

Some Meanings of the Spanish Tinge in Contemporary Egyptian music

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I. Introduction

Arab popular music from the mid 1990s onward strikingly displays the influence of Spanish and Latin music styles: the Spanish tinge. While these musical fusions are relatively straightforward (if varied) in execution, their meanings are more complex. Mere consideration of the Arabic adjectives associated with Spanish influence – *Latini*, *Andalusi*, *filimanku* (flamenco), *gharbi* (western), *bahrawsati* (Mediterranean), *'alami* (global) -- as well as the multiple categories into which Spanish-tinged songs are sorted – *shababi* (youth), *hadis* (modern), *bub* (pop) – suggest the dense tangle of meanings which Spanish-tinged Arabic music presents to Arab listeners.¹ The present study aims to begin the process of unraveling these meanings, as understood by Egyptians. It is neither my intention to document the Spanish tinge exhaustively, nor to explain it in “objective” historical terms. Rather, my aim is hermeneutic “ethnohistory”²: to interpret how Egyptians themselves interpret the Spanish tinge as a historical trend; how they relate it to their past, explain its salience in the present, and assess what it means for the future. It is the production of historical knowledge, rather than reconstruction of history itself, which is the point of the study: to understand how people organize their own experience of music history. This chapter thus stands in the ethnographic more than the historiographic tradition. It constitutes a “second order” interpretation, the usual epistemological condition for cultural anthropology (Geertz 1973:15), not history.

This task is triply valuable, for: (1) illuminating ongoing cultural processes by which Egyptians construct coherent patterns of historical self-representation, processes which carry additional significance as co-generators of future history; (2) producing subjective evidence, via Egyptians’ reflection upon their own lived experiences through history, interpretable as a means of accessing that history; (3) illuminating objective history directly, insofar as Egyptians are (being close to it) well-poised to comprehend it (without denying or forgetting that another kind of more “etic” history, while not performed here, is also crucial).

Despite the theoretical value of (2) and (3), I cautiously do not submit this research as a piece of historical work, but rather as ethnohistorical only. But the new Spanish tinge turned out to be such a rich symbol that in attempting to explain and interpret it, Egyptians automatically revealed more general attitudes about culture and cultural change in contemporary Egypt. Thus in the final analysis, investigation of “the Spanish tinge” is perhaps most useful as a kind of Rorschach test, a catalyst for the articulation of diverse cultural thinking active in Egypt today.

¹ In this chapter, transliteration of classical Arabic is based on spelling, while transliteration of spoken colloquial Arabic is based on pronunciation of isolated words (disregarding elisions). Arabic words or names common in English are presented in their usual English forms.

² Throughout this chapter, I use “ethnohistory” in the sense of ethnomethodology, to mean “the study of the local construction of history” (analogous “ethnobotany”).

II. The scope of the Spanish tinge in Arab music today

Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton coined the phrase “Spanish Tinge” to refer to Latin influence in jazz (Williams 1970:28). Yet Spanish influence (broadly conceived to include Latin musics) has been strong worldwide, from the early 20th century onwards, and has lately surged into the mainstream due to new fusions, and the powerful engine of the American music industry. In 1975 a “Best Latin Recording” category was added to the Grammy awards; their “Best World Music album” award (established 1991) has gone to Latin artists in five of the previous 10 years (Grammy awards 2002). Latin megastars with broad appeal, such as Ricky Martin, Carlos Santana, and Shakira, have recently been dominating mainstream pop music charts, while successive albums by the Gipsy Kings (from southern France but drawing on flamenco and Latin traditions (See Gipsy Kings 2002) have ranked high on Billboard’s world music chart since its inception in 1990 (Taylor 1997:5,209ff).³ All this has been marketed worldwide as Spanish/Latin culture, but also stands as “American”, “Western”, or “modern” culture (due to centers of production and popularity, mainstream industry status, and fusions: Latin-rock, Latin-pop, Latin-jazz), “global” culture (due to scope, “non-western” origins, and syncretisms), and as a symbol of globalization itself. Within Arab culture, the Spanish tinge also carries particular cultural and historical meanings, via medieval Andalusia, the Mediterranean, Europe, North America, Latin America, each of which is susceptible to multiple interpretations and valences.

Two factors, then, motivate this study. One is the striking rise of Spanish and Latin styles in Arab popular music over the last ten years. The other is the dense layering of its potential meanings within Arab culture, as linked to the broader significances attached to geographical regions, historical periods, and cultural processes. The Spanish tinge in Arab pop presents a rich symbolic lode for anthropological investigation.

The Spanish tinge in Egyptian pop music occurs primarily in the domain of “al-musiqa al-shababiyya” (youth music, already a fusion of older Arab music with western rock and pop). Spanish influence includes instrumental, timbral, melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, textural, and occasionally linguistic resources. Most often, influence is manifested in acoustic guitar styles, both rhythmic and melodic (often an ersatz ‘flamenco’); in Latin grooves and percussion; or in distinctive harmonic progressions. Within a song, Spanish influence may appear vertically, in short segments: introductions, instrumental interludes, or fills (lawazim) separating vocal phrases. At the level of album, influence is likewise vertical, since in the typically only one or two (out of 8 – 12) songs contain Spanish influence (though these are often the most popular). Or influence may appear horizontally, as one sonic layer within a shababiyya texture including also Arabic, Western rock/pop, and perhaps other styles as well. Occasionally the Spanish style constitutes the primary matrix for an entire song.

A. Amr Diab

Amr Diab⁴ is the most popular music star in Egypt today, and among the three or four most consistently popular singers in the Arab world, from the 1990s to the present. Diab has consistently

³ Another example is the 2001 World Music Awards, in which Ricky Martin is simultaneously awarded Best Selling Pop Male Artist, Best Selling Dance Male Artist, and Best Selling Latin Male Artist (World Music Awards 2002). And the examples could be multiplied: Christina Aguilera, Jennifer Lopez, Gloria Estafan, and the stunning success of *Buena Vista Social Club* (1997).

⁴ This spelling has become standard in English; a more standard transliteration would be “Amr Diyab”.

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innovated since his first album in 1986; his great fame and financial success ensures that his artistic decisions reach a vast audience, and spawn many imitators. Since the mid-1990s, Diab's output has increasingly displayed Spanish influence. His broad influence in defining contemporary Arab pop motivated me to place him at the center of my ethnographic inquiry. A brief examination of his life, representing a microcosm of most of the trends to be discussed, is thus apropos.⁵

Diab was born in 1961, to a middle class family in Port Said. For Egyptians, this city carries considerable symbolic importance for modernity, nationalism, and westernization, and Diab's modern image owes something to his birthplace. Located where the Suez Canal meets the Mediterranean, Port Said was founded in 1859 as the canal's Mediterranean port. Young by Egyptian standards, cosmopolitan, industrialized, Port Said was devastated by three wars (1956, 1967, 1973), but always returned to supply a wide range of goods, local and imported; after 1973 Port Said was declared a free-trade zone to encourage investments (Hamed 1981:3). Inclining towards music at an early age, he received encouragement from his family to pursue a career in music, studying at the music faculty of the Cairo Academy of Art in the mid 1980s. His first album *Ya Tariq* (1986) soon followed, and was an instant success. Since then he has released sixteen albums, and garnered many awards in recent years for best-selling Arab artist.

Beyond birthplace and talent, Diab's social and generational positions were instrumental in catapulting him to the vanguard of Egyptian pop. His career has coincided with rapidly increasing media sophistication of Arab pop styles; Diab was the first Egyptian singer to make extensive use of the *fidiyuklib* ("videoclip", or music video), starting around 1990, and video broadcasts (especially to Arab communities abroad) have contributed greatly to his fame. His adoption of new western fashions in clothes and hairstyle contributes to his au courant image, setting standards for millions of Egyptian youth, as well as establishing him as source (hence symbol) of Western cool. His budding film career has further disseminated his image and music.

Gradually his career has become more international. Besides touring abroad, his use of foreign musical styles has garnered international acclaim, and his fan base has increasingly extended outside the Arab world; this fact in turn reflects and necessitates continued deployment of those styles. Indeed, the most striking feature of his 1990s output is the increasing diversification of music styles, especially Spanish and Latin. Some Arabs began to refer to his as the "Mediterranean sound". His internationally acclaimed "Nur al-'Ayn" (1996), became popular in European discos, often remixed with dance grooves. Subsequently, Diab received a World Music Award (Monaco, 1998) for best global sales (in the newly established Middle Eastern category), alongside Mariah Carey, Puff Daddy, and the Backstreet Boys; the program (hosted by Gloria Estafan among others) was broadcast to 130 countries worldwide (though non-Western musics were evidently omitted in the American version) (Dezzani 1998). Diab reportedly stated that he considers this award as a first step towards popularizing Egyptian music internationally (Egypt guide 2002). At the ceremony his performance of the title track, cast in a flamenco/Gipsy Kings mold, was broadcast to an international audience. Subsequently his music, often remixed in various grooves, became popular in European discos. All this enhanced his image at home, too, even among those who do not ordinarily listen to (or even approve of) his music, for Diab's international recognition (as for Egyptian Nobel laureates Naguib Mahfuz (1988) and Ahmed H.

⁵ The following information has been culled from information duplicated among fan websites (See Amr Diab 2002).

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Zewail (1999), whose works most Egyptians do not read) constitutes an important source of cultural pride and confirmation.

Though Spanish influence is most salient, Diab has experimented with other musical hybrids as well, including Turkish, North African, Greek, electronica, and hip-hop sounds. On his 1999 album *Qamarayn* he collaborated with Khaled, the star of French-Algerian Rai, and the Greek pop diva Angela Dimitriou (also famous in Turkey). “Wala ‘ala baluh” (from *Aktar Wahid*, 2001) features a mix of classical Arab melody with techno and rap. A complex of features—Spanish, Arab, Western, Mediterranean, global—is thus evident in his life history and work.

B. The Spanish tinge: Amr Diab, Egypt, and beyond

What is the evidence for the Spanish tinge in Egypt? As principal trendsetter, a review of Diab’s 1990s output (also foregrounded in my ethnographic investigation) is instructive; a few other examples can be mentioned to show that Diab is by no means alone. “Leeli” (from the album *Shawa’na*, 1990) imitates “Lambada”. “Eeh bass illi ramaak” (*Habibi*, 1992) opens with Spanish-style acoustic guitar, which returns for fills. On *Ayamna* (1993), “Hawak hayyarni” begins with conga sounds, and “Taba‘ el Hayah” features a Latin groove, plus Spanish guitar and Brazilian pop harmonies. However it is on *Wi yilumuni* (1995) that flamenco sounds appear in force, in “Ahlif bi il-layali” and “Wi yilumuni”. *Ragi’in* (1996) features a Latin groove on “Balash tikallimha”. The title track on *Nur al-‘Ayn* (1996) presents the clearest example yet of a Spanish-flamenco groove, instrumentation, and harmonic progression, displacing the usual Arab pop matrix. *‘Awwiduni* (1998) features a Latin/flamenco groove and progression on “Kull il-kalam” and “Wi ghalawtik”, while “Milk Ideek” highlights Spanish guitar filigree. On *Amareen* (1999) the Latin/flamenco sound appears in the title track. *Tamalli Ma‘ak* (2000) contains the Latin-based “Albi ikhtarak” (often compared to Santana’s 1999 “Smooth”), and four songs infused with flamenco styles: “il-‘Alam Allah”, “Sinin”, “Wi hiyya ‘amla eeh”, and “Tamalli ma‘ak”. Finally his latest album (*Aktar Wahid*, 2001) contains no fewer than seven (out of ten) songs displaying deep Latin or flamenco influences, including the title track; by now one feels that for Diab the Spanish tinge has moved beyond color (loon) or novelty, to become incorporated in his musical language and identity.

However the Spanish Tinge runs broader than Diab alone. Indeed, in the late 1990s most of Egypt’s most popular contemporary singers deploy the Spanish Tinge at least occasionally: Angham in “Habbeetak leeh” (Latin); Hakim in the introduction to his “Isma‘ ya illi” (2000); Hisham ‘Abbas in “Sami‘ albi” (2000) and “Inti il-wahida” (1999), among many; Ihab Tawfiq in “La khatar”, “Mushta”, and “Amar il-layali” (1999). Mustafa Qamar deploys a rich Spanish texture in “Ayshin” (2000) (including a flamenco singer) and “‘Ayneek wahshani” (1999), and a Latin groove in “Tal il-leel” (1997). In 1997 Qatar’s MusicBox International marketed a very popular cassette entitled *Arabica Latina*, featuring Spanish Gypsy/Flamenco and Latin music with Spanish and Arabic words, through a production company in Cairo. The Gipsy Kings themselves have concertized in Egypt since the mid 1980s; today they are well known, performing on television and for weddings.

Furthermore, the Spanish tinge in Arabic music affects more than Egypt. Latin influences are hot in Lebanon, as evidenced by productions of top stars such as Nawal al-Zughbi (particularly in “Tul Umri”, 2001), or Julia Boutros (*Bisaraha*, 2001), or Raghieb Allama, and many others. From Iraq, Ilham al-Madfa‘i (e.g. *Ilham Al Madfai*, 1999) deploys Latin-flamenco textures. Within the wider sphere of Arab-Spanish fusions, Egypt represents an important case study, in view of the continued centrality of the Egyptian music industry to the Arab world as a whole.

III. Historical sources for musical ethnohistory

What is the source of this Spanish tinge in 1990s Egyptian pop? The trajectories of musical culture are never easy to locate, not only because of the mass of musical data to be examined, or the difficulty in reconstructing the musical past, but because of the difficulty in assessing which phenomena are to be connected as historically continuous. But in this section I do not aim to analyze the objective sources of the contemporary Spanish tinge in Egyptian pop, much less to trace a continuous history from those origins to present. Rather I want to illuminate three historical periods which figure heavily in Egyptian interpretations of their own musical history.

A. Andalusia as historical past, and contemporary symbol

From North Africa, Muslim armies loyal to the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus took the Iberian Peninsula in 711-13, defeating the weak Spanish Visigoth Kingdom, and establishing the Muslim Iberian domain of al-Andalus. After the Umayyads fell to the Abbasids in 750, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya (one of the former) escaped to al-Andalus where he managed to unify a fractious polity, and establish the Umayyad Marwanid dynasty of Cordoba (756-912). Various Muslim dynasties followed, most notably the Berber Almoravids (1056-1147) and Almohades (1130-1296). Following centuries of conflict with forces of the Spanish Reconquista, the last Muslim kingdom (Granada) fell in 1492. By this time most Muslims and Jews had emigrated to North Africa; those who remained converted to Christianity (Moriscos) but were expelled (mainly to North Africa) from 1609 to 1614. (Levi-Provencal 1999b; Levi-Provencal 1999a; Wiegers 1999; Goldziher and Desomogyi 1966:130)

The brilliant flowering of Arabo-Islamic Andalusian culture was catalyzed by rulers, who patronized the arts and learning, and funded such architectural marvels as the Alhambra. In the late 10th century, al-Hakam II founded a great library at Cordoba containing 400,000 volumes, facilitating high achievements in philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, art and architecture, literature, and music (Goldziher and Desomogyi 1966:131-132). Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Nafi', better known as Ziryab, was a student of Ishaq al-Mawsili, court musician to Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809). Ziryab captured Harun's fancy, thereby arousing al-Mawsili's jealousy; the latter forced him to flee. Thus did Ziryab arrive at the Andalusian court of 'Abd al-Rahman II (r. 822-852), where he soon eclipsed all other musicians of al-Andalus, developing new musical forms, and establishing an influential Music School at Cordoba (Farmer 1973:128-130; Touma 1996:11,68-69). Andalusian culture developed two popular new poetic forms, thus breaking the dominance the *qasida* had formerly enjoyed: (1) the classical *muwashshah*; (2) the colloquial *zajal*. Their stanzaic forms rendered these more suitable for music than the *qasida*'s distiches (Goldziher and Desomogyi 1966:135), and they continue to be used throughout the contemporary Arab world (al-Faruqi 1975).

The cultural efflorescence of Andalusia, situated at the interface between Islamic and Christian worlds, directly influenced the latter. Works by Andalusian scholars (such as philosopher Ibn Rushd, aka Averroës, d. 1198) were translated to Latin, and distributed throughout Christian Europe (Lapidus 1988:383-384). There is also much evidence for musical influence; thus the European lute stems morphologically and etymologically from the Arabic one (*al-'ud*); 'guitar' comes from Arabic '*qitar*', and Arab song appears to have influenced songs of medieval European minstrelsie (Farmer 1970:4; Goldziher and Desomogyi 1966:135). Though its extent has been debated, the putative facticity of this influence is key to constructions of musical history among contemporary Arabs.

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In North Africa, the classical forms of *al-musiqa al-andalusiyya* (*nawba* or *ala* in Morocco, *san'a* in Algiers, and *ma'luf* in Tunis) are valorized (by dominant ideology) as the very musical forms of Andalusian courts (and transferred by emigrants), whose contemporary stylistic differences result only from synchronic differences among various Andalusian court traditions (such as Seville, Cordoba, and Granada) (Touma 1996:70). Though this myth is sustained by anonymous ascription of musical pieces, and the symbolic value of Andalusia, musical and historical analysis suggests that Andalusian repertoires in different parts of North Africa developed quasi-independently, due to vagaries of oral tradition and contrasting regional histories. (Davis 1996a:423-4; Davis 1996b:316).

Likewise, Egyptians and Levantines associate the muwashshah (*qua* musical genre) with Andalusia (“al-muwashshah al-andalusiyya”), though evidence suggesting a continuous musical linkage to Andalusia is even weaker than for North African music, and there is plenty of evidence suggesting discontinuities, including differences in poetic meter, and innovations by well-known composers of Syria and Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as the Syrian ‘Umar Batsh (1885-1950), and the Egyptian Sayyid Darwish (1892-1923) (Touma 1996:83-84).

Five widely-cited attributes render Andalusia a potent and affective symbol in the modern Egyptian imagination: (1) Muslim military victories over Christian Europe; (2) enlightened rulers; state patronage of arts and sciences; tolerance of religious diversity; and intellectual freedom; (3) consequently: the flowering of scholarly and artistic achievements; (4) the influence of Andalusian culture in kindling the European renaissance; (5) the romantic (almost Edenic) tragedy of loss and exile, a metaphor for all lost “golden ages” and utopias.

These features combine to project Andalusia as asserting the greatness of the Arabs, inverting the contemporary power relations between the Arabs and the west, constituting proof that Western modernity is indebted to the Arabs, and suggesting that greatness is again possible. At the same time, Andalusia invokes powerful feelings of nostalgia.

While Andalusia has served as a potent literary symbol for centuries (Aboul-Ela 1999), it loomed particularly large in the ideological period of Arab nationalisms, from the 1950s onward. Andalusia resonates at many levels in literature of this period. Poems alluded to Andalusia as a symbol of lost beauty and hope (e.g. Nizar Qabbani, who saw “...in the fading glories of Alhambra the possibilities for a rebirth of the Islamic nation and Arab aesthetics” (Woffenden and Mitwalli 1998)), or exile (in poetry of Mahmoud Darwish); Yusuf Chahine’s 1998 film *al-Masir* uses the decline of Andalusia as a means to critique contemporary Egyptian anti-liberalism.

B. “Egypt’s liberal experiment, 1922-1936” and the Spanish tinge

In the 19th c, urban Egyptian musical life centered upon varied folk and religious genres, and the more musically elaborate entertainments of popular singers with *takht* (Arab chamber ensemble) and choral accompaniment, incorporating much Ottoman influence. The latter, epitomized by stars such as ‘Abdu al-Hamuli, Muhammad ‘Uthman, and Yusuf Manyalawi, and patronized by elites, was associated with the ineffable aesthetic quality called tarab, “musical ecstasy” (Racy 1985). Performatively, the tarab style features impeccable intonation, proper treatment of the melodic modes (*maqamat*), improvisation and variation, unison or heterophonic textures, stately tempos, slow solo expressive singing, concentrated listening, and emotional feedback from audience to performer (See Racy 1991).

Alongside such “traditional” music were musical styles introduced from western Europe following the Napoleonic campaign of 1798, and supported by the determination of Muhammad ‘Ali (r. 1805-1848)

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and his descendents to modernize the country along European lines. The late 19th century saw the first stirrings of Egyptian nationalism (Vatikiotis 1969:136ff; Holt 1966:211ff). Paradoxically, though turned against British oppression, such stirrings were inspired by European enlightenment ideals. Culturally, politically, and technically Europe presented the highest model for many educated Egyptians, the very definition and source of modernity. (See Hourani 1983) Broad admiration for European culture produced many attempts to emulate it. In music, these included European-style military bands, Italian opera, French-inspired theater, and Western instruments (especially violin, piano, and accordion) (Racy 1985).

The pace of change accelerated rapidly in the early 20th century, with a larger, more educated populace; urbanization; development of technical infrastructure (Hourani 1991:333ff); and the corresponding rise of commercial media mass-markets, especially phonograms (from 1904), radio (from the 1920s), and musical film (1930s) (Racy 1978; Castelo-Branco 1987:32-35). Pressured by change, the elaborate 19th c musical genres swiftly declined in the 1920s (Racy 1988:139). Flexible musical forms, improvisation, and small chamber ensembles gave way to more fixed arrangements, and larger orchestras. But the core aesthetic of tarab continued to dominate urban Egyptian music until the 1970s as what Racy calls the “neutral canvas” upon which all innovations were painted as “colors” (*alwan*) in the central domain of music in Cairo (Racy 1982:391-397).

Forces of nationalism sprang forth violently as the Revolution of 1919 (Sayyid-Marsot 1977:4), and Britain bestowed a nominal independence in 1922; thereafter the khedive became king, and a multiparty constitutional parliamentary democracy was installed featuring some measure of liberal political values until 1952 (but especially before 1936, when the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed) (Sayyid-Marsot 1977). The privileged status of Europeans, the presence of large Mediterranean expatriate community, and French-speaking Egyptian elites ensured a cosmopolitan diversity and openness to foreign influences, at least in Alexandria and Cairo. Political, social, and economic modernization proceeded rapidly to “push Egypt squarely into the modern age” (Sayyid-Marsot 1977:6). Political liberalization, combined with continued de facto British control, European economic dominance, a broad Egyptian acknowledgement of European cultural superiority, and the commercial forces of new entertainment media and industries, all encouraged incorporation of European musical styles into Arab music. But foreign influence was more free-wheeling prior to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, after which foreigners were forced out, and Egyptian nationalism turned from European enlightenment ideals to the more rigid hegemonic forms of a military regime, including a purposive “cultural policy” (el-Shawan 1979:113-115).

Composer and singer Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1897?-1991), whose artistic personality crystallized in the atmosphere of early nationalism, modernization, the monarchy, and Europe (including travels under the tutelage of his poet-mentor Ahmad Shawqi (Danielson 1997:171; Armbrust 1996:72)), was a famous exponent of European modernism within an “eastern” matrix (Armbrust 1996:63-93). He once stated that “...most of our traditions now follow western lines, which has taken control of our life and the form of our social and artistic activities. There is no harm in this. Foreign influence, adapting to the world renaissance, is necessary for evolution. We must bring western instruments into Eastern music...and new melodies...but also hold to our eastern spirit.” But music, he said, should be a true eastern creation, even if it appears in western garb (al-Hifni 1999:54-55).

John Storm Roberts’ *The Latin Tinge* recounts the spread of Latin musics to North America (where new fusions and hybrids emerged) and around the globe. The motive force was the unique relation

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between US market power, media, capital, and attraction for “exotic” musical forms just south of the border. Fads were triggered through commercial entertainment mass media. Thus a craze for Argentine tango (deriving from Spanish gypsy music via Cuba) swept the US following the success of a 1913 musical show, *The Sunshine Girl*, featuring dancers Vernon and Irene Castle (Roberts 1979:15,44). Interest in Latin music affected Tin Pan Alley songs in the 1920s, which were disseminated widely (Roberts 1979:50). In 1931 Don Azpiazu’s hit “The Peanut Vendor” ushered in a new craze for the (Americanized) Cuban rumba (Roberts 1979:76). In the 1940s Latin musicians received more publicity; new forms such as mambo and Latin jazz emerged (Roberts 1979:100). Primarily driven by the engine of the American music industry, the popularity of Latin music soon became international (Roberts 1979:212ff).

Despite stylistic differences between tarab and Latin musics (especially the latter’s use of functional harmony), early 20th c Egypt was remarkably susceptible to this trend. ‘Abd al-Wahhab frequently deployed Spanish influences in the 1930s, when the Latin Tinge was so potent in Europe and North America: Spanish castanets in “Fi il-leel lamma khala”; Argentine tango in “Marreet ‘ala beet il-habayib”, and “Sahrat minnu al-layali” (al-Hifni 1999:53). In the 1950s he composed “Ahibbak wa inta fakirni” (harmonized tango); and a rumba groove in “Khi khi”. Such songs were extremely popular. Yet, true to his words, ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s music is founded on an “eastern” tarab base, the “neutral canvas” upon which various colors, from Latin to Beethoven to tango, are layered, often obscuring but never permanently negating the tarab aesthetic (Racy 1982).

But while introduction of tango and other musical material was certainly innovative, the Western identity (as they were often heard) of such “borrowings” could also be ideologically critiqued, even as their meanings are subject to debate among Egyptians today. Along with many Arabs, ‘Abd al-Wahhab believed that the West is indebted to the East. No doubt reacting to criticism, he stated that his western borrowings are “...nothing more than the Oriental art of our ancestors, which had originally made its way into the western consciousness...being returned to us” (Okasha 2000). Here is a prefiguring of the Andalusian argument, elaborated below, which continues to strongly color Arab borrowings of Spanish and Latin musics today.

Similarly, Farid al-Atrash (1910?-1974), a Syrian Druze who lived most of his life in Cairo, innovated on the tarab tradition, without abandoning it. Farid was especially famous for his brilliant solo ‘ud improvisations (*taqasim*); a style featuring flamenco melodies, harmonies, and rhythmic techniques was widely esteemed and imitated (Zuhur 2001:271). Like ‘Abd al-Wahhab, Farid used Latin music in a number of precomposed songs, including orchestrated tangos such as “Ya zahra fi khayyal” (replete with Latin harmonizations and accordion, from his 1947 film, *Habib al-‘Umr*), and “Ana wa illi bahibbu” (from his 1950 film, *Akhir kidba*).

The lag between the western tango craze of the 1920s, and its appearance in Egyptian songs from the 1930s-50s, foreshadows a pattern, and contemporary criticism of Egyptian musical borrowings: that they constitute delayed reactions to world trends, inferior imitations, rather than innovations, indicative of cultural dependency and lack of self-confidence.

Despite the various overlays, the tarab style continued to flourish into the 1970s. But by then new changes were underway.

C. The roots of the contemporary pop explosion: 1970s to early 1980s

Following the Egyptian revolution of 1952, the development of Arab socialist nationalism by a popular and charismatic president helped restore Egyptian self-esteem. For the first time since antiquity Egypt was boldly independent, a self-directed leader among the new Arab nations. The state strictly controlled the national economy; large businesses were nationalized, and most foreigners left. 'Abd al-Nasir's ideology, while it certainly did not preclude foreign cultural influence, discouraged imports, and encouraged artistic self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and export. Already geographically and demographically central to the Arab world, under his leadership Egypt became the ideological, political, and cultural center as well. Governmental support and monopolization of the media (radio, TV, film, and phonograms), and special attention to particular singers, such as Umm Kulthum and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, established Egypt's musical influence throughout the Arab world (Hourani 1991:340, 393); Umm Kulthum's musical dominance is nearly a metaphor of state control: the Voice of Egypt (Danielson 1997). But by the mid 1960s, the system was faltering. Nasserism, as it came to be called, became inefficient and corrupt, and dreams of modern development, justice, and power were continually deferred (Aulas 1982:7). Some of the hypocrisies of the system were revealed by Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, and with the death of 'Abd al-Nasir in 1970 his eponymous ideology was fatally shaken too.

After the 1973 war, Nasir's successor Anwar Sadat took a new tack with his "open door" policy (*infitah*), laissez-faire economics opening the economy to foreign investment and imports, and establishing free trade zones in Port Said and elsewhere, in the hopes of attracting foreign capital so that Egypt could follow in the footsteps of model nations such as Brazil (the Latin American model) and South Korea (Aulas 1982:7-8). Culturally the *infitah* was a move towards the West, and away from the Soviets with whom Nasir had been close.

But the result was economic chaos and social upheaval, as Egypt's statist economy was rapidly integrated into the world market (Aulas 1982:8). New economic opportunities (legal and illegal) beckoned from every direction (including commercial music ventures), and a nouveau riche of entrepreneurs emerged with new musical tastes. Those tastes would become increasingly important as the private sector music industry developed its sophistication to target lucrative markets. But inflation was rampant, while government wages were nearly fixed. Many rural areas were impoverished, and the cities swelled with rural immigrants, providing ever-greater markets for the new entrepreneurs. A rift between rich and poor opened. At the same time, the developing Gulf states were becoming rich with oil, and needed labor (Aulas 1982:14-15). During the 1970s and 80s, Egyptians worked abroad, sending home remittances and returning with new gadgets, now also available in Egypt's newly expanded import market. Most relevant to the current discussion was the widespread purchase of tape players, and television sets, which hastened musical commodification, and broadened markets. Though the *infitah* failed to attract much foreign capital, it did expand the internal market for imports (Aulas 1982:11,15). That market demanded capital equipment and media to fuel the cassette music revolution. Cassette blanks, recorders, and duplication equipment, cheaper than their phonodisc predecessors, became available. Musicians could more easily import musical equipment, such as amplifiers and foreign-made instruments.

Suddenly it was more feasible for small businesses to produce recordings in private studios. The government could not easily regulate production, and the new culture of *infitah* was well disposed to

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entrepreneurial ventures. Decentralized production meant development of many more market niches: rather than a dominant 'central domain' (Racy 1982:391-392), multiple competing domains emerged, reflecting the newly competitive private sector (Castelo-Branco 1987).

But the *infatih* was also a cultural reorientation towards the West. Under Nasir, Egyptian radio broadcast a daily program of western music called "al-Shari' al-Gharbi" (the Western Street). The Sadat years greatly increased direct Western media exposure. Two popular television programs, "Ikhtarna lak" (we chose for you) and "al-'Alam yughanni" (the world sings) brought western programming to all Egyptians with access to TV (and the percentage was rapidly increasing), including the West's culture of musical style, performance, and reception. Spanish flamenco, and Julio Iglesias, were popular on these programs. Cassettes of western popular stars, original or bootleg copies, became widely available.

The import of Western tastes and cultural products dovetailed with the import of Western modes of production and economic organization. Western popular music became more available, and more desirable. The largest market was the young generation, maturing under *infatih*, for whom the old tarab style was too heavy and old-fashioned. They longed for something new: shorter, faster songs, with more Western content.

Cultural influence was not only from the West, however. The rise of petro-dollars, combined with an increasing migrant worker population, increased influence from the east. Singers began to direct songs to rich Gulf (*khaligi*) Arabs summering in Cairo, or via media. Egyptian workers returned with a taste for *khaligi* musical styles. Islamism, inspired by Saudi and local preachers (and supported by Sadat for political ends), expanded rapidly in the 1980s, spearheading a new feeling of anti-Westernism.

Singers such as Warda, Nagat, and Hani Shakir continued the tarab tradition, as represented by Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz (though significantly all three passed away in the mid 1970s, and 'Abd al-Wahhab was no longer very active). Each of the younger tarab generation strove to be the *khalifa* (successor) of the predecessors, though none succeeded in revitalizing the tarab tradition. Correspondingly, the tarab style, until then the primary matrix for urban music, began to lose its status as the 'neutral canvas' of a 'central domain'.⁶ Instead two new (not entirely separable) types arose, rejecting that canvas: *musiqā sha'biyya*, and *musiqā shababiyya*. Both inhibited tarab via short fast songs, simple melodies, and a dance-like ethos. (See also Danielson 1996:301)

Musiqā sha'biyya ("popular" music) is based in rural song, combined with urban lower class dance music, and some western instrumentation (including synthesizers). This style is the musical response to rapid ruralization of the cities: lowbrow, appealing to inhabitants of popular districts. Performers such as Ahmad 'Adawiyya, Hasan al-Asmar, and 'Abdu al-Iskandarani updated older traditions of *mawwal* and *zagal* (genres of folk song), and risqué wedding songs, by modernizing the instrumentation and addressing urban life without losing a folk feel, full of improvisation and flexible interaction. Suggestive lyrics earned this material the moniker "aghani habta" (low songs) (Armbrust 1996:180-190; Danielson 1996:307).

Musiqā shababiyya (youth music) fused western popular music styles and instruments with Arab characteristics. This new "bub" (pop) music (sometimes mislabeled "jil" in the West (Werner 2000), a

⁶ Composer Hani Shanuda criticized 'Abd al-Wahhab for never really rejecting Ottoman tarab, despite his innovations (Armbrust 1996:187).

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term Egyptians generally do not use) retains Arabic language, lyrical meanings, and elements of the tarab vocal style, thus addressing local aesthetic preferences. Arab percussion is typically retained as well. As one of my respondents put it, despite evident Westernization, there is a “Eastern spirit” in this music. But this spirit blends with the grooves of western popular musics (rock, jazz, funk, or disco), featuring trapset, keyboards, bass, and guitar, and often employs melodic and functional harmony as well. Composers and arrangers are central; performances are often multitracked; there is consequently less room for vocal interpretation or interactions. Unlike the tarab tradition, the music’s social identity sometimes centers on the band rather than the singer. Shababi music is directed at educated middle-upper classes who appreciate western styles, though it can be popular at many levels.

Out of these swirls of mixing cultures, several key musicians, bands, and styles emerged in shababi music. Hani Shanuda popularized the org (Arabic synthesizer)⁷; the first generation of Arab-Western bands included the Blackcoats, and the Petit Chats (with Hani Shanuda on keyboard) in the early 1970s. In 1977, Hani Shanuda’s band, al-Masriyyin, became famous, paving the way for many of today’s shababi stars (Ghazaleh 2001; Armbrust 1996:186); Another popular 1970s group was the Jets, blending western rock with Arabic lyrics and sensibilities.

Samir al-Iskandarani combined harmonic disco grooves with Arabic percussion and classical muwashshahat in his 1978 album *Layali Disco*. Around the same time, Muhammad Nuh combined disco with popular Sufi music. Muhammad Munir’s upbeat blends of Nubian, Egyptian, and western popular music were very popular, though media recognition was slow. Working with Hani Shanuda, he startled Egypt in the late 1970s with *Binitwilid*, featuring rock guitar, keyboards, trapset and harmony on an Arab groove, with a non-traditional philosophical text by ‘Abd al-Rahim Mansur. Jazzy and inimitable, Munir was one of the first Egyptian singers blending Arab and European styles to achieve popular acclaim in Europe (he recorded with German rock bands Embryo and Logic Animal (Swedenburg 1997:95; Gehr 1997:33)).

Their post-colonial relationships made popular music cultural connections to Europe much stronger in North Africa than in Egypt. Two Libyans were central in the development of modern Egyptian pop. One is Nasir al-Mizdawi, whose songs feature Arabic lyrics and vocal style on a sophisticated pop-jazz base. al-Mizdawi’s first tape became extremely popular in Egypt in the mid 1970s, influencing Egyptian musicians. The other is Hamid al-Sha’iri, who came to Egypt in the 1970s. Building upon al-Mizdawi’s name and Libyan-European aesthetics, al-Sha’iri popularized the fast upbeat song in the mid 1980s.

Many of the innovators of shababi music continue to be active, though the field is much more densely populated today. al-Mizdawi has continued to influence Egyptian musicians, having composed many songs for Egyptian pop stars, including Amr Diab’s most well-known song, “Nur al-‘ayn” (1996). Muhammad Munir and Hamid al-Sha’iri remain among Egypt’s top singers. Besides producing his own material, al-Sha’iri composes and arranges for many other singers; including arrangements for many of Amr Diab’s recent albums. Hani Shanuda composed four songs on Amr Diab’s first cassette (Ya Tariq, 1985), and arranged all of them; he continues to compose and arrange for others.

In both new styles, the vocalist is a pop culture star (*nigm*), though not a *mutrib* (producer of tarab) in the strict sense. Since the broadcast media were still controlled by the state, these new types were at

⁷ (For a discussion of the org see Rasmussen 1996)

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first largely excluded from TV and radio, and developed via the new cassette industry—especially sha‘bi (Armbrust 1996:184).

The 1970s witnessed a renewal in North American Latin music. In New York a developing hot, creative style, primarily combining jazz and Cuban influences, diffused under a new label: salsa. Latin rock emerged in the early 1970s. (Roberts 1979:186-191) These trends were to color Egyptian shababi music, or even transform it entirely.

IV. Ethnohistory: Egyptians’ interpretations of the Spanish tinge

I asked a variety of thoughtful Egyptians, living in Egypt, in Europe, and in Canada, to interpret and explain the recent profusion of Spanish and Latin sounds in Arab pop (shababi) music. Why Spanish, and why now? Discussions took place in person, by telephone, by e-mail, on listservs, and Internet bulletin boards. I used the career of Amr Diab as my central example, though discussions ranged widely.

Responses are categorized below, according to the kind of arguments used. Sorting responses was not an easy task, and required considerable interpretive activity on my part. For one thing, respondents didn’t always fill in the logical chain and implications of their arguments; in what follows I have attempted to elaborate each argument while remaining true to what I perceive as its spirit. Secondly, responses frequently touched on a number of logically distinct positions, which I attempted to disentangle. Third, the various enumerated arguments are often interdependent, exhibiting a network structure that I attempted (with difficulty) to linearize. My occasional comments are relegated to footnotes.

A. Music, history, and culture

1. Andalusian argument

Most respondents pointed to Andalusia as a key factor in the selection of Spanish (and Latin) music, indicating the enduring power of al-Andalus in the contemporary Egyptian imagination. Andalusian arguments for the contemporary Spanish tinge took two forms: (1) symbolic value, and (2) genealogical compatibility. Both are predicated on the notion that at root the Spanish tinge is connected to Arab culture.

Spanish (and by extension Latin) music is a symbol that invokes Andalusia, not merely due to its origins on Andalusian territory, but due to perceptions of a distant Andalusian source as well. Spanish and Latin musics are at least indebted to (or even represent the diffusion of) Arab culture. Egyptians hear flamenco, Spanish music generally, and Latin music by extension, as all pointing to the nostalgic glory of al-Andalus. They hear the ‘ud in the guitar; flamenco’s “ole” as a corruption of “Allah”. The sounding of Andalusian symbols makes them all the more affective; as one respondent commented, “when you hear Spanish music you *feel* that you contributed to its construction”. The Spanish tinge carries the positive value of Andalusia; reasserts the fact of Europe’s debt to the Arabs; retrieves what was originally Arab (as ‘Abd al-Wahhab emphasized); hence does not incur cultural indebtedness. All three factors are particularly important today, when many Arabs are feeling a sense of cultural despair.

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Secondly, there is the argument of compatibility based on a shared genealogy. If Spanish and Arab musics flow from a common source, then it is only natural that they should produce a consonant mix. Arab constructions of music history (signaled by terms such as “muwashshahat andalusiyya” and “musiqa andalusiyya”) provide evidence of continuity, suggesting that other branches of the Andalusian genealogy should likewise be compatible. Emotionally, Arabs naturally respond to Spanish music. More generally, many Egyptians view Spanish and Arab culture as highly congruent, as if there is a distant shared bloodline extending back to Andalusia.⁸

2. Continuity of Western influence argument

The Spanish tinge of the 1990s should be identified as a continuous extension to the use of Spanish musics earlier this century, but now within the context of shababi songs. This in turn is an instance of a more general propensity for Western styles in Egyptian music, e.g. the 1960s Franco-Arab fad (including such hits as “Mustafa ya Mustafa”, sung in Arabic and French). Such eclecticism is long-standing, a product of Egypt’s openness, reflecting a particular colonial history. Though strongly shaped by France and Britain, Egypt was never a formal colony of either (even among colonies, British indirect rule reduced cultural dominance). Large non-Egyptian populations (Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Italian) in Cairo and Alexandria ensured cultural diversity in centers of cultural production. Consequently, and most unlike North Africa, Egypt culture was open to a wide range of Western cultures, producing foreign musical influence. Even if the sound of the contemporary Spanish tinge is new, its acceptability is linked to earlier popularity of the same styles. The adoption of Spanish music also followed naturally from the adoption of the guitar as a Western instrument in the 1970s. At first used to introduce jazz and rock styles, Egyptians associated the acoustic guitar with flamenco and Latin musics, facilitating entry of those musics. At the same time, from the 1970s onwards Spanish music (with the growth of salsa, Latin rock, and Latin pop) was increasingly important in mainstream Western popular music. Egyptian musicians following Western trends thus introduced Spanish styles.

3. Modern Latin American argument

Since 1952, Latin America has carried a special significance to Egypt, more so than any other region of the developing world. At first there was a sense that Latin America was structurally and culturally parallel to the Arab world, comprising poor third world countries (though not the poorest of the poor), manipulated by foreign imperialists. The struggles with poverty, against dictators, to achieve freedom, justice, democracy, and economic growth, were shared. Latin American liberation figures, such as Simon Bolivar, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara (who met with Nasir) were cultural heroes to a segment of Egypt’s revolutionary elites. Later, when Latin American countries achieved some measure of democracy and economic prosperity, Arabs wondered why, given their parallel conditions, they couldn’t achieve the same thing. Since the 1970s, Latin American writers such as Marquez and Borges have been extremely influential in Egypt, and admired for their worldwide influence. In music (as in politics) the history of Latin America sets a standard for Egyptians to match: a “third world” music with European connections, which has become popular and influential world-wide, but especially in

⁸ The Iraqi ‘ud virtuoso Munir Bashir (1930-1997) was convinced that flamenco was influenced by Arab music, illustrating his ideas in a recording entitled *Flamenco Roots* (Asmar and Hood 2001:314). Likewise, Egyptian sha‘bi star Hakim has justified his use of Latin influences since historically there is “a love between Arab and Latin rhythms” through a shared Andalusian heritage (Nickson 2001:21).

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the West. By incorporating Latin music, Egyptians are identifying with Latin America and aspiring to what it has achieved.

4. Musical compatibility argument

Without necessarily invoking Andalusian genealogy, respondents frequently pointed to the compatibility of Arab and Spanish musics, as ensuring the Spanish tinge's aesthetic success. The compatibility is timbral (both musics center on similar stringed instruments), rhythmic (Arab cycles such as *bamb* and *malruf* mesh easily with clave), and formal. Unlike traditional Arab music, Spanish music is harmonic and does not quartertones; however since the 1970s Arab music has developed harmony, and gradually reduced the use of quartertones. Furthermore, two Arabic scales lacking quartertones are central to Spanish musics: *nahawand* (analogous to the Western minor mode), and *kurd* (analogous to flamenco's Phrygian scale); furthermore, these two modes stir musical emotion quickly, an important quality for short shababi songs (in which there is no time for the longer modal developments and modulations of older tarab music).

5. Mediterranean argument

For some respondents the presence of Spanish (and by extension Latin) music reflects more general cultural mixing and borrowing around the Mediterranean, including also North African, French, Greek, Italian, Turkish. (For instance, Amr Diab has worked with Algerian, Greek, and Turkish musicians; Greek music of *Zorba* or Demis Roussos has been popular in Egypt.) Throughout history, Mediterranean peoples mixed and shared, due to proximity, and similar environments. Mediterranean cultures are "hot", as opposed to the "colder" cultures of northern and eastern Europe. In Egypt, the Mediterranean cities, Alexandria and Port Said (birthplace of Diab), were important sites for cultural interaction, and the locus of much musical innovation. Mediterranean neighbor Libya also played a key role, since Libya maintained close ties to the west (especially Italy) until the 1969 coup, while Egypt was more closed. After 1969, when Qadhafi made conditions difficult, several Western-influenced musicians (including Nasir al-Mizdawi, Hamid al-Sha'iri) emigrated, and become influential in Egypt.

6. Passing of the stars argument

Umm Kulthum, 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, and Farid al-Atrash, three of the four greatest vocal stars of Egypt's mid-century tarab tradition, passed away in the mid 1970s. Due to a shifted zeitgeist (see below), and (according to some) a paucity of equivalent vocal talent, younger singers found it impossible to take their places, though many tried. This fact created an aesthetic vacuum, which had to be filled with something new. The introduction of the Spanish tinge was a delayed reaction whose development required another fifteen years, after experiments with rock, disco, jazz and other styles had run their course.

7. Rupture of history and ahistoricity of the musical sign argument

Egypt is an ancient civilization, which has always borrowed from other cultures, while maintaining continuity through a cultural grasp of its own history. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with advances in education, that grasp strengthened; the golden age occurred in the 1930s and 40s. The military-backed revolution of 1952 crushed this budding enlightenment; the educational system

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declined because revolutionary leaders were not themselves well educated; history was sacrificed to ideology. Blinded by the present, Egyptians lost their cultural memory, and an unprecedented rupture in historical continuity loomed.

The use of Spanish styles in post-revolutionary Egypt has nothing to do with Andalusia, or with Spanish-inflected music of the interwar period; it is rather an ahistorical musical sign designed to produce aesthetic pleasure for profit. Popularized in the 1990s, videoclip images (extending the power of musical products to dominate the visual as well as auditory field) play an important role in determining an ahistorical musical meaning, by gratifying and capturing more senses, riveting attention on the present. Watching videoclips of Spanish-tinged Arabic music, one sees white palaces, blue sky, clear water, beautiful girls dancing and singing, gorgeous sunsets. These are not signs of Andalusia, but rather ahistorical kitsch, designed to sell. Objectively the Spanish tinge may extend throughout history, but experientially one cannot connect present manifestations to that past.

8. The Zeitgeist of westernization, globalization, instability arguments

Several respondents postulated that music necessarily reflects cultural ethos, or zeitgeist. As the Egyptian zeitgeist became more Western, Western musical styles became more appropriate for Egyptian cultural expression, and hence are appropriated in the new shababi songs. As Latin music mixed into the Western mainstream (over the past two decades), it naturally appeared (albeit delayed) in Egyptian music as well.

A related argument holds that in the 1990s the Egyptian zeitgeist is becoming not more Western, but more global; or that the concept (if not the content) of the global and globalization is itself central to the Egyptian ethos. Latin/Spanish music's popularity in Egypt results not from its Western, but from its global popularity and meaning. Latin/Spanish music *is* global; furthermore (due to global spread and internal hybridity) it represents the *concept* of the global.

A third version holds that Egyptians feel insecure; everything is unstable in Egypt today. Egyptians don't know who they are or even what they want; rapid stylistic change reflects this uncertainty.

B. Music, politics, ideology

1. Music, politics, and post-ideology arguments

Several respondents stated or implied that Egyptian culture has been more open to foreign influence (interpreted as modernization) when its politics are more progressive. Two contrasting applications of this principle emerged.

In one interpretation, Egyptian progressiveness is associated with the pre-revolutionary period, particularly 1922-1952, when foreign musical influence was strongest in the music of 'Abd al-Wahhab and others. In this period models of modernity were drawn from European culture, through which came Latin music. During the Nasir years, socialist nationalism and statism caused Egypt to be more isolated. In the 1970s, with the infitah, and the decline of nationalism and Nasserism, Egyptian culture was again open to foreign economic, political, and cultural influence. But now diversity and globalism replaced Europe as a criterion for modernity. Throughout this experimental period a variety of musical influences appeared, to be sifted and sorted over the following decades; certain styles (including Spanish) ultimately emerged as most suitable (for any of the reasons presented earlier).

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In a second interpretation, the pre-revolutionary period, as well as the mid 1960s, are viewed as progressive, in contrast to the reactionary 1970s. In the mid 60s, Egyptians were optimistic and confident about their progress towards modernity and global greatness. Though politics were not free, they were forward looking; reactionary Islamism was weak. Despite Nasir's anti-western rhetoric, western fashions were wildly popular. The 1960s thus represented a kind of cultural *infitah*, an acceptance of Western cultural modernity. Optimism and progressivism were extinguished by the 1967 defeat, and subsequent death of Nasir. The 1970s economic *infitah* was simultaneously a cultural closing (*inghilaq*), due to the rise in Gulf (khaligi) cultural influence, and the concomitant rise of reactionary Islamism, which did not decline until the early 1990s, by which time other ideologies were spent as well. The rise of more sophisticated musical fusions between Egyptian and compatible Western styles (including the Spanish) became more possible in the post-ideological 1990s.

2. Ideological uniqueness argument

Ideologically, Latin America is uniquely empowered as being both "Third world" and Western, among all musics of the world. Even today, Egyptians view Western culture as superior, yet they also seek symbols of resistance to Western dominance. Egyptian music producers want to fuse Arab music with a music fulfilling ideological criteria of "Western", but also "global" and "Third World", opposing the hegemony of Anglo-American pop. Latin music, associated with Spain (hence Europe), popular in the West, global in diffusion and internal syncretism, nicely fits the bill. Egyptians regard African music, for instance, as *too* "Third World". (An additional advantage is the fact that Spain was not, for Egypt, a colonial oppressor.)

3. Ideological failures argument

Arab ideologies of unity and progress have failed. Leadership is poor; hypocrisy is everywhere. There is no democracy or political freedom; Palestine is still oppressed; there is economic distress and imbalance everywhere. The brutal 1991 US-led Gulf war against Iraq, and an increasingly hard-line Israeli regime unconditionally supported by the US, induced a turn away from American culture. Instead, the musical themes of Andalusia (ancient golden age) and Latin America (contemporary model) have come to the fore.

C. The maturation of the music industry

1. The rise of the commercial music industry argument

With the decline in historical memory after 1952, Egyptian music began to be freed from its own past. The *infitah* of the 1970s, in both its technological and free-market economic dimensions, provided the critical push towards a totally commercialized market-driven music industry. The motive force is profit, and the shape of the market. Market forces, in the absence of historical memory, necessarily produced radical change. Egyptian music is no longer truly Egyptian. Music is created to please foreign tastes of non-Egyptians (especially Gulf Arabs), or Egyptians alienated from their history. Poorer Egyptians maintained historical continuity, but with little financial clout they weakly influenced the market-driven system of music production. The age of unconstrained commercial music started in the 1970s, but marketing matured in the 1990s; during this period the market became less encumbered by ideological constraints. With the significant advent of the videoclip (popularized in the 1990s), musical meaning expanded to the visual sphere, to be more cunningly manipulated for a market

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seeking pleasure, not historical continuity. Since videoclips are intensively watched on ordinary Egyptian TV, as well as by Arab audiences living abroad, this mode of musical meaning increasingly determines musical contents.

Egypt today is increasingly globalization, full of economic and cultural linkages to the outside world, particularly the West. Because of these interconnections, any outside commercial cultural trends will quickly penetrate Egyptian markets as well, though a short delay is to be expected.

Because Spanish music is globally popular, a Spanish tinge in Arab music appeared: to sell to an international market, to sell to a local Egyptian market that has adopted foreign tastes, and to appear more international in the local market.

2. Maturation in musical tastes argument

A more sanguine view holds that the contemporary popularity of the Spanish tinge represents a delayed cultural selection from the infinite variety and confusion of the infitah era, when everything suddenly became possible. In the initial flush of enthusiasm, Egyptians saturated themselves with foreign cultural influences. Over the following twenty years, they gradually sifted through these influences, and selected Spanish musics as most compatible with their own.

3. Local marketing argument

Particularly in post-Nasserist Egypt, Egyptian audiences want to feel importantly connected to global history, as a means of reestablishing cultural self-confidence and a sense of their own relevance to the wider world. Therefore they value global musical trends outside Egypt; they value western culture (which largely controls those trends); they value that which signifies the concept of the global; and they value Egyptians who attain international stature. By blending Arab and Latin/Spanish, Egyptian music producers not only tap into an existing Egyptian fascination with Latin/Spanish music itself, but also with the very concepts of “western trend”, “global trend”, and “global fusion” which that music signifies; “global fusion” is further symbolized by the Arab/Spanish mix itself. But one respondent reports that in Egyptian villages listeners don’t recognize Spanish sounds at all, identifying such music only as “western”. In this case, the value of the Spanish tinge may depend on the foreign marketing argument.

4. Foreign marketing argument

By incorporating global trends into Egyptian music, producers aim to capture foreign markets, or at least to give the impression (to local markets) of making Egyptian singers relevant to foreign markets. The foreign market itself comprises two essential segments: those of Arab descent seeking connections to the “home country” (expats), and the non-Arabs “world music” market. Those of Arab descent, but born abroad, seek music reflecting their dual identity: combining local aesthetic standards with Arabic language and sound. Aside from its privileged economic position and expanding population, in the 1990s the importance of the Western-Arab market has sharply increased with better distribution of Arab music CDs (largely via Internet), and widespread Western consumption of Arab music via satellite broadcasts of “videoclips”, and music programs, in which song rankings are determined by viewers. Thus to a great extent Arab music is being driven by its foreign market. The world-wide popularity of Latin music (and its perceived connections to Arab music) make it an

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excellent choice for increasing sales abroad.⁹ The non-Arab Western market seeks world music: the exotic in a familiar base; Latin/Spanish music, being both mainstream and “other”, helps bridge Arabic and Western popular musics, and consequently markets.¹⁰

5. Maturation of star-creation process argument

The music industry, including singers and their producers, has learned how to manufacture stardom. This ability has naturally produced a plethora of new stylistic syncretisms, as performers actively seek out visual and sonic material by which to forge a star persona, balancing continuity, imitations, and distinctiveness. The conscious control of this process naturally led Egyptian singers to incorporate the style of world-famous Latin pop stars into a shababi pop base. ‘Amr Diab is a good example. Though inspired by ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz’s persona, he didn’t insist on imitating ‘Abd al-Halim too closely. Rather he followed the principle which had made ‘Abd al-Halim successful, fusing continuity, modernity, and innovation in a musical style and image. Breaking free of Egyptian traditions, he sported western dress and haircuts, benefiting as the cutting edge of fashion. More specifically, he imitated international Latin singers, such as Ricky Martin, in order to endear himself to Egyptian fans.

6. Arbitrary difference argument

In the foregoing arguments, Latin and Spanish music do not carry any essential significance beyond representing trends happening in the West, or globally, or at least perceived as such. But this argument was also taken to a further extreme, by arguing that Spanish influence does not carry any particular significance at all, beyond the mere presentation of difference.

In the music mix, differentiation is necessary in three dimensions: differentiation from older tarab music to imply modernity; from the local to imply the global; and from previous mixes to imply innovation. If the first two establish Egyptian pop music as contemporary and international (like “world music” in the West), the third establishes a particular product or artist as unique. As Egyptian music is increasingly driven by a sophisticated profit-seeking music industry, new albums are created and consumed more quickly. The commercial maturation of the music industry means that the music field is increasingly crowded and competitive. Each singer therefore attempts either to be unique, or to imitate others who are already successful; the latter must relentlessly seek out new musical styles. Not only cassettes, but entire styles are rapidly consumed. Whereas the tarab era favored musical craftsmanship and innovation within a stable style, today radical stylistic change has great commercial value. Marketers favor globally popular non-Egyptian styles, never previously fused with shababi music, to enable a new cassette to “burst” (*yitfar’a*) on the scene, since otherwise the active bootleg cassette industry will reduce sales. Spanish influence is being used only to provide a new source of marketable difference.

⁹ Relatively large Arab populations living in Latin America, especially Columbia and Brazil, may also be significant. The great Lebanese singer, Wadi’ al-Safi, lived in Brazil (Asmar and Hood 2001:316). The Columbian vocal star Shakira is half Lebanese, and states that she is “...devoted to Arabic tastes and sounds” (Shakira 2002)

¹⁰ ‘Amr Diab’s “Nur al-‘Ayn” is the outstanding example. Zirbel’s claim that world music fans reject Egyptian pop (Zirbel 2000:133) has yet to be verified; reviews by non-Arabs on music web sites (such as aramusic.com, or amazon.com) and the incorporation of Egyptian pop on compilation CDs (Earthwork’s *Tea in Marrakech*, and Putumayo’s *Arabic Groove*, both 2001) suggests otherwise.

7. Technological change argument

Technological advancements enabled greater play of difference in Egypt since the 1970s. Previously, musical performances were recorded whole, with all musicians present and interacting, on one or two tracks. The unit of production was the song, for which creativity was credited to singer, composer, and lyricist. In the 1970s the introduction of multitrack studio technology, with concomitant techniques of overdubbing and mixing, enabled inclusion of disparate musical factors, which could be recorded separately, then combined. The “song” unit, previously central to Arab music, was replaced by an aggregate of diverse tracks, contrived by the arranger, and combined by the sound engineer. Significantly, the names of arrangers and sound engineers were now prominently displayed on cassette boxes.

In the 1990s, availability of digital studio equipment, enabling “drag and drop” editing and digital effects, has pushed musical production further towards the art of manipulating and recombining tracks as the underlying musical units.¹¹ These technical operations enable any musics to be juxtaposed, opening Arabic music to wider ranges of foreign influences, indeed demanding such juxtapositions in order to ensure a constant supply of difference. The use of Spanish/Latin is only an instance.

Three other significant technological changes spread widely in the 1990s: videoclips, satellite television, and the Internet (web, email, listservs, newsgroups, chat rooms, and filesharing). All contribute to the globalization of Egypt, further connecting young upper and middle class Egyptians (the prime market for shababi music) to global trends (such as Latin/Spanish music), while emphasizing the concept and importance of “the global” as a value in itself, and expanding foreign markets for Arab music, which responds by reflecting foreign tastes.

V. Postscript

If one grants them some historical validity, the arguments listed above go a long ways towards explaining the emergence and significance of the Spanish tinge in 1990s Egyptian pop music. In light of his biography (presented earlier), they also help us to account for why Amr Diab became a leader in this trend, and why others followed him in it.

By asking Egyptians to reflect upon their own culture and history in order to explain a contemporary transnational musical phenomenon, this ethnohistorical study quickly uncovered a rich lode of meanings. Unpacking the answers to my questions reveals a startling diversity of theories, all deserving of a more in-depth “objective” historical treatment elsewhere, but also valuable in themselves for indicating how contemporary Egyptians conceptualize their musical, its historical and cultural predicament, and its relation to the wider world.

But one of the most remarkable outcomes of this research does not concern Egyptian musical history or even ethnohistory, but rather the extent to which a seemingly innocuous question about popular culture catalyzes the generation of wide-ranging and heartfelt discourse of broader and more profound significances. Beyond their importance for understanding transnational flows of music and meaning, the arguments enumerated above provide evidence for the varied ways in which Egyptians construct and interpret their own history and culture.

¹¹ International Arab artists such as Amr Diab have begun releasing multiple mixes of the same song for various markets and contexts.

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Through such research, ethnomusicology demonstrates its scholarly value, not only as a method for documenting musical culture per se, but as a mode of accessing cultural self-understanding in the broadest sense.

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