohort “intensifies and exacerbates most existing problems of these societies” (Fuller 2003: 6).

Due to some unique features, Arab youth culture should be examined from a different perspective than what we experience in the United States and in the Western world. For example, there is a major difference in population and demographics. The population in the Arab region has grown substantially over the past few decades, so that now we are seeing “youths under the age of 24 now make up 50%-65% of the population of the Middle East” (Fuller 2003: 3). What does this mean for youth culture in the Arab world? Well, for one, it means that there is a
significant percentage of youths and, “The main consumers of pop music are, for the most part, in the age bracket of 13-30 (Firth 2004: 38). Therefore, music in the Arab world is being consumed by very large youth groups, and most sha’bi music is being marketed across the Middle East to quite a wide audience. In addition, the music being consumed is probably appearing, more and more, in the mainstream and therefore more people outside of the youth bracket are becoming exposed to youth styles. In other words, because of the younger population, people are now being exposed to music that they would earlier have no interest in consuming on their own.

In fact, Arab youths may be looking to Western culture for their generational needs. For example, Fuller states in regards to the Western world,

 Affluence as well as political and social freedoms and the weakening power of tradition and social structures afford Western youth far greater latitude in expressing their individuality in manifold respects. Nonetheless, these Western patterns are not just the product of Western society; they also reflect the realities of economic development that in turn impacts traditional social structure. This suggests that something comparable to an international youth culture is gradually infiltrating the entire world, even if at varying rates and with different characteristics. But the changes are ongoing (Fuller 2003: 12).

What Fuller means is that Western youth culture is now becoming the world youth culture. The impact of globalization is being seen strongly in the Middle East and shows that there is a strong need for youth to define themselves.

Films, television, and videocassettes are now broadly available, remorselessly projecting the lifestyles and preoccupations of international youth from various parts of the developing world. Music and clothing styles are usually the chief vehicles physically capturing generational differences, symbols of even more important statements of outlook (Fuller 2003: 12).

However, while Arab youths are taking on these generational characteristics and cues from Western culture, middle-aged and elder Arabs are struggling to fit new global ideas into their everyday lives. For example, Fuller states the following in regards to the Arab world:
“Their societies are generally more traditional and conservative, and probably impose greater social constraint than in the West. Political controls too, are obviously greater” (Fuller 2003: 25). Therefore, the new Westernized version of popular culture may be perceived more dramatically, and with greater tensions in the Middle East than in the Western world. People are not used to seeing and experiencing popular music like that today; instead, they are used to more conservative stars, conservative and less challenging in the way they dress, how they act on stage and in public, and in the music they perform.

Globalization has attracted Arab youths by showcasing lifestyles very different from their own; through music and visuals, foreign lifestyles are presented as extravagant and contemporary. Said Al Marouk says “there is a thirst among the young for something new that reflects their lives. We want something that is like us” (Usher, BBC News Europe 2007). Music is now being utilized in a different way than in the past. Arab youths are turning to a lifestyle that is different from their parents and grandparents, and they use music as a way to separate themselves.

There are other reasons that explain why youths are drawn to pop music and the answer does not only have to do with religious and political rebellion. In regards to the music, specifically, taste has changed considerably for this generation and there are overarching reasons why this may have occurred. For example, young people “…no longer have the attention span for singers to perform two hour songs as Umm Kulthoum did while standing still on stage. Instead, they expect the experience to be one of participation, stimulating all of their senses” (Abdel-Nabi et al., Hawwa, 234). In general, youth are not “fantasizing being up on stage,” but instead “the individual fans get their kicks from being a necessary part of the overall process,” which includes all aspects of the performance, such as the performers, amplification, and stage
production (Firth 2004: 39). Youths just want to be a part of this overall process. Umm Kulthum’s music allowed fans to experience the music firsthand; however, a more theatrical performance in modern day pop music is more appealing to younger generations.

Older genres of music, much like in the West, are no longer popular because they do not represent the current youth. Many songs in past generations were sung about pining for a lover, hopefully waiting for marriage, or expressing love for one’s significant other. Now, songs have changed from being about love to other topics, including concerns that exemplify the struggles of youth in the Arab world. Haifa Wehbe states an interview with CNN Arabic, “We are not Fairouz anymore, but Britney is not Pavarotti, Jennifer Lopez is not Dean Martin [sic]” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F0fuGPZe4Q). Wehbe here is noting the issues that many new pop stars have had to deal with: that of being compared to their predecessors. However, she clearly states that new pop stars are not their predecessors and should not be compared to them.

Technology and Mass Media

Technology and the mass media have had a large impact on pop music, especially in the Arab world. Firth states, “the history of twentieth-century popular music is impossible to write without reference to the changing forces of production, electronics, the use of recording, amplification and synthesizers, just as consumer choices cannot be separated from the possession of transistor radios, stereo hi-fis, ghetto blasters and Walkmen” (Firth 2004: 33). Without these technological advancements, music would not exist as we experience it today. For example, popular music would have trouble becoming international without recording devices; famous singers would have trouble becoming famous and touring domestically and internationally
without the microphone; and the way people consume music today would not have been possible without these and other technological advances.

Considering the large impact of technology on the production and consumption of music, Arab pop music has also seen a large surge of mass consumerism, especially among its youth culture. However, the impact of technology on music in the Arab world can truly be seen as starting with the onset of Umm Kulthum’s career, and we can see it further manifested in Fariouz’s fame. During an interview with one of my participants, Abud, we spoke of the impact that technology had on the careers of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. Abud basically equated Umm Kulthum’s fame to a more localized fame group and Fairouz’s fan base to a more international one. This was all due to the rise of technology in the intervening years.

Differentiating between Umm Kulthum and Fairouz’s careers, Abud states,

At that time, technology was not as prevalent and available in an affordable fashion for Umm Kulthum to portray herself as a global star. It was more the radio and people in the station and people on the trains were listening to Umm Kulthum and she was really in her initial career, but a big part of it was technology, absolutely. What happened with Fairouz is, she actually went to a lot of these places that I mentioned. She actually traveled. Whereas, Umm Kulthum, there was very little presence from her globally. And part of that was I think immigration from the Arab world actually happened while Umm Kulthum was growing up. There was not a whole lot of market. So if you’re gonna go to Paris and play for the Arab population there, not a whole lot of people were gonna be there, just because there wasn’t a whole lot of immigration there. But by the time of Fairouz, she was ready to go and take advantage of the global image for herself. She was like, ‘ok there is a global community here’ and people could afford and go and watch her show.

In Umm Kulthum’s time, her voice was the most important aspect of her performance characteristics. This was, in part, due to the radio being the primary way that people consumed music. Other than radio, the only way to experience the performance of Umm Kulthum and other famous stars was to physically go to their concerts. This is where the microphone has allowed for people to experience live music.
In the 1970s, at the height of Fairouz’s career, video and television production became more widespread across the Arab world, and therefore people began to physically and literally see performers, not just hear their voices. This allowed for people to see how stars, like Fariouz, chose to dress and the mannerisms that accompanied their performances. Television would become the most important way that people in the Arab world experienced music.

One of the first shifts in technology in the Arab world that impacted *sha ‘bi* music was the consumer use of not only television, but more specifically, the music video. Television in the Arab world, unlike America, is mostly controlled by the government. The visual aspect of television allowed Arab youth exposure to their favorite pop stars and the lifestyles portrayed in videos. Moataz Abdul Aziz states, “Likewise, these new trends of Arab music channels have an impact on Arab youth” (Aziz 2004: 1). However, government and religious control of television channels have, in recent years, attempted to control and censor certain music videos that contested and challenged the views of conservatives in the Arab world. This reaction, in part, is due to globalization. For instance, Aziz states, “Hollywood and European films provided a window that enabled Arab talents to gain more subjects and ideas for their productions” (Aziz 2004: 4). Arab artists, in turn, created art that was perceived to challenge conservative mores, and this art, in turn, stimulated a response from conservatives.

In Umm Kulthum’s time, the microphone was the technology of choice. Fairouz utilized television and festivals to get her nationalistic perspectives across, and, in the new age of *sha ‘bi* music, the music video changed the way people experience and consume music. While technology plays a vital role in the production and consumption of youth music, it still leaves us with the question: What are people who like *sha ‘bi* music and actively consume it saying about this music?
Pro-Pop Attitudes in the Arab World

Sha’bi music has quite a large fan base, despite the many news articles claiming that female pop stars are distasteful and not truly musicians. Despite the negative backlash from members of Arab society, we are missing out on the actual consumers of this music. Who are they? And, most importantly, why do they like this music?

On the pages of YouTube featuring sha’bi clips, the majority of comments written by fans are of a positive nature, and they often show overwhelming support for Nancy Ajram. The religious and political backlash from many groups has not seemed to impact Nancy Ajram’s career or the way her fans view her. In fact, after she made it a point to change her image, her fan base grew even larger and more adoring. One fan wrote on November 8, 2009: “Nancy is beautiful, her voice is beautiful, this song is beautiful…just beautiful. I cry every time I hear this…”

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wae5Vm2EuMA&feature=PlayList&p=3B07B733F5129916&index=0). The overwhelming support for Ajram can still be seen today, as her fan base expands.

Haifa Wehbe also has a very strong and devout fan base and a prominent presence online. Fans’ comments on www.YouTube.com videos and in other news sources have often cited the controversy surrounding the pop star, but it is clear that her fans still support and love her, despite the controversy. “I love Haifa…and this is my favourite song, and I love her looks in [this] video. She is so sexy and I adore her so much! (FidaHakimin, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UQ8oCIBviY&feature=related). However, there are many YouTube comments where some fans complain about Wehbe’s image being too sexual and or
claim that she is not being a “true Muslim” because of the way she presents herself. The majority of comments left on Youtube.com pages discuss her image, first and foremost, and then question whether she is Muslim or not.

Chapter Conclusion

Despite the large fan base, there are still YouTube users that disagree with Ajram’s and Wehbe’s music and how they represent Arab culture. For example, some Ajram fans have posted negative comments in the past. One response left by a viewer said (in response to a Nancy Ajram video), “This is extremely Westernized Lebanese culture, NOT real Arabic culture.” In response to this statement, another user commented, “hahahaha yes it is…besides what is ‘purely’ Arabic culture???” There is no right or wrong answer to this question, but it has proven to be problematic in answering because there is no central or “pan-Arab” culture. The diversity across Arab nations is often difficult to define. Arabs are an ethnic population but not all peoples have the same specific attributes or customs; “Arab culture” becomes almost impossible to define. The topic of Arab culture comes into play with female pop stars because there is no doctrine defining Arab culture as a whole. Political and religious matters are often discussed in response to videos. People argue about morals and question if the videos are right or wrong for their portrayal of women. Some people blame Westernization and other factors for contributing to the growing change that is ever-present among the Arab nations. The discussions among Arabs on these sites have shown that, in one way, music is a representation of how Arabs feel about their own culture, but also, how Arab nations are being seen by the outside world. This issue of perception will be addressed in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER III: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES IN SHA’BI MUSIC

In the previous chapter, I discussed music and youth culture and approached the subject of why Arab youths are drawn to sha’bi music. For this chapter, I wish to discuss the issues surrounding sha’bi music, focusing on the negative responses from the Arab population. I wish to discuss why certain populations do not like this music, and more importantly, why people do not like the performers and the mass-mediated lifestyles that accompany sha’bi music.

To begin, I explore how westernization and globalization have impacted pop music and more importantly sha’bi music. Then, I highlight the religious and political issues that women performing sha’bi music have dealt with. Lastly, I draw attention to the comparisons made between Fairouz and Umm Kulthum with those of Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe. I argue that Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe and other Arab female pop stars are coming under much scrutiny because they are constantly compared to their foremothers, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. While there is some scholarship and discourse on why these women are being targeted, I wish to take a feminist approach to the subject and examine, deconstruct what they have posited about this music, and frame my findings in a feminist perspective.

**Westernization and Globalization**

…the present generation not only faces harsher socio-economic conditions, but also is being socialized in a more radical regional environment overall, one characterized by the power of radical Islamic ideologies and heightened political violence and growing anti-Americanism (Fuller 2003: 23).

In the new era of global communication and mass media, the Arab world appears to be struggling to find its niche. In countries that uphold high religious and moral standards, the new age of free reign, especially among young generations, is beginning to take hold and manifest
itself in a new global market. For the country of Lebanon, which is producing the majority of female pop stars and has incorporated western and global popular culture over many generations, the impact of westernization and globalization appear to be less of an issue. However, western popular culture is having a much greater influence in other Middle Eastern countries. Criticisms of western culture have been rampant in the Arab media for decades now, with particular emphasis directed at America. Political issues and wars have affected much of the Arab population, especially the youth culture growing up today. These have, therefore, infiltrated themselves into various areas of popular culture, but more specifically, music.

Due to colonial legacies, Westerners for centuries have been seen as the upholders of high culture. Many areas of the world have taken cues from the Western world. Western and Near East relationships, in regards to music, came together in 1932. The Congress of Arab Music, held in Cairo, brought together researchers from Europe and the Arab world to discuss philosophical and musicological opinions (Racy 1991: 68). The congress was formed by King Fu‘ād in order to “bring Egypt up to par with the modern ‘civilized’ world.” King Fu‘ād wanted both European and Egyptian scholars to attend the conference in order to “discuss all that was required to make the music civilized, and to teach it and rebuild it on acknowledged scientific principles” (Ibid.). There were several main issues that the Congress addressed, including, a) enhancing the “evolution” of Arab music, b) establishing a fixed musical scale, c) adopting specific symbols for transcribing Arab tunes, d) systematically organizing Arab compositions, e) investigating musical instruments and assessing their appropriateness, f) organizing music education, g) recording indigenous songs from various localities, and h) discussing relevant musical and scholarly works in both printed and manuscript forms (Ibid.: 70). In other words, the Egyptian government wanted to “standardize” music and make it more “civilized” by revising
and organizing it by Western standards and Western expectations. It appears that the Egyptian government did not believe that Arab music was up to par with “other civilized nations,” also known as the Western world. This conference was one of the first recorded examples of Arab nations comparing themselves to Western nations and thereby trying to construct their culture to meet the level of those in the western world. In other words, Egypt subjected itself to the “high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism” that held remnants of Orientalism. More specifically, the Congress of Arab Music confirmed the long history between the “Orient” and the “Occident.”

Since the Congress of Arab Music in 1932, both Egypt and Lebanon have been known as the holders of culture and popular culture. Movies, music, music videos, recording artists, and more have been produced in and disseminated from these countries, and they are still considered the two main countries of cultural output today. For Lebanon, the cultural output appears to focus mainly around producing sha’bi music and popular stars.

Politically, Lebanon has proven to be the least conservative country of the Arab nations. Many of the famous Arab pop stars today are Lebanese and “most of the video production houses are in Lebanon” (Freund, Reason magazine 2). The article, “Changing Times,” states, “Known to be more liberal than other countries in the region, Lebanon has produced a large number of these controversial new stars” (“Changing Times,” Middle East, 35). It is clear that, because of the less-conservative nature of Lebanon, the popular music industry has prospered and produced many of the stars. However, while Arab media may be produced in Lebanon, it is often aired across the Arab world and therefore more conservative countries must contend with the idea of modern female pop stars and scrutinize them as they see fit. This inspection has led to severe criticisms and backlash against sha’bi music and its performers, particularly its female
performers. In news media and elsewhere, the *sha’bi* music trend has been blamed on westernization and globalization, but mainly on the influential impact that the West has had on Arab culture and music.

As introduced in Chapter II, technology has played a main role in disseminating mass media and culture throughout the Arab world. The largest impact has come from the music video. Showcasing *sha’bi* music, the music video has revolutionized the way youth generations are experiencing music. Not only do they get to hear their favorite pop stars singing much-beloved songs, they get to experience the song with the additional realm of the visual and all it suggests. This has allowed people throughout the Arab world to see an apparent upsurge in outside influence, namely from the West. Mohamed Hossam Ismail writes,

> Arab music videos are teeming with definitely ideological signifiers especially those centered on young female bodies. Some music videos show strong westernized attitude with girls mingling with young men on beaches, in parties…etc. Whereas, some other music videos maintain the traditional image of the Arab woman longing for a lover, most probably a husband, in a very passive and submissive way preserving the traditional Arab Islamic gender roles (Ismail 2005: 3).

Arab pop stars and the promotional mass media are being pushed into the global music market and striving to have the success of their western counterparts. Popular shows, such as MTV, have also permeated the air waves of the Arab world, popularizing the global music market (Abdel-Nabi et al., *Hawwa*, 234). MTV’s impact on the present generation of teens and young adults is astounding, not only in the United States, but in many places around the world, including the Middle East. The Arab world has picked up on the large influence of MTV and incorporated the music television empire into Arab viewers’ homes.

Roberts states, “While many consider the rejection of Arab traditions and values a Western influence, it is in fact a symptom of a variety of political and societal upheavals in the
region” (Roberts, *Bitch*, 18). Are the appearance of MTV and the expansion of the mass media proving that the Middle East is becoming more western? While it appears, from the outside, that the encroaching new culture is an example of westernization or globalization, it could actually be an internal matter, spurred forward due to the frequent sociopolitical upheavals throughout Middle Eastern history. An example of western influence would be the pressures and expectations put upon women, as mentioned above. In this new age, where technology has brought about mass communication internationally, Arabs can better view other nations and how they function. But, they also see their own war-torn lands and constant political disturbances. They may want something different and new, whether it is a product of the West or not. In the quote above, Roberts asserts that the disruptions of the Middle East are causing people to question their cultural values and social and political systems. People are searching for the reason there is such conflict and are starting to resent the tension, creating a backlash among many Arabs. Many women are doing exactly this: rejecting the social norms placed upon them, thus challenging the status quo.

Female pop stars, such as Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe, have been described as the quintessentially young musician taking cues from western popular culture and music. This “character” they portray is engaged in a dialectic battle between the conservative views of the Near East and the liberal attitudes of the West. Therefore, women pop stars in the Arab world must constantly find a balance between old and new.

For places like Saudi Arabia, where women only leave the house accompanied by a male relative or their husband, are not allowed to drive, and suffer further public restrictions, the image of women in music videos mingling with men is culturally abhorrent to many Arabs. Arab music videos, such as those produced in Lebanon, represent “speed, power, girls and
wealth” and “it could be easily figured out that cars, clothes, mobile phones and modern furniture are the products that attract young Arab men and women alike” (Ismail 2005: 8). All of these factors that help to perpetuate pop music rupture the strict social and religious norms of Arab society. Ismail writes, “music videos represent the enticement of daydreams of the average Arab young men and women. Music videos share narcotizing them through alluring fantasies that compensate for the tough living conditions of the majority of the Arab youth” (Ibid.).

In the article “Changing Times,” Usher reveals a different approach to Arab pop music, using pop star Ruby as an example. The article explains, “…a product will not sell if no one wants to buy; and the popularity of singers such as Ruby reveal an appetite for what they offer: not something ‘Western’ but universal” (Usher 2008:35). The portrayal of women may be over-sexualized in some cases but, as the author states, this is something that is universal, not necessarily just a product of the West that is imposed on others. There is an obvious demand for this image and music everywhere. If this were not the case, pop music – and the images and sounds it offers – would not sell in such high quantities.

The international pop world is permeating cultures everywhere. What does this mean for Middle Eastern cultures and Arab popular music? In the article, “Changing Times,” Usher writes “Critics claim that despite the songs being sung in Arabic and using Arabic tones, there is very little else about them that speaks of Arab culture” (Usher 2008: 35). In a time of upheaval and uncertainty, Arab people are asking, what is Arab culture? Clearly, cultures are continuously changing around the world and the music scene within the Arab world is not immune to such changes.

I believe that the majority of Arabic pop music has been influenced by both westernization and the backlash against western social and political influences in the Middle
East. Pop stars in the Arab world are aware of popular culture in the West and the elements that are necessary to sell their music today. Sexualization of one’s self is often seen as the first feature portrayed in pop stars. This idea may originate in the West, but there are also pressures from social and religious entities to prevent this. The populations of young Arabs are now in control of defining their generation as they choose.

**Religious and Political Issues**

The majority of criticism of *sha’bi* music has come from religious and political conservatives in the Arab world. These conservative members of Arab society have attempted to shelter their citizens from the world of Arab pop, often banning music, videos, and even performances by famous pop stars. Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe have often been targets of these bans and have faced some of the most unabashed and harsh criticisms from religious and political conservatives. Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe have experienced criticism for being too overtly sexual, wearing clothes that were too revealing, and for how some believe they have impacted the younger generations that continue to listen to their music and watch their videos.

In fact, “Haifa Wahbe and Nancy Ajram, both pop starts from Lebanon, came under the spotlight in 2006 when members of Egypt’s Islamist party called for them to be banned from performing there. The claim was that their overtly sexual dance routines and revealing costumes would provoke inappropriate thoughts and behavior.” (Usher 2008: 35). Information on whether this ban has been lifted or not was difficult to find. However, Ajram and Wehbe’s fans, despite the religious backlash, have continued to show support and loyalty for their favorite pop stars, even at their own peril. The cultural implications of this backlash are much greater than ever before due to the rise in violence against pop fans. Roberts writes, “Ajram’s fans in Kuwait were
pummeled with rocks by local religious conservatives” (Roberts, *Bitch*, 18). Violence against Ajram’s fans made worldwide news.

What this low, ‘vulgar’ genre is offering, in sum, is a glimpse of a latent Arab world that is both liberal and ‘modernized.’ Why? Because the foundation of cultural modernity is the freedom to achieve self-fashioned and fluid identity, the freedom to imagine yourself on your own terms, and the videos offer a route to that process. By contrast, much of Arab culture remains a place of constricted, traditional, and narrowly defined identities, often subsumed in group identities that hinge on differences with, and antagonism toward, other groups. (Freund, *Reason* magazine, 4).

Outside the world of pop, the Middle East is still holding on to conservative views and morals, no matter how much the media changes. While the pop music helps to define the Arab youth population, it has proven to be problematic for the rest of the Arab world due to opposing views and standards.

Political upheavals, military conflicts, sanctions and embargoes have affected many economies of the region, causing declines in productivity and disrupting markets. Some countries, struggling to recover from the ravages of war, have emerged with substantial debts, limiting options for public expenditure. All affected countries have emerged with compounded socio-political problems that have retarded progressive moves towards liberalization and democratization (Fuller 2003).

In Bahrain in 2008, Haifa Wehbe’s show was almost cancelled, but it was narrowly approved by one vote by the parliament. The problem was based on the assumption that Wehbe’s show “would be sexually provocative, violating Islamic conventions and Bahrain’s traditions” (Harrison 2008: 1). To prevent the ban, Wehbe’s organizers promised that she would dress modestly for the performance.

**Living up to their Foremothers**

In this section, I argue that one of the main reasons people criticize female pop stars is because there is an ever-present image for them to live up to that of their foremothers. More
specifically, I propose that Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe, and other similar female pop stars are being subjected to scrutiny because they do not hold the same perceived qualities that were so highly regarded of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. First, I highlight some of the characteristics that have drastically changed from the times of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz to the present day with Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe. There are, however, also similarities between the four divas and I wish to bring to light the characteristics that make them alike.

First, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz were both very conservative dressers in public and on stage. Umm Kulthum was definitely the more consistently conservatively dressed one of these two women. However, often times they both wore dresses that had long sleeves to cover their arms and legs. The only other outfits that I have seen them wearing in photos and film clips are shorter dresses that came down to their knees. Umm Kulthum’s hair was usually always tied back in a bun. Fairouz’s hair was either tied back in a bun or left completely down.

Umm Kulthum and Fairouz were famous because of their singing voices. In an age where singers were more likely to be heard on the radio instead of seen on television or in film, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz were evaluated for the quality of their voices and their appearances were usually not notable. However, times have changed drastically since then; now, pop music does not just encompass the vocal quality of the singer, but also takes into consideration how they are dressed and their overall personas. For instance,

[T]hough it would be unfair to say that the Arab divas (Umm Kulthoum and Fairouz) of yesteryear had faces made for radio, they were (how to be polite?) very talented singers. But this bevy of Lebanese hotties [such as Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe], who came of age in the era of globalization and Britney Spears, stands for just one thing: sex, or at least the mass-mediated illusion of it (Butters, New Republic, 2).

While I find the criticism from Butters a bit harsh (stating that Umm Kulthum and Fairouz “had faces made for radio”), I understand the thought process here. Women, during the
times of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, rose to stardom because of their extraordinary ability to sing. However, aesthetics and expectations have changed drastically and, in the modern day, pop stars, and especially female pop stars, are expected to be much more than singers. For instance, female pop stars are expected to have the “whole package,” which basically means that they must have beautiful looks, beautiful personality, the right clothes, the right hair, the right makeup, the right shoes, and so forth. Nancy Ajram herself makes a point of this by stating, “We’re in the image age, the first thing people notice are the singer’s looks and apparel. They notice the voice second, though I believe it is the most important factor, however, you cannot ignore presentation, and this includes hair, makeup, and clothes” (“Singer Profile…” 2004). Pop music is not just about the talent that singers possess, it is also about the pop stars’ images, their stage presence, the stage production, the video production, and so forth. What Ajram is basically saying is that we live in a new era where the “whole package” matters greatly to people. Therefore, it is hard to imagine a female pop star in the present day who does not fit the mold mentioned above; if they choose not to conform, could they become famous? To approach this question, I would like to briefly note a few of my observations of the singing competition, American Idol, where appearance is one of the factors that contestants are judged on. At the beginning of the season 1, Paula Abdul was the judge in charge of commenting on contestants’ appearances. However, she stopped addressing the look of contestants and this duty of commenting on appearance was usually left to Simon Cowell, and comment he did. Along with his unabashed and sometimes harsh criticisms of contestants’ vocal qualities, Cowell frequently commented on their appearance, and often focused on their weight. I distinctly remember Cowell stating that image and appearance do matter whether we like it or not; that is the harsh reality.
When I asked my interviewees what they thought of the new famous Arab female pop stars, they most often commented first, on how they dressed and second, on their singing voices. They prioritized look over voice. From their negative comments, it was clear that they disrespect these women for dressing the way they do, but, interestingly, most criticism was aimed at their ability to sing. Most of my participants, when asked if they liked sha’bi music, stated “no” and explained that their dislike of the style was because the female singers do not have good singing voices. Below I list a few participants’ answers to the question: Do you like Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe’s music? Why or why not?

- “I am more prone to Nancy Ajram’s music because I am more familiar with it. I also am not too fond of Haifa Wehbe’s voice in comparison to Nancy Ajram’s voice” (Lucy)
- “I don’t think they are very talented in the aspect of singing, they are more focused on the sex sells aspect of selling records” (Banan)
- “I don’t listen to their music because I honestly don’t feel connected to it and don’t enjoy it. Their vocals are not great at all, their appearance is tasteless because of the plastic surgeries they’ve done, and their “go-to-market” strategy is much geared toward video-clips that expose sexually-OPpressed Middle East audience to something they have never been exposed to. Are they successful? Do they have audience? Do generations like them? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. But I’m not a fan” (Abud)
- “Yes, they are relatively of the very popular singers because of their attractive look, but their voice is bad” (Georges)
- “I think they are okay singers” (Sam)

Another reason why people may not like this music and be critical of it is simply because it is pop music. Though she was a popular artist, Umm Kulthum was known for perfecting the style of tarab and she built her career singing the style. While Fairouz’s music is considered more of a popular genre, she was more nationalistic and political and these qualities enhanced her fame; Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe’s popular styles are very different from these women’s styles. Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe’s music is of the specific genre of sha’bi. Not only is
sha’bi music not very respected in much of the Middle East, pop music in general has had a tough time putting itself on the map as a respected and legitimate genre of music. Therefore, some Arabs may have a problem with not only the female singers and their personas, but also with the genre of sha’bi music itself.

Sha’bi music has frequently been criticized for not being “Arab” enough. Some Arabs have criticized the music for not having any of the style characteristics of songs from the Arab world. In fact, most sha’bi songs are in western tonality, or they are in a maqam that closely resembles a western mode. The absence of maqam in these songs have made sha’bi music sound more westernized, and has taken these songs further from the ancestral Arab roots. Along the same line, Arab orchestras, often used in previous decades to accompanying popular singing, are absent from modern-day performances. Today, the music accompanying performances is like many pop performances, where the music is recorded before the performance or the musicians playing the music are not in sight of the audience.

In the times of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, Arab orchestras were always present as support and accompaniment. However, due to the rise of the pop genre in the Arab world, live orchestras are usually no longer needed or present. Instead, most singers will sing to a prerecorded track; this approach also allows a singer to simply lip-sync as well. Music scholars have noted the shift in musical aspects of Arabic music. Pop songs are in both Western scales and Middle-Eastern modal systems; some are sung in English, while others stray so far from the aesthetic norm that the only characteristic linking them to the Arab world is the Arabic text. And, while many pop stars continue to perform for live audiences, they lip-sync throughout the performance and the results are very obvious.
Song lyrics have changed over time as well. In past generations, songs were about love and one’s country and the community that surrounded them. Now, new waves of pop music have shifted from songs about love for one’s country and community to pop stars singing about their individual selves, which was unheard of as a song subject in Umm Kulthum and Fairouz’s time. For example, Haifa Wehbe’s most famous song is titled “Ana Haifa” (I am Haifa).

Of course, it is easy to see the differences separating Umm Kulthum’s and Fairouz’s generations from Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram’s generation. However, there are similarities between all four divas as well. For instance, neither Haifa Wehbe nor Nancy Ajram have become completely westernized, and they often include some aspect of Arab culture in their performances. Soraya Roberts describes Nancy Ajram as the “personification of the dichotomy that exists in the world of Middle Eastern pop culture: conservative tradition mingling with secular modernity” (Roberts, *Bitch*, 17). Both of these modern pop divas use live performances to showcase their hybrid lifestyles. While the songs they sing may sound more and more western, they maintain visual indicators of Arab culture in the stage production. For example, in a live performance by Haifa Wehbe, men and women danced behind her dressed in traditional Arab clothing; and, during one of Nancy Ajram’s live performances, background dancers dressed in western clothing, but their dance movements shifted back and forth between ballroom dancing steps and *dabke* steps, showcasing the hybridity of Lebanese culture.

Other similarities between the divas of yesteryear and the present day are obvious as well. For instance, at a young age Nancy Ajram trained her voice by singing in *tarab* competitions; she even once won a competition singing an Umm Kulthum song. So, for some people to state that she is not a good singer is a little surprising to me. Also, as mentioned in the

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1 Popular folk dance in Lebanon and other various Arab countries
previous chapter, Umm Kulthum did not live her life by social norms, despite her mythologization; as a matter of fact, neither does Haifa Wehbe today. Wehbe deviates from social norms in the way she dresses and dances, and basically her whole pop star persona strays from social norms in the Arab world. However, she has never faltered from her image and stands strongly by it, much like Umm Kulthum did in her time. As quoted before, Wehbe says, “My image is a sensual, Arabic, exotic look, sultry sometimes” (*People*, 120.) She adds, in regards to her persona, “I know my fans want me and I am there for them- I am not concerned with the other issues” (Haifa Wehbe).

One last similarity connecting Fairouz and Nancy Ajram is their dedication to upholding the image of a “good” woman in Lebanon. For instance, Fairouz’s career was built and focused on Lebanese nationalism and pride and also on her role as a good mother and wife. Fairouz made it a point to showcase her dedication to Lebanon and to her family. In my opinion, Nancy Ajram is attempting to do the same thing. She has represented herself and the Arab world in several television campaigns for UNICEF and other organizations. Ajram also makes it a point to showcase herself as a wife and mother. For example, on Lebanon’s Mother’s Day 2011, Ajram appeared on a television station with her mother and daughter. She spoke about how important family is to her and about the love she has for her country. She then sang a song dedicated to all mothers. The absence of traditional Arab music and presentational characteristics - such as conservative dress, Arab orchestras, and *maqam* scales and modes - has altered audience expectations of a performance. Gone are the years where Umm Kulthum’s concerts would last for many hours and female performers dressed conservatively and sang of love, family, and honor. Today, younger generations cannot connect with this older style of music. One participant stated that he listens to Umm Kulthum’s music only once a year because, “She is a little bit
boring to me and sings sad songs.” Another participant said, “I don’t listen to Umm Kulthum very often... as a matter of fact I don’t remember the last time I listened to Umm Kulthum.” He continues, “Many of my friends and acquaintances say that Fairouz’s music is out-dated and not appealing, but I listen to Fairouz every other day.. at least 3 to 4 times a week.” Some youths are using Umm Kulthum’s or Fairouz’s music as a way to hold on to the traditions that have defined the Arab world for generations. However, new struggles and constant turmoil have reshaped the Arab world and music is reflecting this shift in culture and values and encompassing the East/West hybridity that Lebanon has been known for.

Because They Are Women…

When completing my ethnography for this study, I knew that my central focus was on the issues that Arab female pop stars face in the present day. I had assumed that others (particularly young Arabs and Arab Americans) would see what I was seeing: a forced-upon image of women throughout history that continues to manifest itself in our lives today. However, I was surprised by their answers to one specific question:

- In your opinion, what are some of the issues that people have with Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe and other popular performers that sing similar music? Could part of it have to do with them being women? Or is the music sending the wrong message to fans? Or could it be that people feel this way because they don’t like the music?

In response to this question, participants answered:

- Sam: “Of course being a woman is not an issue.”
- Banan: “Them being women has nothing to do with it, there have been female artists for years and have been the most popular across the world.”
Abud: “It is a little of everything… Middle Eastern culture is so oppressed and passively managing its problems. Sex and women are such a taboo topic in the Middle East.”

Georges: “Actually young people appreciate the performance done by these singers especially because they are attractive and cute”

Fady: “I don’t think it’s because they are women. I think some people have issues with the message they send to the fans, the video clips or even sometimes the lyrics.”

I was surprised by most of my participants’ answers. I could not understand how they could believe that people did not have an issue with these women being women. At first, I took their answers at face value and began to think that I had maybe gone down the wrong path, that maybe the issues with these women were not actually because they were women. However, after flushing out my other ideas, it occurred to me that there were many sides to this issue and that I wanted to address the other aspects and talk about my own opinion on this issue as well. I find that my opinions divert from the interviewees. I believe that there are issues with these pop stars being women, and I address these issues in this section.

In the Middle East and around the world, women have roles that they are expected to fill throughout their lifetimes. Women in the Middle East, like much of what was listed about Umm Kulthum’s life in Chapter II, are expected to marry, bear children, and be “good” wives for their husbands. Being a good wife means keeping up your physical appearance and supporting your husband as the head of the household. In other words, women are expected to be submissive to their husbands, and this submission often results in oppression against the women.
Many of these expectations have a history, and women have basically dealt with oppression from men since the beginning of time. But addressing these issues has remained stagnant for quite some time in the Middle East, and this is mainly a result of the Arab interpretation of Islam and the demands it places upon women. Morals and values in Arab society have been shaped and constructed by Islam and the Arab world is still focused mainly on supporting these beliefs. Islam and customary laws in the Middle East have required for centuries that women be pious and non-sexualized, and that they save their sexuality for their husbands (Cooke 2000: 151). Women’s sexuality, in the Middle East, has been viewed as the property of men. In other words, women have always been described in relation to men. Whether it is with marriage titles (women take the last name of the man), jobs, owning land, and so forth, women have always been regarded not as individuals but by how they act in relation to men.

Strict expectations are placed upon women to keep up their appearances, not for themselves, but for men. In other words, women need to always be beautiful in order for their husbands not to stray. Naomi Wolf explains in The Beauty Myth how the pressure and expectations placed upon physical appearance for women throughout history have forced them to feel oppressed, and, in turn, have encouraged women to attempt to live up to outlandish expectations for their physical beauty. Wolf writes, “The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power” (Wolf 2002: 13). Wolf describes what many feminist theorists have asserted before her, that women’s oppression is not about women at all, but about the men who enforce it. Despite feminist movements throughout the world, women still feel the need to live up to the expectations placed on their lives and physical image. These institutions to conserve this power relationship were placed upon women by men; however, in
the present day, both women and men help to perpetuate these issues surrounding women (Wolf 2002: 3).

For female pop stars around the world, the issues surrounding women are magnified. In the Arab world, where women are expected to act one way, but the world of pop demands that they act another. For example, for female pop stars around the world, the sexualization of their images is usually not only expected, but also demanded; their hair, makeup, clothes, as well as every visual aspect is expected be absolutely perfect at all times. Their sexualization is a result of the social expectations imposed on them from the beginning of their careers. A reason these expectations have been forced on women pop stars is because of the old adage, “sex sells.” Pop stars’ personas are created by the mass media, society, and record labels. However, when female pop stars live up to these expectations, backlash from the general population, as in the case in the Middle East, can ensue.

In a world filled with hijabs and burkas, a woman suddenly exposing her body causes more conflict now than ever due to the impact of globalization. This issue of female flesh is problematic when dealing with men’s reactions and the question of their desires and this topic is often forbidden to be spoken aloud or even admitted in most Muslim countries. Conservative values and religious beliefs are sensitive subjects that are more often enforced in the Arab world than the United States. Therefore, the subject of sexuality is more challenging to discuss openly in relation to Middle Eastern society.

As mentioned before, pop stars like Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe are stuck between a conservative society and what the pop world expects of them in order to sell their music. The discourse surrounding these women often describes them in relation to men. For example, Lena

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2 Thank you to Jessica Hamel-Akré for helping me with this idea.
Lehman, a music producer states, “I think watching videos of Haifa Wehbe and all these girls who have their boobs hanging out is a kind of mild form of porn for them (men)- this is why they love watching videos” (Usher, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/hi/europe/6666725.stm). Along the same lines, Roberts states, “some academics accuse sexy singers of maintaining backward conservative values: Because the stereotypical image of the Arab woman is of a body that exists simply for man’s pleasure, women gyrating in tube tops and low-riders are arguably maintaining the status quo” (Roberts, Bitch, 18). In other words, instead of female pop stars being seen as taking control of their images and disregard the negative responses, they are, in fact, just perpetuating this image, instead of fighting it. However, why do academics and news media outlets always describe these women in relation to men? I believe it is because of women’s historical past and the fact that, as mentioned above, women are never regarded as their own, individualistic entities, but instead are seen from a male perspective. Also, these criticisms are overlooked as being misogynistic because women are often reduced to only their appearance. Wolf writes, “Why does the social order feel the need to defend itself by evading the fact of real women, our faces and voices and bodies, and reducing the meaning of women to these formulaic and endlessly ‘beautiful’ images?” (Wolf 2002: 18). What Wolf is asking here goes deeper than just appearance or what is on the outside; it suggests that female pop stars are expected to live up to these roles, but when they do, they are ostracized and attacked for it. In other words, female pop stars are simply being reduced to an object, a feminine, sexualized object, and all in relationship to men.

I firmly believe that the issues mentioned above are, obviously, not just about women. As mentioned before, they are issues about women in relation to men. If, in fact, these issues are not
about these female pop stars being women, (as some of participants stated), then why don’t male pop stars receive the same attention?

Male pop stars have not, in academic discourse and the popular media realm, come under as much scrutiny as women have. For instance, male pop stars are not going to dress in a “sexual” way like women do simply because it is not socially acceptable from a gendered standpoint. Also, men are not going to be dancing and singing in a sexual way, again, because this is not an acceptable way of portraying their gender. Male pop stars are subjected to their own cultural expectations just as women are. However, male pop stars in the Arab world help to perpetuate the sexualized female image just as much as female pop stars are claimed to do.

While male pop stars are usually seen as respectable men with nice voices, almost reminiscent of past singers, they are, in fact, helping to perpetuate the “sex sells” aspect of popular music. In order to examine men’s images in popular music I took a closer look at some of the most famous male pop stars in the Arab world today, and did a short analysis of their videos and how they portray women in these videos.

Amr Diab, Fares Karam and Tamer Hosny are three of the most famous male pop stars in the Middle East today. Almost every song they release is about love and searching for the right woman. However, through music video imagery, it is clear that these men help to perpetuate a sexualized image of women. For example, each video they release usually features one woman that is supposed to portray the desire of their affections. The videos closely highlight the physical aspects of the token woman. For example, in a music video by Fares Karam, “Dakheelo”, the clip begins by showing a woman walking towards the camera in a short dress. She bends down, flirting with the camera as if it is Fares Karam. An apparent breeze is blowing towards her that lifts up her skirt, exposing her thighs. Karam’s videos are often filled with sexual portrayals of
women such as this. For another song by Karam, “Alekaza”, the video begins by showcasing a woman walking away from the camera, but the camera is only focused on her derrière. The camera, for the first 20 seconds of the video, focusing only on the woman, showcases her legs, derrière, and her full body, exposing her as if she were an object to be ogled. Karam’s face is only seen for a few seconds in the beginning of the video, but the woman is always in front of him, being displayed for all to see.

These videos help to perpetuate the sexualized image of women, but they also help to perpetuate heteronormative attitudes. For instance, most male pop star’s videos feature a woman or women, who are usually dancing, cars, or doing sports, or all three! This is apparently the “formula” for making a successful video for male pop stars in the Arab world.

**Chapter Conclusion**

There are many issues surrounding female pop stars in the Arab world. They have come under much scrutiny for the way they dress, how they dance, their singing ability, and the music they sing. It seems that people’s issues with these singers originate from a conservative society reacting to widespread globalization and diverse influences from the outside world. The Islamic religion has a strong hold over Arab society, morals and the value systems that are in place. The conservative nature of Islam and the Arab-style practice of Islam have been the rationales for harsh criticisms against these female pop stars. Female *sha’bi* singers are also coming from a long line of highly respected and extremely talented musicians, such as Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, and there are pressures to conform to the wholesome, manufactured image of these women. And, most of these female performers are coming from Lebanon, perhaps the most liberal of the Arab countries. Finally, in disagreement with most of my interviewees, I find that
there are issues with pop stars simply because they are females and living in a world where they are constantly defined in relation to male sexuality and desire.
CHAPTER IV: ETHNOGRAPHY: ARAB DIASPORA OF BOWLING GREEN, OHIO

For this ethnography, my research did not focus around one specific musical group, but instead on the subjects and consumers of the music that I am studying. Therefore, actual music was not directly involved in this study; the focus instead was on talking about the social, political, religious and cultural issues surrounding the music. I wanted more insight into the lives of Arab music consumers, their opinions of *sha'bi* music, the female pop stars involved, and how these specific issues are results of globalization.

For this chapter, I first discuss my participants in this study: the group of people that I chose to participate, why I chose them, and how their answers affected my research and outcomes. Next, I describe the methodology that I used to devise questions and interview the participants. Here, I also discuss how my methodology helped with devising ideas for this thesis and also some of the issues that arose from it.

**Participants**

My fieldwork focused on the Arab diaspora of Bowling Green, Ohio. I concentrated mainly on participants of Lebanese origin, but broadened the spectrum by including participants from Palestinian, Egyptian and other Arab backgrounds. The reason that I expanded the list of participants was because, while many of the female pop stars come from Lebanon, their music reaches the majority of the population of the Arab world.

I decided, early on, that I was going to choose many of the Arab and Lebanese people that I had already come in contact with or knew on a personal basis. Some of them are my close friends and others are acquaintances that I have met during my time in Bowling Green, Ohio. To
begin, I chose ten participants, five male and five female. Because the issue of gender is one of the main subjects of this thesis, I wanted a balanced group of both males and females. However, after some issues with time on the part of some of the participants, my participants were dwindled to five males and one female. The issues with having an unbalanced group are addressed later in this chapter.

My original goal was to find participants that were born in the Arab world and had moved to the United States within the last five years. The five-year framework was devised for this study because I wanted participants to have been exposed, on a consistent basis, to popular music in the Arab world. I also knew that popular music has a high turnover rate and can change drastically in just months; therefore, I wanted participants who had come to the United States no longer than five years prior to this study. The six participants in this study were between the ages of 23 and 35. I had some issues with age group, class and gender for this study. I address those issues in the last section of this chapter.

The participants that were involved in this study were from various countries, but mostly from Lebanon. Abud, Sam, Georges, and Fady are all originally from Lebanon. Banan is from Palestine, and Lucy is first generation Lebanese-American. All participants, with the exception of Banan, are in their mid-20s. Banan is in his 30s.

**Methodology**

To conduct my ethnography, I combed through several different methodologies. I know all of my participants personally or through close friends and family. Therefore, it was relatively easy to get in touch with them and ask them if they were willing to be interviewed. After my participants consented to being interviewed, I set up a separate time for each participant to be
interviewed. I brought to each interview one set of questions that I had devised beforehand as talking points. After conducting the interviews, I sent each participant follow-up questions that were basically used to clarify issues that may have been ambiguous or to give interviewees opportunities to elaborate on parts of the conversations. My last goal was to send participants the Human Subjects Review Board Final Consent Form for their signature.

The questions that I asked were very specific because I wanted to center participants directly on the points that I am trying to demonstrate in this thesis. The questions were as follows:

- How did you come in contact with Umm Kulthum and Fairouz’s music?
- Do you like their music? How often, would you say, do you listen to it?
- What have you heard others say about their music?
- Do you actively listen to Middle Eastern and Arab popular music, like Amr Diab, Diana Haddad, Elissa, etc.?
- Have you heard of Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram?
- Do you listen to their music? Why or why not?
- What do you think of these singers, in your own opinion?
- In your opinion, what are some of the issues that people have with Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe and other popular performers that sing similar music? Could part of it have to do with them being women? Or is the music sending the wrong message to fans? Or could it be that people feel this way because they don’t like the music?
- Lebanon has been known throughout its history for adopting parts of Western culture and at times more freely than other Arab nations. Therefore, their history is a conglomeration of
traditional and new, Western and non-Western. After reading many comments by people on Haifa Wehbe’s and Nancy Ajram’s music videos, One fan commented, “This is extremely Westernized Lebanese culture, NOT real Arabic culture.” What do you think this person meant by “Arab culture.” What is Arab culture, in your own opinion? How are these videos/images portraying or not portraying Arab culture?

- Do you think that Umm Kulthum/Fairouz encompass(ed) Arab culture?
- In your opinion, do you think Arab youth (ages 13-30) are using Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe’s music as a way to define their generation and differentiate it from their parent’s generation? Why or why not?
- What type of music do you listen to? Are there specific types that you prefer over another, and if so, why?

The second set of questions, or the follow-up questions, were specific to each participant.

Sometimes I needed more clarification on the first questions and other times I needed participants to elaborate on their initial statements. For example, I asked Abud to elaborate on the compound question: In your opinion, what are some of the issues that people have with Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbe and other popular performers that sing similar music? Could part of it have to do with them being women? Or is the music sending the wrong message to fans? Or could it be that people feel this way because they don’t like the music?

**Abud**: “It’s okay if Haifa wants to be like this, but it’s when they choose to bring it into the public realm that it becomes an issue. Anything that is not part of the social norm in the Middle East will definitely get scrutinized. That is very prevalent in the Middle East because for so long there hasn’t been a whole lot of technology, not a whole lot of advancement, not a whole lot of empowerment of women, not a whole lot of democracy and really embracing the rights of human beings as the rest of the world embraced it. So what the rest of the world went through say hundreds of years ago basically the Middle
East is going through the same kind of process. And I think that probably right now, the confusion that they are feeling is from the diffusion of technology. Think about the diffusion of Western music and its integration in the Arab world alongside all these technologies. It’s not just the rich who can actually participate. It became available to everybody.”

Although Abud does not explicitly state that these pop stars being women are an issue, it is implicit in his statement. “Anything that is not part of the social norm in the Middle East will definitely get scrutinized” and the Middle East hasn’t seen “a whole lot of empowerment of women” are both implicit statements that basically highlight that the way female pop stars present themselves in the public realm so openly has become an issue. This is one point that Abud continued to come back to: that Middle Easterners have not been exposed to many of these things until much later than the Western world, that therefore they need time to adjust to these drastic changes, and that technology has played a large role in the pop music phenomenon.

Abud’s statement above and the follow-up statements from other participants helped me to develop my ideas for this thesis. When the interviews were finished, I realized that I agreed with most of the statements made by the participants. I used the answers that I agreed firmly with to support my arguments throughout this work. As for the statements that I did not agree with, I used them to find data to help me refute those statements.

Overall, I found the experience of interviewing participants to be rewarding because I had the opportunity to hear what other Lebanese and Arabs were saying about these issues. Also, their answers were helpful in aiding me to understand some of the problems and issues that are still faced in the Arab world today.

Problems and Issues
The first meetings with the participants for the ethnographic portion of my thesis brought up reoccurring issues that I have struggled with throughout my life, and these issues are now making their way into my life and research. My awareness of these issues began with a party that I attended with Russian and Lebanese international students in spring of 2010. When I was talking to a Lebanese man, Patrick, I told him that I was not all Lebanese, that I am also a quarter Italian as well. He proceeded to answer my statement by saying, and I’m paraphrasing, that I was not a true Lebanese because I have Italian blood as well. “What is truly Lebanese?,” I thought. “What does being Lebanese mean? What does being Arab mean?” These are questions that I have had to address with personal issues, such as the ones mentioned above, as well as in the research for this project. Because Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram have experienced so many backlashes from more conservative members of Lebanese society, they have been characterized as not truly encompassing Arab, Lebanese, or Muslim values, and as not truly being part of Arab culture. But, what is Arab culture? Is it defined and epitomized by Umm Kulthum and Fairouz during the Golden years of music in the Middle East? Or, are Arab morals and values encompassed in the mainstream music we are seeing today? Throughout my own personal struggle as well as the issues surrounding this research, I wish to engage these questions in my work. I need to address, for both my own sake and the sake of my research, why and how we choose to identify ourselves, how that identity affects how we see and treat others and ourselves, and eventually, how this worldview leads people to create boundaries and borders to define what is and is not and what belongs and does not, and this perspective brings us back to the age-old issue of insider and outsider, emic and etic, culture bearer or not.

Following my exchange with Patrick, I noticed this trend in questioning Arab identity once again when I began my fieldwork. When one of my participants introduced me to another
participant, he basically said: “This is Dana. Her father is Lebanese and her mother is half Lebanese and half Italian. Now, she does not speak Arabic very well, but as you can see, at least she looks Lebanese.” From his statement and Patrick’s, it was obvious that their ideas of identity are centered on language ability, genetics, and visual appearance. They did not ask me what sort of culture I grew up with, which happens to me very often when I converse with many Arabs. When I speak of the fact that I am Lebanese-American, most value is given to the fact that I do not speak Arabic fluently; the fact that I grew up with the same culturally significant aspects of Arab life that they did is ignored. Another aspect of my research that questions identity is the contention among my Lebanese participants that Lebanese people are not ethnically Arab, but rather Phoenician. This led me to wonder: Why do so many Lebanese people put so much emphasis on defining and separating their ethnicity from that of other Arabs? How is being “Lebanese/Phoenician” different from being “Arab” if the only qualifiers that make you a part of a culture come from language and visual appearance? Phoenicians and Arabs share the same language and usually resemble each other quite significantly, although not all the time.

One problem that I faced in conducting my ethnography is that most of my participants were men. I did not give much attention to this factor until after I had conducted the interviews. However, I feel that my research and ethnography would have benefited greatly if I had a more controlled group, perhaps consisting evenly of men and women. Also, the male participants of this study all came to the United States as students; therefore; most of them come from middle-class to upper-class families, and all are between the ages of 23-30. There was not much diversity between the male participants. Choosing participants from different classes and social standings may have made my results quite different.
The age range for my participants also proved a bit of a problem. In retrospect, the age range of 23-30 is quite high in regards to the people that usually listen to new forms of popular music. This theory was reaffirmed by my participants’ answers as to whether or not they listen to sha’bi music. Most of the participants answered that they only listen to this music at parties or dance clubs; they do not actively pursue listening to this music outside of others choosing it for them at music venues. If I had chosen participants in a younger age range I would most likely get distinctly different answers to the questions that I asked.
CONCLUSION

This thesis addressed *sha’bi* music and how it has become a phenomenon in the Arab world over the last several years. Specifically, this study examined the role that women have played in *sha’bi* and popular music and their standing in the Arab world.

I established four central ideas. The first of these concerns the lives and careers of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz as contrasted with Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe. The former two are intimidating; they sonically captured the Arab world as it was modernizing and gaining independence in the twentieth century. Umm Kulthum’s legacy as a singer, composer, and nationalist icon remains in the minds of Arabs today and she is still considered among many to be “the voice of Egypt.” For Fairouz, her fans identify her as the “ambassador to the stars” because of her dedication to the Lebanese nationalist movement. Through her music and support of Lebanese nationalism, Fairouz has become an icon in the eyes of many Arabs and Lebanese.

Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe, as contemporary pop stars on the music scene, where “the whole package” (images, dancing, websites, television, etc.) is required for women performers, have, in turn, paved the way for many other female pop stars in the Arab world. Their personas, particularly as displayed in music videos, appear to be the antitheses of Umm Kulthum’s and Fairouz’s images. They often sing more suggestive lyrics, wear more revealing clothing, show more flesh, interact directly with men in videos, and dance in a way that earlier female performers never could. These new elements have subjected Ajram and Wehbe to much scrutiny throughout their careers, particularly from older generations, Muslim clergy, and men. However, despite the criticism of their personas by segments of the Arab countries, these new pop stars have garnered quite a huge fan base in the Arab world and its diaspora today.
The second focus of this thesis includes the fan base for *sha’bi* music and the central question of why people like this music. Within this topic, many theories on popular music were applied to Arab popular music. Youth culture has been a major criterion to examine popular music. It is clear that the large youth demographic in the Arab world has helped to popularize *sha’bi* music, even when there is resistance to this music and to the female stars in many countries. The rise of technology and influences from mass media have played a huge role in popular music in the Arab world, providing a new level of dissemination throughout Arab countries and worldwide.

The third major idea presented concerns the role that both westernization and globalization have played in the growth of *sha’bi* music. Many Arabs consider popular music to be a product of the western world that has moved from a more local context to infiltrating around the globe. With westernization and influences from globalization, the Arab world has had to deal with new images and ideas of lifestyle, women, love, and so forth. And, these developments have stimulated reactions from religious and political conservatives, particularly in regard to female pop stars’ personas and bodies. Within this topic, it becomes clear that Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe have been subjected to criticism due to being compared to their foremothers, Umm Kulthum and Fairouz. The fact that these singers are women is a major reason why they are so scrutinized; their male counterparts are not subject to the same inspection in the public media. The image of *sha’bi* music and the demographic of its fans affect the attitudes of much of the public to these women.

The fourth main idea of this thesis falls into my ethnography and my interviews and interactions with Arab participants. The participants’ responses revealed their own positions in understanding *sha’bi* music and female performers, and pushed me to discover other ideas that
affect attitudes. I referred to feminist literature to understand the control over image and the unequal position of women in popular music and issues of sexuality.

Overall, this thesis has explored issues of women in Arab popular music that have sometimes been neglected. By combining historical perspective, feminist literature, popular culture literature, and ethnography, I conclude that women face scrutiny in Arab popular music today, both because of the legacies of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz and because of the backlash against modern and more global images of women as displayed by sha'bi music and female performers, particularly Nancy Ajram and Haifa Wehbe. Despite the criticism, these artists are major stars with large fan bases, and this discrepancy reveals the tensions between previous generations and people reluctant to embrace the modern world and the younger generation that is a fundamental part of this world.
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TO: Dana F. Acee  
Music

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.  
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11T211GE7

TITLE: *Westernization and Women in Lebanese Popular Music*

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of April 29, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on April 14, 2012. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 10 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:  
Stamped original consent form is coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. David Hamish

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
Hello, my name is Dana Acee and my advisor is Dr. David Harnish. I am a graduate student in Ethnomusicology at Bowling Green State University doing research for my thesis. My research topic is titled, "Westernization and Women in Lebanese Popular Music."

This research is important because it brings attention to the role that women have in popular music as well as contributes to scholarship on this subject. For individual participants, this study is important and beneficial because it will provide you with the opportunity to give your opinion on a subject matter that is often not asked about outside of the popular media realm. However, there are no direct benefits of participating, such as monetary awards or course credit.

For this study, I will be asking you your opinion on the following popular singers: Umm Kulthum, Fairouz, Nancy Ajram, and Haifa Wehbe. We will also be discussing Arab identity, Lebanese identity, and pan-Arab identity. Your answers to these questions are imperative to this study. By gathering your opinion and those of other participants and including them in my research, I wish to show some of the popular opinions surrounding these issues, as well as boldly address the issue of Arab identity. After the initial interview, I may contact you again for follow up questions. However, you will not be interviewed more than twice; again, only once for the original interview and possibly a second time for follow up questions. Participation in this study will take no longer than 1 hour of your time.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions (or not do a particular task) or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your (grades/class standing) or your relationship with (Bowling Green State University, your teacher, your school, your job or any institution involved in the research).

The data collected from interviews will be stored on my iPhone recording device, which is protected by a password and security system only accessible to me. I will then transfer the information to my computer, which is also password protected and security protected. I am the only person who will have direct access to this data and it will not be shared with anyone else. Your name and personal information will remain confidential.

There are virtually no risks associated with this study. I will be asking basic questions about Lebanese popular music to a group of informed subjects. There are little to no anticipated risks. However, I want to reiterate that you can leave the study at any time.

** Please see the reverse side of this page for contact information and to sign for consent
Please contact me by phone or email if you have questions pertaining to the research or your participation in the study: dacee@bgsu.edu; (585) 355-0663. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. David Harnish dharnis@bgsu.edu; (419)372-8487. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsr@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

________________________________________________________________________________

Participant Signature