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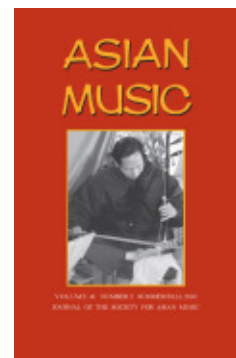
## **Nationalism, Nationalization, and the Egyptian Music Industry: Muhammad Fawzy, Misrphon, and Sawt al-Qahira (SonoCairo)1**

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# Nationalism, Nationalization, and the Egyptian Music Industry: Muhammad Fawzy, Misrphon, and Sawt al-Qahira (SonoCairo)<sup>1</sup>

*Michael Frishkopf*

## Introduction

The first large record companies, established in the late 19th century, were based in America, Britain, France, and Germany. By the early 20th century they had already established highly profitable global empires of production and distribution (including copious quantities of music recorded far from the corporate bases of power),<sup>2</sup> extending along preexisting colonial networks (Gronow 1981, 1983, 56).<sup>3</sup>

Local challenges (often small, but symbolic) to this productive hegemony arose naturally in tandem with economic and technological development in colonized areas, as well as the rise of independence movements and national consciousness. If the significant forces underlying the appearance of locally owned recording companies among nations recently emerged from colonial domination were largely economic and technological, such developments were often catalyzed and facilitated—if not driven—by nationalist discourses of independence and self-sufficiency. However, so long as there existed a shared capitalist framework, the local company might directly cooperate with the global one (for instance, pressing its records locally, or—conversely—sending masters to be pressed abroad).<sup>4</sup>

But nationalism could assume multiple and contradictory forms. Hobsbawm observed that states confronted nationalism as a political force distinct from state patriotism. Appropriated by the state, nationalism could become a powerful affective asset. However, he also called attention to the risks inherent in merging a comprehensive state patriotism (e.g., “all citizens of France are French”) with a more exclusive, grassroots nonstate nationalism (e.g., “only the French are French”) (Hobsbawm 1990, 90–3). Likewise, Anderson distinguished “official nationalism” from popular national movements; dynastic empires strove to fit what was often a limited grassroots concept of nation (e.g., Russian) to a much broader empire (e.g., the Russian empire) (Anderson 2006, 86ff).

In the newly independent postcolonial world nationalism was further complicated by the relative instability and—hence—insecurity of newly established regimes. As a popular sentiment, nationalism implied liberation from colonial tyranny, and empowerment of the people, but new governments typically could not tolerate such empowerment, even if they had depended upon it (or promises to provide it) in their own acquisition of power. Adopted by revolutionary regimes as a ruling strategy, popular heartfelt nationalism frequently—and ironically—was radically transformed, institutionalized as a patriotism demanding unquestioning loyalty to the state: requiring citizens to cede political and even economic capital, or risk labeling as a dangerous “counterrevolutionary.” In this so-called “third world,” problems in retrofitting nationalism to suit state agendas did not always inhere in broadening them to cover a diverse or far-flung population (though this was sometimes the case), so much as in ensuring domination over a potentially restive population rife with threats (real or perceived) to newly established power, especially challenges to its legitimacy.<sup>5</sup>

Whether in the hands of the state or the broader population, whether deliberately manipulated as crafted ideology or reflecting popular grassroots sentiments, contradictory nationalist discourses often presented remarkably similar symbolic and rhetorical forms (e.g., “for the sake of the country”). State and individual alike perforce operate in a shared field<sup>6</sup> of nationalism (a field of ideological production). Such a field functions, within the broader social space, as a symbolic game or market with a particular logic, in which certain forms of cultural capital (practical knowledge of nationalist logic, including its discursive forms) can be exchanged for other kinds. Thus, in a capitalist system, corporations often deploy nationalist discourse as a means of acquiring wealth (e.g., “support America—buy American”), exchanging cultural capital for economic capital. Meanwhile, the state might deploy the same discourse as a means of consolidating power, exchanging cultural capital for political capital (e.g., “support America—do not criticize the state”). Conflict over the “rules of the game” (e.g., what exactly is nationalistic behavior?) is characteristic of fields; as Bourdieu observes: “Every field is the site of a more or less overt struggle over the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field” (Bourdieu 1985, 734).

Thus, the logic of the field of nationalism and its concomitant discourse may support individual political-economic liberation (the nationalist concept of “liberation” leading to individual freedom within a capitalist economy, unfettered either by the state or foreign domination), or (conversely) may serve as a tool by which newly independent totalitarian or dictatorial regimes expand their economic power (the nationalist idea that “the revolutionary government represents the people” justifying statist control of centralized economies).

To return to the record industry: In the first case, nationalism could protect and encourage local private ownership of record production and freedom of

artistic expression; in the second, domination of record production by the state and censorship. In either case, local music industries were formed at the expense of transnationals (portrayed as a vestigial colonial formation). The conflict between popular and state nationalism had important repercussions for expressive culture, especially in its mass-mediated forms (music, cinema), whose strategic political importance has rarely been overlooked by nascent revolutionary regimes bent on shoring up power.

While cooperation between state-held record companies in statist economies and the large transnationals was theoretically limited by the lack of a common economic system, ironically the state-held local company tended to conflict more with the private-sector local company (with which it competed directly, and more importantly against which it had to struggle to ensure hegemony) than with the transnationals (just as—in the political realm—armed forces of third world countries tended to be used against their own citizenry more often than against any foreign threat).

During the period following the Egyptian Revolution (1952), Egyptian nationalism underwent precisely such a transformation from popular to state-dominated discourse, and from capitalist to statist economy. Nationalist discourse mapped out two theoretically contradictory world-views—one empowering to the citizenry, the other empowering to the state—bound to lead to contradictions in practice, exacting tremendous personal tolls. The most well-known examples of such contradictions are the persecution of the ruling regime's political opponents starting in the mid-1950s, and the nationalization of key industries starting with the Suez Canal in 1956, but mainly from 1961, following which Egypt's nascent private sector record manufacturing was decimated, to be replaced by the state-owned company, Sawt al-Qahira (SonoCairo). Private sector music production would not recover until the mid-1970s, with the flourishing of a diverse cassette industry in the new economic climate of Sadat's *infatih* (economic "opening") (Castelo-Branco 1987).

While this general historical picture may be well-known, the latent conflict between popular and statist forms of nationalism, and the complex—and often ironic—ways in which they evolved and interacted cannot be fully understood or appreciated except through the careful historical tracing of particular instances of these conflicts. This paper presents one such trace, as embodied in the tragic life and career of Muhammad Fawzy, artist, capitalist, and Egyptian nationalist.

### **Muhammad Fawzy and Misrphon**

Though a large number of European recording companies (including the Gramophone Company, Columbia, Odeon, and Pathé) operated in the Arab

world starting around the turn of the 20th century, record manufacturing took place almost exclusively in Europe: in England (Gramophone), France (Pathé), Germany (Odeon), and later in Athens. The same was true of Lebanese Baidaphone, whose discs were manufactured in Berlin, and its Egyptian successor Cairophone (Racy 1976). Until the 1950s, the only Egyptian record manufacturer was a small-scale operation, the Mechian Company, located near Midan `Ataba in central Cairo, owned and operated by an Armenian *khawaga* (foreigner), Setrak Mechian, from as early as 1908 at least until the 1930s. During his heyday, Mechian recorded a number of distinguished artists, including Sayyid Darwish and Mahmud Subh, as well as many minor singers. However, production was extremely limited: using a simple pressing machine Mechian manufactured shellac phonodiscs individually, essentially “by hand” (Racy 1976, 43–4).

According to Ali Jihad Racy, record production and consumption declined in Egypt starting in the 1930s, a consequence of the Great Depression, the rise of the musical film (1932), the proliferation of radio broadcasts (starting in the late 1920s), and the founding of Egyptian State Radio (1934), to the extent that Racy regards “. . . the early 1930s . . . as the beginning of a new post-phonograph era in Egypt” (Racy 1976, 45–6).

Salwa El-Shawan’s analysis is slightly different. According to her, the rise of radio and musical films in the early 1930s actually had a positive influence on the flagging record industry, due to intermedia synergies. Songs from musical films were usually issued as phonograms, and radio stations helped promote singers and their recordings. Owners of private radio stations would play records in order to reap profits when listeners came to purchase them at retail outlets they also owned. During the 1930s, therefore, most record companies produced abundantly in Egypt. Odeon and Baidaphone were most active, producing new records and re-pressing old ones. Odeon actively recorded many artists, including 53 songs performed by superstar singer Umm Kulthum between 1931 and 1939. British Gramophone continued to record in Egypt in the early 1930s, issuing numerous recordings from the important 1932 Arab Music Congress on its HMV label. Columbia, Polyphon, and Mechian continued to record in Egypt as well (El-Shawan 1980, 91–2). Baidaphone, owned by the Lebanese Baida family, acquired exclusive rights to record the celebrated singer-composer-actor Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab, who became a financial partner in the company during this period (Racy 1976).

In any case, by the 1940s many record companies had declined or discontinued operations altogether. By then the Egyptian State Radio Broadcast Station (inaugurated on May 31, 1934 [Boyd 1999, 17]) was well-established, private radio was banned (from 1932), and most artists recorded for State Radio in preference to private companies (El-Shawan 1980, 92–3, 97). Odeon remained

in Egypt, but declined. By the mid-1940s the Egyptian branch of Baidaphone had been transformed into Cairophone.

From the 1940s through the mid-1950s, Cairophone dominated the Egyptian record industry, under the artistic supervision of Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab (El-Shawan 1980, 92–3; Racy 1976; *Akhir Sa`a* 1957c, 15–8). In contrast to other record companies operating during this period,<sup>7</sup> Cairophone was primarily Egyptian in content, and probably ownership. According to some accounts `Abd al-Wahhab personally held a majority of Cairophone shares (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 1956a), though some Lebanese ownership seems to have remained. Yet even Cairophone's records were all pressed abroad. Establishment of the first modern, automated, Arab-owned record factory in the Arab world awaited the arrival of the multifaceted talent, Muhammad Fawzy (1918–1966).

Muhammad Fawzy Habs `Abd al-`Al al-Haww was a complete artist, excelling as composer, singer, and actor. Fawzy was born on August 28, 1918, in a small village near Tanta (near the center of the Egyptian Delta), the 13th of 16 siblings,<sup>8</sup> to a distinguished and wealthy family. He honed his musical and vocal skills—like most others of his and older generations—via Qur'anic recitation (in which his father also excelled), subsequently singing at school, in local *mulids* (saint festivals), at public gardens, and for weddings and other parties. He also studied singing and *`ud* (unfretted lute) with a fireman (!) in Tanta named Muhammad al-Garibili. His father disapproved of his music, occasionally smashing his *`uds*, but his mother encouraged him. When he was about 18 years of age, and against his father's wishes, he moved to Cairo in order to study at the Royal Arab Music Institute (al-Ma`had al-Malaki li al-Musiqa al-`Arabiyya)<sup>9</sup> at the invitation of one of its faculty members, Mustafa al-`Aqqad, and worked in the cabaret bands of Badi`a Masabni and Fatima Rushdi, as singer and composer (Farghaly 2000, 11–20; N. M. Fawzy 2004). He set texts to music so effortlessly it was said he could even turn the newspaper into song (*Nisf al-Dunya* 2000, 31).<sup>10</sup>

In Egypt, Fawzy is frequently credited as one of the country's seminal composers, not only for the strength, abundance, and originality of his songs, but also for their centrality in the formulation of modern Egyptian musical style. The acclaimed Egyptian composer Hilmi Bakr credits Fawzy, along with Muhammad al-Qasabgi and Sayyid Darwish before him, as the most important composers to bestow upon Egyptian song its distinctively Egyptian character, while boldly innovating in melody and form (Bakr 2004); likewise the renowned singer Muhammad Rushdi credits him as one of five composers, along with Sayyid Darwish, Muhammad al-Qasabgi, Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab, and Riyad al-Sunbati, primarily responsible for formation of modern Egyptian song (A. al-Hakim 1996; Makkawi 1996). Fawzy is therefore strongly linked, in the popular imagination, with Egyptianness and its musical expression.

Fawzy was prolific. While indices to Egyptian Radio Archives list 94 songs Fawzy composed for himself, and another 63 songs he composed for some 26 other singers (Nassar 2001, 64–71),<sup>11</sup> his son states that he composed 450 songs *in toto*, from the 1940s through 1966 (N. M. Fawzy 2004); another source indicates that he presented around 400 of his own songs, 300 of them in films (Fahmy 1998); he also composed for such eminent singers as Shadia, Huda Sultan, Fayza Ahmad, Nazik, Sabah, Layla Murad, and Raga' `Abduh (*al-Kawakib* 1999). He is renowned for pioneering popular children's songs (especially "Mama Zamanha Gayya"), for Egyptian and Arab nationalist songs (including a liberation song for Algeria that became that country's national anthem after independence), and for composing the first so-called "Franco-Arab" hits, "Mustafa ya Mustafa" and "Fattuma," combining Arab and European literary and musical idioms (A. al-Hakim 1996). Fawzy worked with the most renowned lyricists, including Ahmad Ramy, Bayram al-Tunisi, `Ali Mahmud Taha, Badi` Khayri, Ma'mun al-Shinawi, Fathi Qura, Husayn al-Sayyid, `Abd al-Su`ud al-Ibyari, and `Abd al-`Aziz Salam (*al-Kawakib* 1999). As for other composers of his day, Fawzy's recorded compositional and vocal output was publicized via musical films, on radio, and on phonodiscs.

Muhammad Fawzy was also arguably the most important creative force behind maturation of Egypt's historic musical film tradition in the latter 1940s, a tradition of central importance in disseminating Egypt's popular culture and colloquial dialect, and therefore in establishing the media centrality of the Egyptian nation, throughout the Arab world.<sup>12</sup> His own vocal-cinematic career began in 1944, after the celebrated actor-producer Yusuf Wahbi selected him to star in *Sayf al-Galad* (Farghaly 2000, 22; N. M. Fawzy 2004). Following subsequent cinematic successes, Fawzy too became a producer, presumably in order to increase artistic control and profit. In 1946 or 1947, he formed Sharikat Aflam Muhammad Fawzy (Muhammad Fawzy Film Company) and produced *al-`Aql fi Ajaza* (directed by Hilmy Rafla and starring Shadia). In 1951, he was the first Egyptian to produce color films (*Nahayat al-Qissa* and *al-Hubb fi al-Khatar*).<sup>13</sup> By 1959 he had produced more than 25 musical films, and starred in about 34; the most famous of his female co-stars was Layla Murad (Fahmy 1998; Nassar 2001, 63).

In the 1940s and 1950s, both music production facilities in Egypt, and Egyptian ownership of music production, were quite limited. Until the late 1950s, only two professional recording studios had been constructed in Egypt, both in Cairo: one in the State Radio building, and another in Studio Misr on Pyramids Street; singers sometimes were forced to travel outside Egypt to record. By the 1950s, the most important record companies operating in Egypt were Baidaphone and its Egyptian offshoot, Cairophone. But with the exception of `Abd al-Wahhab's share in the latter (Isma`il 2004), all record companies were foreign-owned (al-Gafi 2004). Following the closure of Mechian's operation, all Egyptian

records were pressed in Europe, especially France, Germany, Britain, and Greece, then imported to Egypt. This complex and uneconomical process, incurring shipping costs, levies at border crossings, and inevitable loss and breakage, raised the price of the final product considerably. Egyptian composers, lyricists, singers, musicians, and producers all suffered from foreign domination and exploitation of local music production.

Some critics charged that Egyptian composers were not being paid the mechanical royalties enjoyed by their European colleagues, as per international law, even when their songs were recorded by many different singers and sold many copies. Meanwhile, the local label Cairophone, controlled by the powerful `Abd al-Wahhab, was accused of monopolistic contract-making, of supporting only proven talent, of failing to pay mechanical royalties on records produced abroad, and of marketing records according to economic rather than artistic factors— withholding new releases pending public demand or even to avoid competing with `Abd al-Wahhab himself. Farid al-Atrash, whose records were sometimes delayed in this way, was sufficiently incensed to propose a boycott of Cairophone (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 1956a). But at the time Egyptian composers, lyricists, and performers had few alternatives, and only one Egyptian company to choose from (*Radio and TV* 1960d, 30).

At some point in the early to mid-1950s (precise dating is difficult) Fawzy founded Misrphon as a music production company, in part to support his musical film operations. A certain nationalism is apparent in his choice of name. “Misr” is Arabic for “Egypt”; “Misrphon” thus implies the sound of the Egyptian nation.

Initially, Misrphon rented studios to record songs, then sent the masters abroad for pressing, usually in Greece, like Cairophone. After a *brova* (proof) was sent back and approved, Misrphon would place a mass-order for disc manufacture, which would ultimately be shipped to Egypt by boat. This process was far from satisfactory; it entailed payment in hard currency, considerable expenses for transportation and duties, and risked loss through damage or misdelivery. But—with the exception of Mechian’s small-scale operation—this is the way nearly all records had been produced in Egypt thus far (Hidaya 2004).

Muhammad Fawzy sought to transform this system entirely by building the first Arab-owned, modern record factory in Egypt—indeed, the first in the Arab world and Africa.<sup>14</sup> As his former secretary Mary Lutfy recounted to me in 2004, Fawzy was not only a multifaceted artist; he was business-minded (“*mukhkhu tugari*”) and keenly nationalistic as well. He viewed the establishment of a record factory as a means of helping Egypt and supporting its musical community (Lutfy 2004). An early public enunciation of his plans appeared in a promise to members of the Jam`iyyat al-Mu`allifin wa al-Mulahhinin (Authors’ and



Composers' Association).<sup>15</sup> In 1956, Muhammad Fawzy nominated himself as president of that organization, pledging that if elected he would help provide more opportunities for Egyptian singers, composers, and authors by establishing a modern Egyptian record factory and recording studio, which would respect, rather than exploit, the rights of Egyptian lyricists, composers, and performers (Farghaly 2000, 33–4; *al-Jumhuriyya* 1956; *Radio and TV* 1960d, 30).

By all accounts he aimed to advance his own business and artistic interests too. Beyond the nationalist discourse, Fawzy also sought a means to increase artistic control and profits, as evidenced by the fact that his factory ultimately produced recordings of a large number of his own compositions. Given his diverse interests in the art and business of music and musical film, investment in record manufacturing was a sound business decision.

Using proceeds from his songs and films, and mortgaging his Pyramids Street villa in Cairo (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1959), on June 23, 1957, Fawzy entered into a formal 50–50 percent financial partnership with a Saudi neighbor and family friend, Hasan Surur al-Sabban, thus establishing Masna' al-Sharq li al-Ustawanat—Muhammad Fawzy wa Shurakah (the Eastern Company for Records—Muhammad Fawzy and Partners) with 20,000 LE capital<sup>16</sup> and headquarters in downtown Cairo's Immobilia building (where offices for his film production operations were already situated). Fawzy was the *sharik mutadamin* (partner with financial and administrative rights and responsibilities), while al-Sabban was the *sharik musi* (advisory partner) (M. Fawzy and Nasr 1964). In Egypt today, this company is widely heralded as the first modern record factory in the Middle East and Africa.<sup>17</sup> His first recording studio was located in his Pyramids Street home, though early on he had plans to build an independent, well-equipped, air-conditioned facility (*al-Ahram* 1957a).

Muhammad Fawzy traveled to Germany to conclude an agreement with three audio engineers, who came to Cairo on six-month contracts as consultants (*al-Ahram* 1957b). Construction of the record factory started in late 1957 on a plot of land behind the Engineering College in `Abbasiyya (Cairo),<sup>18</sup> and was completed soon thereafter, reportedly at a cost of some 50,000 Egyptian pounds (*Akhir Sa`a* 1957b). According to Ahmad Hidaya (a lyricist and Fawzy's assistant starting in 1959), Fawzy had first bought Mechian's record-pressing and studio operation, and began to produce shellac records as Mechian had done 50 years earlier (Hidaya 2004).

However, better technology was now available. At that time Dutch Philips was an international electronics company with experience in music recording and playback,<sup>19</sup> and a long-standing presence in the Arab world through its Cairo-based joint stock subsidiary, Philips Orient, founded in 1930 (USAID Mission to Egypt and IBM Business Consulting 2003, 17).<sup>20</sup> Fawzy sought them out. Would

they be interested in partnering with him to establish an Egyptian recording and phonodisc production facility? At first they refused. But Fawzy persevered. Apparently his high artistic status and close contacts with the major stars caught their attention, and Philips finally agreed to support his venture. Subsequently, Fawzy traveled to Holland to purchase manufacturing equipment from Philips (al-Gafi 2004). His second wife, the famous actress Madiha Yusri, encouraged and supported him throughout the project, even helping to supervise the construction; he in turn greatly respected her intelligence and managerial skills (al-Bandari 1957, 22; Farghaly 2000; *al-Ahram* 1957b).

As soon as he founded his new company, Fawzy attracted interest from most of the major singing stars of the day. Besides appealing to nationalistic feeling, he offered a better deal: singers who recorded with him would receive a share of royalties, rather than a lump-sum payment—an arrangement recognizing the especially creative role of the performer in Arab music, and yet not available to most Egyptian artists at that time (or even today) (al-Nammar 2001). He also boasted modern, high-speed production. Fawzy claimed he offered to produce 30 songs for `Abd al-Halim Hafiz over 3 years, and pay him 1,500 LE for each song, or 45,000 LE total, not including costs of lyrics and composing; `Abd al-Halim would retain the right to select any song and any composer (`Abd al-Tawwab 1959b). Reportedly, while in Germany Fawzy also concluded an agreement with several foreign record companies, including Telefunken and Deutsche Grammophon, to press select records in his factory (*Akhir Sa`a* 1957b; *al-Ahram* 1957b).

There was more than nationalism and shared economic interests behind Fawzy's attraction of the greatest singing stars of his time; there were also close personal and artistic connections. Fawzy had composed for many of the stars with whom he concluded recording contracts, or had supported their careers by offering them leading roles in his films. Moreover, Fawzy possessed a charming personality, exhibiting a winning combination of energy, warmth, and generosity, and he was evidently very well liked (Lutfy 2004). He supported younger colleagues such as composer Baligh Hamdy, who testified to Fawzy's kindness in introducing him to the great singers as a rising star (*al-Akhbar* 1982.)

Record production began with "Lamuni" for his sister Huda Sultan, and "Dhahab al-Layl" for Fawzy himself (*Radio and TV* 1960d, 30). A number of important artists were signed, including Fayza Ahmad, Huda Sultan, Shadia, Nazik, and Sabah, and—most importantly—Umm Kulthum, who offered an exclusive contract.<sup>21</sup> According to Mary Lutfy, Fawzy's secretary during this period, other artists worked with Cairophone; typically the same artist didn't work with both companies—it was one or the other (Lutfy 2004). Besides popular music Fawzy produced religious songs, and was by his reckoning first to consider recording

the *mushaf murattal* (complete recited Qur'an) and the President's speeches on disc (*Radio and TV* 1960a, 46; *al-Kawakib* 1965, 31).

During 1958, Fawzy recorded 25 songs. At this time, his factory could produce 100,000 records each year ('Abd al-Tawwab 1959a). Mary Lutfy doesn't recall exactly how many copies of each disc they used to press, but believes the number did not exceed several thousand, because relatively few people owned the necessary playback equipment in those days (Lutfy 2004). Local production paid off: Fawzy's records cost only slightly more than a third the cost of the older imports (0.35 versus 0.90 Egyptian pounds) (al-Gafi 2004).

By the beginning of 1959, Fawzy's operations had expanded to include not only the record factory, but also a state-of-the-art recording studio in Midan 'Ataba, and a retail outlet (still extant) near Opera Square, completing the vertical integration of his music enterprise. He employed new technology to produce unbreakable records, including 45 and 33 rpm, and *marina* (flexible) records; those who bought three ordinary records received a free *marina* one (al-Gafi 2004).<sup>22</sup> At this time, Fawzy's 'Ataba facility was one of only three studios in all of Egypt; it featured an "echo room," capable of creating an acoustical reverb, and was widely used even by Egyptian State Radio; Umm Kulthum preferred to record there (N. M. Fawzy 2004).

During 1959, Fawzy returned to Holland where he had obtained equipment for his factory from Philips. Prolonging his visit to nearly 2 months, he discussed possible financial partnerships. Egypt's press reported that Philips wanted a business agreement with Fawzy ('Abd al-Tawwab 1959a). On June 30, 1959, Philips Orient bought out Fawzy's partner al-Sabban's share in Masna' al-Sharq. With technical advisors and equipment from Philips, Fawzy's factory was upgraded to the latest international standards. Later that year (October 26, 1959) the company's official name was changed to Masna' al-Sharq li al-Ustawanat—Misrfun<sup>23</sup> (M. Fawzy and Nasr 1964); in this shift from "Fawzy" to "Misr" (Egypt) music industry observers have again noted an expression of nationalism (al-Nammar 2001).

Besides producing his own records, Fawzy also rented his studios and factory to other music recording companies in the Arab world. At this point, the only other Egyptian studio active in music production was located in the Egyptian State Radio building, but Radio was legally barred from renting its facilities to private firms. So all contract work went to Misrphon, which remained busy around the clock (W. al-Hakim 2004).

Nationalist aspirations and self-sacrifice, always forefront in Fawzy's discourse, now became a polemical tool in his competition with then-dominant Cairophone, and Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab.<sup>24</sup> Through domestic record production, said Fawzy, Egypt could conserve needed hard currency reserves and help local artists. Announcing that he wanted to put an end to the foreign

domination of Egypt's record (and hence music) business, he accused his singer-colleagues—especially competitors Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab (partial owner of Cairophone) and `Abd al-Halim Hafiz—of antinationalism, specifically “of supporting foreign record companies . . . and wasting large sums of hard currency, although the production of the factory I established is of no lesser quality than that of any other international factory . . . I mortgaged my villa in order to conserve our wealth from loss . . . but what can I do . . . `Abd al-Wahhab and `Abd al-Halim Hafiz are determined to export our wealth . . .” (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1959).<sup>25</sup> A great admirer of foreign music, he also expressed his dream to exalt Egyptian music worldwide, “to help make our song and music an art heard in all countries of the world . . .” (*Radio and TV* 1960d, 30).

Alongside his nationalist spirit in establishing local music production, Fawzy's own music was nationalistic in more than one way. Fawzy had supported the revolution, recording a number of patriotic songs, including his own composition “Baladi Ahbabtuki Ya Baladi” (My Country, I Loved You, My Country), and “Nasir,” by `Abd al-Wahhab, in praise of President Gamal `Abd al-Nasir<sup>26</sup> himself (al-Bandari 1961). Many other singers and composers produced patriotic material as well. But Fawzy's music went further in its appeal to the Egyptian people. He claimed he rerecorded `Abd al-Wahhab's “Nasir” because he wanted to arrange it for a chorus, so that the song would iconically represent—in its performative texture and practice—the voice of the people (al-Bandari 1961). While often viewed as the modernist par excellence, `Abd al-Wahhab and other “elite” composers continued to produce long songs featuring complex solo melodies in a “salon” style often criticized as “Turkish.”

By contrast, Fawzy was a populist Egyptian composer, influenced by and adapted to the music mass media, who developed an innovative Egyptian school of composition using the short song as vehicle. Fawzy's melodies are sophisticated in their simplicity (*al-sahl al-mumtani`*, impossibly simple, as they are often termed), typically including a straightforward choral refrain expressing and signifying mass participation. Even when he didn't arrange a song with chorus, Egyptian listeners typically sing along with Fawzy melodies because they are so singable. His compositional influence strongly shaped the following generation, including such seminal composers as Kamal al-Tawil and Baligh Hamdy (*al-Kawakib* 1996, 20). According to Wagdi al-Hakim, director of Egypt's pan-Arab radio station (Sawt al-`Arab) from 1954 to 1994 (and someone who knew Fawzy—as well as many other Egyptian composers—personally), “Riyad al-Sunbati composed for Umm Kulthum; Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab composed for himself; Mahmud al-Sharif composed for `Abd al-Muttilib, Ahlam, Shadia, and others. But Fawzy composed for all.” This populism was closely related to his adoption of the musical film style (W. al-Hakim 2004) and, by some accounts, his work forms the primary source for the emergence of uptempo,

light *musiqā shababiyya* (youth music) in the late 1970s (*al-Kawakib* 1996, 21), the style dominating mediated Arab music today.<sup>27</sup>

Fawzy was a staunch advocate of Egyptian modernism, defending his mixing of Eastern and Western music for the sake of evolution (*tatwir*). Playfully unabashed in his brazen—though always good-natured—competitive boasting, he asserted (in 1959, and quite clearly targeting `Abd al-Wahhab) that all the famous Egyptian composers with good ideas are students of his “school.” Nationalist symbols drawn from the broader archive of postrevolutionary Egypt suffuse his discourse of musical modernism and progress, as in the following passage: “Our Eastern music is great, like the Pyramids at Giza—will we remain glorifying them and living on their glory past—or will we build the High Dam? We can create a future for Arab music with new western instruments, like the eastern woman—do we dress her today in the ‘*milayat al-laff*’ [traditional black wrap] of 50 years ago? If we present her with the latest Christian Dior dress does she turn into a foreigner? No—this is just progress” (`Abd al-Tawwab 1959b). About Fawzy, Farid al-Atrash once said: “If only God had extended his life, the Eastern musical creativity would have reached out to the entire world at his hand” (Yusuf 1996).

Misrphon, established by Fawzy’s patience, diligence, talent, and extensive social networks, was testimony to his nationalism, populism, high artistic standards, and business acumen. But building a manufacturing company came at great personal cost. Fawzy invested himself in his company financially, personally, and artistically. During 1956, while he was still planning, he rarely had time to attend meetings as president of the Authors’ and Composers’ Association, to the point that there were calls for his ouster (*al-Akhbar* 1957). At the same time, the pace of his singing and acting careers slowed significantly (Lutfy 2004).

Possessor of a sweet voice and light melodies—why has he disappeared from the spotlight? He was always the hero of more than one film during a single season, and his beautiful voice always had our ears and hearts during the day on Radio. Now we rarely hear him and Muhammad Fawzy the actor has disappeared completely. . . . (*Radio and TV* 1960d, 30)

One of Fawzy’s lifelong dreams was to compose for Umm Kulthum. She had requested that he set the poem “*Ansak ya salam*,” but after composing the first couplet he turned over the text to the rising star Baligh Hamdy, a sign of his avuncular generosity, but also his exclusive dedication to Misrphon (Bakr 2004). Archival searches reveal that popular periodicals of the late 1950s (e.g., *Akhir Sa`a*, *Ruz al-Yusuf*, *al-Musawwar*, *al-Kawakib*) only rarely dedicated any articles to Fawzy, as compared to his more musically active contemporaries `Abd al-Halim, `Abd al-Wahhab, Umm Kulthum, and Farid al-Atrash.

After his last film in 1959 (*Layla Bint al-Shati'*), he dedicated himself entirely to the administration of his beloved record company (A. al-Hakim 2003, 24). Initial capital costs pushed Misrphon into debt, but by the early 1960s, the Fawzy-Philips partnership was gradually beginning to turn a profit. Regular adverts from this period published in *Majallet al-Idha`a wa al Tilifizyun (Radio and TV)* proudly proclaim: "Misrphon presents the most famous of female and male singers performing the latest songs recorded on the international brand of Philips"; Fawzy's compositions for Shadia, Sabah, and others are "available in all record stores . . . all records recorded at 45 rpm" (*Radio and TV* 1960b, 45); sometimes photos of stars such as Umm Kulthum, Nagat, Fayza Ahmad, and others are included as well (*Radio and TV* 1960c, 31). However, no sooner had he pocketed his first 4,000 LE in profits than disaster struck (Bakr 2004).

### **The Founding of Sawt al-Qahira (SonoCairo) and State Acquisition of Misrphon**

From the beginning, the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 displayed socialist features, which, however, were not wholly incompatible with the mechanisms of free market capitalism. There had been the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, as an isolated response to a specific political predicament. But the policy of centralized state control surged sharply after 1961, with the nationalization of key industries.

In Egypt, it is commonly understood that Misrphon was simply nationalized along with hundreds of other companies. This understanding is not quite accurate. Though the company was undoubtedly seized, it was not nationalized directly. In an interview, Taha Nasr, the first president of Sawt al-Qahira, stated that as early as 1960—the year Egyptian television was first established—President Nasir mentioned to his Ministers that he wanted to create a national company for producing phonodiscs (Nasr 2003). The unverifiable implication is that although Misrphon was not nationalized as such, Nasir may nevertheless have been targeting Fawzy's company.

The complex details of what actually happened can be understood from the legal preamble to the key 1964 legal contract between Fawzy and Sawt al-Qahira, in which the former ceded his share of Misrphon to the latter (M. Fawzy and Nasr 1964). As previously clarified, as of August 12, 1959, Muhammad Fawzy held 50 percent of Misrphon shares and the position of *sharik mutadamin*, the managing partner holding full administrative control and liability; Philips Orient held the subsidiary position of *sharik mus*i (advisory partner).

Law 118 of 1961 stated that the Egyptian government must assume partnership in certain companies and foundations, including Philips Orient (Nasir 1961b, 1049). By Presidential Decree 202 of 1961, Philips Orient was placed

under management of the Nasr Institution, and its name was changed to the Nasr Company for Electrical and Electronic Appliances. This state-owned company now took over the *sharik musi* position in Misrphon. Although Fawzy retained his managing partner position, Presidential Decree 1899 of 1961, establishing the Supreme Council for General Institutions, ordered that Misrphon be placed under administrative supervision of the Egyptian General Institution for Arts of Theater and Music, supervised by the Minister of Culture and National Guidance (Nasir 1961a, 1806). Finally, Ministerial Decree 70, issued by the Minister of Culture and National Guidance on May 24, 1962, appointed Mr. Ahmad Abu al-Futuh Shawqi as temporary director of Masna` al-Sharq li al-Ustawanat—Misrphon. Besides the factory and `Ataba studio, Fawzy's Pyramids Street villa was also seized, apparently because it contained a recording studio (Farghaly 2000, 39).

Journalists, colleagues, family, and historians all recount Fawzy's shock and anguish when he lost control of Misrphon. While he was offered the position of artistic advisor to the company (a post his nephew Abd al-Latif al-Haww later accepted [Lutfy 2004]), he clearly viewed an advisory role as an indignity, especially due to the modest salary and tiny office it provided, as well as the manner in which the position was offered, and he ultimately refused.<sup>28</sup> Many written sources link the entire painful episode directly to the onset of his illness (A. al-Hakim 1996; Fahmy 1998).

Farghaly writes:

He received the news as he sat in his recording studio in `Ataba; he didn't shake or become angered, but merely said to the person who came to receive the company: 'Welcome, this is for the good of all.' After two days Fawzy went to the head office in `Ataba, as invited by the new director, who was sitting at his desk. Fawzy extended his hand in greeting, but was ignored, and told that he had been made artistic advisor for the company, and directed to his office, which had formerly been used to prepare tea. Fawzy declined this offer, returned to his home, and slept. Then he awoke and felt a pain in his leg, the beginning of his illness which would afflict him for the next five years. (Farghaly 2000, 39–41)

Whether or not Fawzy's illness was actually caused by the seizure of his company, this discursive form, in which affliction directly follows state usurpation of individual economic liberty, and the individual's attempt—at once pathetic and futile—to reconcile individual with state nationalism ("this is for the good of all"), is both forceful and eloquent in mirroring the larger conflict within the field of nationalism. The body of the people is diseased: the embodiment, in the popular imagination, of the destructive oppression inhering in this conflict.

Meanwhile, a state audio recording and publishing project was founded in 1962, under the auspices of the Egyptian General Organization for Cinema, Radio, and Television<sup>29</sup> aiming to produce Quranic, religious, art song, and musical recordings and publish them on phonodiscs, in keeping with the general

aims of the Organization.<sup>30</sup> This project (not yet an independent company) was named *mashru` insha` sharikat al-ustawanat* Sawt al-Qahira (project for establishing the Sound of Cairo record company).<sup>31</sup> Taha Nasr (an electrical engineer who had worked at Egyptian State Radio for several years) was tapped to run it, and sent to RCA in Rome for training (Nasr 2003). Its first Cairo factory, located on the ground floor of the Maspero Radio and TV building, produced flexible plastic records (Ministry of Information 1999, 170). It seems likely that the establishment of this factory followed the initial takeover of Misrphon, whose manufacturing equipment could then have been transferred for this purpose. Following Ministerial Decree 308 (August 13, 1963), requiring the director of Misrphon to report to the chairman of the board of the Egyptian General Organization for Cinema, Radio, and TV (M. Fawzy and Nasr 1964), Misrphon and Sawt al-Qahira were gathered under the same umbrella organization.

On July 28, 1963, Sawt al-Qahira (self-identified in Latin characters as SonoCairo) opened its second factory, for pressing ordinary (nonflexible) records according to the latest technical standards, in Alexandria. Taha Nasr reports that American experts (probably from RCA) arrived to determine the best location for a record factory. Testing air samples from Cairo and Alexandria, they found the latter much cleaner. The factory was therefore founded on the site of a confiscated palace in Alexandria, and design began in 1962. Building started in early 1963 and was completed in 6 months. New equipment was purchased from RCA<sup>32</sup> in the United States, and was assembled and installed in July 1963, with the help of an American engineer, Mr. Clark (Nasr 2003). Ultimately perhaps this factory also redeployed some of Misrphon's recording-pressing equipment from the `Abbasyya factory site, which (sometime after 1969) was retooled for assembling gramophones. The inauguration was conducted by Dr. `Abd al-Qadir Hatim, Assistant Prime Minister of Egypt for Culture and National Guidance. At that time, the factory was the largest of its kind in the entire Middle East and Africa (Ministry of Information 1999).

Until now, the gramophone was a status-bearing fixture of wealthy homes, but too expensive to be widespread. Clearly, record sales were going to be limited by the installed base of playback equipment. Therefore, Taha Nasr pushed Sawt al-Qahira to enter the business of importing, assembling, and selling gramophone equipment at a modest price. In the early 1960s, a gramophone cost 12 LE (about 600 LE in 2006 Egyptian pounds,<sup>33</sup> a reasonable price for a cassette deck today) (Ibrahim 2003–2004). Taha Nasr described this strategy:

... we produced records—ok, these records, how could people hear them? In Egypt in the early 1960s—1960, 61, 62—people still didn't have a musical consciousness [*wa`y musiqi*]—they weren't used to the idea of buying a disc and bringing it home and listening. Why? Because they didn't have the device, the gramophone. So we began to import gramophones of all makes, the parts—and assemble them in Egypt.



We brought in about 100,000, of all makes—from Czechoslovakia, from England . . . a huge number, and of different types: automatic, ordinary, stereo, and so on. We began to sell these devices at a cheap price, because we wanted people to buy gramophones . . . for anyone buying a gramophone would certainly later buy records. (Nasr 2003)

At first the gramophone assembly operation took place in the television building at Maspero, alongside flexible record pressing (*SonoCairo Catalog* 1969), though ultimately it was transferred to the `Abbasiyya factory, originally used by Fawzy for manufacturing records (Ministry of Information 1999). It is possible that Philips, formerly a major manufacturer and distributor of phonodisc playback equipment in Egypt (Akhir Sa`a 1957a) (and worldwide), or its nationalized successor (the Nasr Company) may have played a role in establishing this factory, though details are not readily available. In any case, sources concur that only gramophone assembly—not manufacturing—took place in Egypt, and thus a certain foreign dependency persisted, though the cost of gramophones must have dropped considerably. Later on, after the onset of the cassette era in the 1970s, Sawt al-Qahira began to assemble cassette players as well, though this operation was never as successful, perhaps because in that period of *infitah* capitalism, Sawt al-Qahira could no longer establish a monopoly.

On January 6, 1964, Shirkat Ustawanat Sawt al-Qahira (SonoCairo Phonodisc Company) was founded by Presidential Decree 180 for 1964 as an independent company with its own administration, for the purpose of manufacturing ordinary and flexible phonodiscs, assembling gramophones, producing new content, and doing business with this production (Ministry of Information 1999, *al-Jarida al-Rasmiyya* 1964). Taha Nasr was installed as chairman of the board.

A confidential company document from 1965 listed the following goals: manufacture of records, ordinary and flexible, for trade and export; pressing records for other companies; assembling and trading gramophones, and manufacturing parts if possible; producing songs, artistic products, cultural products, and religious products at the company's own expense as well as for others; exploiting studios for artistic purposes or for others; collaborating with local or foreign companies with the aim of buying or absorbing them (!); establishing branches around Egypt and outside it (Sawt al-Qahira 1965).

On February 4, 1964, upon the signing of a contract between Sawt al-Qahira (represented by Taha Nasr) and Fawzy, the former purchased Fawzy's share of Misrphon, including studios, factories, and offices, for 6,000 LE (M. Fawzy and Nasr 1964).<sup>34</sup> A subsequent financial and equipment audit at the close of fiscal 1964 (June 30) determined that Philips' share was 99,000 LE, while Fawzy's was only 6,000 LE, perhaps due to the latter's responsibility for company debt (Misrphon internal audit 1964).

Why did Fawzy sign such an exploitive contract, thereby relinquishing his labor of love for far less than his original 1957 investment? The answer seems clear. As the *sharik mutadamin* in Misrphon, Fawzy should have retained both control and fiscal responsibility, yet a series of legally binding decrees deprived him of any real power. Fawzy was thus legally burdened with the company's debt, without the benefit of administrative directorship. In the prevailing socialist environment, Fawzy had no hope of contesting these decrees through the courts. In addition, he was by now quite seriously ill.<sup>35</sup>

While the government had already taken *de facto* control of Misrphon in 1962, now they controlled it *de jure*, since Sawt al-Qahira was now the *sharik mutadamin*. Soon afterwards, Sawt al-Qahira bought the *sharik musi* shares from the Nasr Company, and its control of Misrphon was complete (Nasr 2003).

What changed with the shift from Misrphon to Sawt al-Qahira? I posed this question to Mary Lutfy, one of the few employees to have worked continuously at Egypt's record manufacturing company from the Misrphon to the Sawt al-Qahira eras. She told me that the main change was in the scope of operations. With the government behind it, everything increased in size. Misrphon had employed only five or six employees, from its downtown Immobilia Building offices, with Fawzy himself attending to business. Audio recordings were almost wholly dedicated to songs. Sawt al-Qahira's operation was much more extensive, and they began to produce many more kinds of audio products, including educational recordings, and more Qur'anic recitation.

In 1964, Sawt al-Qahira comprised two record production factories: one in Alexandria, and the other the Misrphon factory in `Abbasiyya. Misrphon continued to exist as a separate administrative unit based in their `Ataba studios; activities of the two parallel organizations, each with its own budget, were coordinated by the Central Common Office (al-Maktab al-Markazi al-Mush-tarak) located on Qasr al-Nil Street (Lutfy 2004). After June 30, 1965, the two administrations were combined and the Misrphon studio and factory ceased to retain an independent organizational existence, even nominally (Ibrahim 2003–2004).

However, the little Misrphon retail outlet off 26th July Street had somehow escaped attention of the authorities, perhaps because it was legally separate from Masna` al-Sharq, and—along with the Misrphon offices in the Immobilia Building—has remained the property of the Fawzy family, continuing to sell cassette tapes to the present day.<sup>36</sup>

Despite medical treatments abroad, partly at state expense, Fawzy never recovered his health, though he had spent most of his savings on treatments.<sup>37</sup> His cheerful bravado remained, though now tinged with regret, and palpable

bitterness at how meagerly his country had recognized his broad spectrum of achievements, expressed with defiant resistance and swagger:

I admit that I erred when I directed myself to commercial work—for it took me away from my art . . . I warn all artists against leaving themselves for commercial work—this is my experience . . . I deserve the State Prize, for several reasons: I was the first to present musical revue films, the first to present color films, the first to present religious songs, and the first to establish a record factory. I suggested the “mushaf murattal” and recorded it, and recorded the president’s speeches on disc. I composed the liberation song for Algeria and after their independence it became their national anthem. I’m proud of all this production, besides all my successful songs and new musical ideas. For all this I deserve the State Prize . . . (*al-Kawakib* 1965).

Muhammad Fawzy passed away on October 20, 1966, only 48 years old (A. al-Hakim 1996). His last composition, preceding his death by only 8 months, was a nationalist song, “Umm al-Bilad” (*Nisf al-Dunya* 2000, 134).

Fawzy’s death was widely viewed as symbolic of the oppressiveness of Nasir’s statist socialism. Out of his enormous funeral procession erupted one of the first spontaneous demonstrations against Nasir’s government, which many people blamed as responsible for his demise. According to an eyewitness, police were unable to control the crowds chanting *la ilaha illa Allah! Allahu akbar!* (there is no deity but God; God is greater!) as his casket was carried through all the streets of Cairo (W. al-Hakim 2004). Eight months later, Nasir’s socialist program collapsed with Egypt’s defeat in the Six-Day War.

But Fawzy continued to be remembered primarily on the anniversaries of his passing. A year after his death, in an article entitled “Didn’t he deserve a salute today?”, an Egyptian state newspaper recalled one of Fawzy’s patriotic songs (“Baladi Ahbabtuki Ya Baladi,” “My country, I loved you, my country”) and wondered why he wasn’t more frequently mentioned on state radio and television (*al-Akhbar* 1967). The Arab Music Institute didn’t honor Muhammad Fawzy with a program of his music until the 14th anniversary of his death (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 1980). Two years later, in 1982, the nationalistic magazine *October* recounted Fawzy’s life story, deploring the fact that “He deserves to be remembered, but is too often forgotten . . . on TV and radio” (*Uktubir* 1982). In 1996, several famous musicians even proposed to Safwat al-Sharif, who as Minister of Information oversaw Sawt al-Qahira, that Egypt’s national record company should be renamed for its founder (*al-Kawakib* 1996, 15). This suggestion was never adopted. Indeed, virtually no trace of Fawzy remains in the contemporary company; all his business records appear to have been lost in the transfer from private to public sector.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of Fawzy, Misrphon, and Sawt al-Qahira conceals a pithy irony. In a single move, Fawzy empowered Egyptian artists and the Egyptian public against the injustices and depredations of music monopolies (e.g., Cairophone), foreign business interests (record companies and pressing plants), and the mentality of music-as-business, helping to return control of music production to the artists themselves, and to their own nation. While sacrificing his personal financial well-being to build a modern record-pressing plant may have been a sound business decision, he also aimed (publicly at least) to reduce Egypt's dependence on foreign manufacturing and the export of hard currencies, a strategy he shared with Nasir himself. Yet this seemingly nationalist and populist move, explicitly conceived as such, was cut down in its prime by the ruthless bureaucratic logic and totalitarian aspirations of Nasir's Egyptian socialism. With it went Fawzy himself, who died only 1 year before Nasir's entire social-political program was discredited by the 1967 war.

For Nasir, acquiring the means of recorded audio production provided more than economic control, for he recognized the ideological value of music media very well. Taha Nasr, who remained close to the upper echelons of power in the Ministries of Culture and Information, explained that President Nasir once told Dr. `Abd al-Qadir Hatim that "the record is the ambassador of Egypt throughout the world. When we export records to any country in the world, and they hear our music, they'll know that we are an advanced people (*sha`b mutaqaaddim*)" (Nasr 2003).

Still, the government's motivations for acquiring Misrphon merit some careful contemplation. Oral histories suggest that in the first year of Sawt al-Qahira operations, much (or all) of Fawzy's older Philips equipment (dating from 1958) was supplemented by more modern RCA equipment (Nasr 2003). Ultimately (perhaps in the early 1970s), Fawzy's record-pressing factory was reengineered for gramophone production. If they weren't using Fawzy's hardware, what did the state stand to gain by wresting control of the company from a popular nationalist singer?

Two answers suggest themselves. Nationalization was not simply a means by which the government seized productive capacity, but rather by which it dominated all important production sectors, brooking no competition from the private sector, and establishing itself as a monopoly. In this way the state could eliminate inconvenient constraints imposed by free competition as a force shaping strategies of a public company, which would then be free to pursue goals of the socialist ideology—a freedom particularly important in the information-media business (and a policy followed, until approximately 2002, in television as well). Thus, even if Fawzy's equipment was not used by the state, his operation needed to be shut down.

The second answer is more tentative, though hardly implausible. Arguably, Fawzy's most valuable holdings were not "hardware" but rather "software" or "content" (to use this useful contemporary distinction between material and nonmaterial resources)—not factory, but catalog and, more importantly still, contracts with important artists, most notably Umm Kulthum. Whether or not Sawt al-Qahira legally acquired this material is subject to some debate—at least one contemporary lawyer I spoke with believes they did not, and he has filed a lawsuit challenging their ownership. However, in practice Fawzy's impressive recorded catalog became the core of Sawt al-Qahira's artistic output, and many Misrphon artists continued to record under the new Sawt al-Qahira label. This musical content was not merely lucrative; it also represented a significant segment of Egypt's musical cultural capital. Under state control such capital could be marshaled toward national and state interests.

In the 1960s, Sawt al-Qahira featured an impressively wide array of singer-artists, including Umm Kulthum, 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz (before he began to record exclusively with Sawt al-Fann), Fayza Ahmad, Warda al-Jaza'iriyya, Muhammad Fawzi, Sabah, Layla Murad, Shadia, Nagat, Muhammad Qandil, 'Abd al-'Aziz Mahmud, Nagah Sallam, Su'ad Muhammad, Muharram Fu'ad, Karim Mahmud, Maha Sabry, Huda Sultan, Muhammad 'Abd al-Mutilib, Muhammad al-Kahlawi, Sharifa Fadl, Maher al-'Atta, Shafiq Galal, Su'ad Makkawi, Layla Nazmi, Farid al-Atrash, and Fahd Ballan (from Syria). This musical catalog was acquired from Misrphon, though management continued to produce new songs by some of these artists, whose contracts were deemed to have been inherited, and added others besides.<sup>39</sup>

By far the most important of Misrphon's contracts was the exclusive with Umm Kulthum. After Sawt al-Qahira's "purchase" of Misrphon, the former claimed to have inherited her Misrphon contract and recordings, as well as to have acquired exclusive rights to her earlier recordings through negotiations with the singer herself (Deacon 2000; Ministry of Information 1999).<sup>40</sup> While it is possible that Umm Kulthum willingly cooperated with Sawt al-Qahira, such cooperation is likely to have occurred at state behest, if not coercion. Control over Umm Kulthum was especially important for Sawt al-Qahira, and for the Egyptian state, not only financially (because her great popularity could be translated into profit),<sup>41</sup> but more importantly because of her ideological significance as a symbol of pan-Arabism, and Egypt's importance in the pan-Arab sphere under Nasir's leadership. But state recognition was also to Umm Kulthum's advantage, a reality underscored by the fact that immediately following the Revolution of 1952 her performances were banned from Egyptian Radio on the grounds that she was a Royalist (having sung for the King). Public outcry reportedly caused Nasir himself to order that her voice be restored to the airwaves (Danielson, 1997). For this she may have felt gratitude expressed as loyalty; in any case, the

incident must have impressed upon her the pragmatic importance of cooperating with the new regime.

Indeed her subsequent relationship with Gamal ` Abd al-Nasir and the Egyptian state provided mutual advantages. Working in tandem with state-owned Sawt al-Qahira, the “sound of Cairo,” Umm Kulthum literally became the “voice of Egypt” (Danielson 1997) (and more broadly the “voice of the Arabs”) in an ideological and political sense: Umm Kulthum, her voice, her image, and her songs, monopolized by the state, became potent, affective symbols of Egyptian and pan-Arab nationalism, whose cultural and social capital could be readily exchanged for the economic kind. She sang for the revolution, and throughout the 1960s she stood by President Nasir, holding numerous consciousness- and fund-raising concerts, especially after the 1967 defeat.

As Taha Nasr commented:

... Umm Kulthum's production presented a great advantage in helping the company to be strong, because all of her products were loved, popular from Morocco to the Gulf states. All of her products sold well, and Sawt al-Qahira had a monopoly on all of them. Furthermore, she loved Sawt al-Qahira for nationalistic reasons—it belonged to the state, which she loved. She wanted to make the company strong. . . .

I remember very well the first time I dealt with her in the 1960s. The Egyptian pound was worth a lot then. I gave her a check for 10,000 LE, worth much more today. . . . I went to her house to bring the check. I thought I was bringing her something that would make her happy, smile, thank me. She said “What's that? A check for 10,000 LE? For what? Is the company so rich as to give me 10,000 LE? Keep it and use it to make the company bigger and stronger, and then in the end give me my money.” I mean, she wasn't materialistic at all . . . that was a big sum in those days. This was a big nationalistic gesture. (Nasr 2003)

It is assuredly no coincidence that 1964, the year in which the Egyptian state finally took complete control of Misrphon and in which Sawt al-Qahira was formerly founded as an independent company, was also the year in which Egypt's two greatest musical stars and competitors finally joined forces. In that year, under force of Nasir's personal influence, Umm Kulthum and her erstwhile rival Muhammad ` Abd al-Wahhab collaborated to produce Sawt al-Qahira's first and greatest hit song: “Anta ` Umri” (You Are My Life). The production of this song symbolized Nasir's charismatic stature, helping to boost his popularity from within popular culture while deflecting attention from his political failures abroad—the war in Yemen and the recently broken union with Syria (Amin 2004)—and at home, all of which presaged his larger failure to realize pan-Arab ideology as a political reality. The song also helped establish Sawt al-Qahira's reputation, and became a “golden goose” for the company. According to Taha Nasr, the Sawt al-Qahira factory produced nothing but “Anta ` Umri” for 2 full years—and even so was unable to meet market demand (Nasr 2003).<sup>42</sup>

Sawt al-Fann, the label founded by Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhhab and `Abd al-Halim Hafiz in 1960, was left unscathed by nationalization.<sup>43</sup> Nationalization primarily targeted larger firms and especially those with material productive capacity—equipment, factories, and workers—and significant stores of capital. Sawt al-Fann’s meager capital and its lack of manufacturing or recording facilities may account for its immunity (W. al-Hakim 2004). However, at least one historian believes that `Abd al-Halim Hafiz’s explicit state-oriented nationalism and close personal relation to Nasir and his regime may have protected his investments (al-Gafi 2004).

Muhammad Fawzy was not so lucky. He too was a nationalist, but more independently, less personally connected to the state and its leader than either Umm Kulthum or `Abd al-Halim, and certainly not socialist by nature. According to his son Nabil, Fawzy was simultaneously an ardent patriot, and a capitalist—like that other great hero of Egyptian independence, Tal`at Harb. At the time of the revolution, Fawzy had recorded 17 nationalist songs, and his public discourse—as artist and businessman—was highly nationalistic. But he didn’t found the region’s first modern record factory simply for the sake of the Egyptian nation—it was also intended to be profitable as a capitalist venture (N. M. Fawzy 2004).

Throughout my interviews with key players in the Egyptian music industry, no one ever proposed that Fawzy was targeted by his enemies; rather, he was deemed unfortunate in his timing. But the entire affair remains somewhat enigmatic for critics. As Ayman al-Hakim wrote: “Until now, no one has been able to present an acceptable reason for this decision [to seize his company]. The owner was not feudal, had not inherited from his grandfathers, was not an enemy of the revolution, but rather was among its most enthusiastic supporters” (A. al-Hakim 2003, 24–5).

The logic of the unavoidable clash between popular and state-oriented nationalism in a newly independent country is only impossible to present so long as one shies from calling attention to the contradictions between two forms of nationalism deploying the same nationalist discourse, and the hypocrisies such contradictions imply. The Egyptian state didn’t nationalize industries to liberate the nation from its oppressors, but rather for the sake of power over it. But the irony of an impersonal, ideological statist nationalism—expressed in coldly numbered laws and decrees, and enforced by a ruthless state apparatus backed by force of police and army—steamrolling the more personal, heartfelt, and populist nationalism of a beloved composer-singer, has not been lost on Egyptian critics (al-Nammar 2001).

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> “The Gramophone Company alone recorded more than 14,000 titles of Oriental music before 1910. By 1930, the figure had certainly doubled” (Gronow 1981, 274).

<sup>3</sup> These companies included Edison Phonograph Co. (American, founded 1887); U.S. Gramophone (American, 1894), Columbia (American, 1888); Victor (American, 1901); The Gramophone Company (British, 1898); Deutsche Grammophon (German, 1898); Beka (German, 1903); Odeon (German, 1903); Pathé (French, 1897) (see Gronow 1981, passim; 1983, 55).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Lebanese Baidaphone; see below.

<sup>5</sup> For a lucid discussion of these issues in the Arab world see Hourani (1991, 381ff).

<sup>6</sup> I use this concept of “field” in Bourdieu’s sociological sense (Bourdieu 1985, 724–5).

<sup>7</sup> The sole exception may have been Mechian; I was unable to ascertain whether—and, if so, when—this Egyptian firm ceased record production, or if minimal production continued until Muhammad Fawzy acquired its manufacturing equipment in the mid-1950s (see below).

<sup>8</sup> Two of his sisters also achieved artistic fame: Huda Sultan (Bahiga) and Hind `Allam (Zuzu) (Farghaly 2000, 11).

<sup>9</sup> The Oriental Music Club (Nadi al-Musiqa al-Sharqi) was founded in 1914, under the leadership of *qanun* virtuoso Mustafa Rida, as a center for Arab music activities, including training, composition, performance, and preservation. A few years later, several members proposed the establishment of a formal educational institution for Arabic music. The result was the Oriental Music Institute (Ma`had al-Musiqa al-Sharqi), opened in 1929, and renamed The Royal Arabic Music Institute (al-Ma`had al-Malaki li al-Musiqa al-`Arabiyya) in 1933. This Institute supplanted the Oriental Music Club and continued to be directed by Mustafa Rida until his death in 1950 (El-Shawan 1980, 90, 95).

<sup>10</sup> The trope “able to set even the newspaper to song” was applied to Sayyid Darwish as well (thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out). But even if it should be read as a figurative and hyperbolic cliché, the claim is nevertheless telling as a compliment.

<sup>11</sup> These indices list only songs broadcast on Egyptian Radio.



<sup>12</sup> The first Egyptian musical film was *Unshudat al-Fu'ad* (1932), starring the female singer Nadra, with songs composed by Zakariyya Ahmad. Eighty-nine song films were produced in Egypt during the period 1932–1951, or 17 percent of Egypt's total industry output of 523 films (El-Shawan 1980, 93).

<sup>13</sup> The introduction of color film demonstrates Fawzy's pluck. Color film was expensive, and had to be sent abroad for development. When Fawzy shipped the exposed reels for *al-Hubb fi al-Khatat* to London, they accidentally burned. Rather than abandon the project, he reshot the entire film, and nearly went bankrupt in the process (Bakr 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Around the same time, other Egyptians were also toying with such an idea (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 1956b) though none carried it out. Fawzy was, however, anticipated by at least two foreign operations. Aside from Mechian's small-scale factory, one other company appears to have preceded Misrophone. In EMI's Hayes archive (near London), I located a letter from "ARK," the "Arabic Recording Company" (al-sharika al-'arabiyya li tasjil al-ustawanat) on company letterhead, addressed to EMI and dated December 17, 1954. The letter states that ARK was established in Zeitoun, Cairo, and that it had been pressing Arabic and Greek records for local or Middle Eastern record companies for the last 2 years (i.e., since 1952). The letter offers record-pressing services to EMI, and is signed by ARK's director, one Edward E. Morey; from this name one can safely infer that the company was not under Egyptian management. There is no evidence that EMI accepted the ARK offer, and the actual extent of ARK's Egyptian record operation is unclear. Another Hayes archival document, an English translation of an Italian article entitled "The Record in Egypt" (originally published in *Musica e Dischi*, June 1954, and written by one Antonio Plomaritis, owner of a record shop in Alexandria), states that there are currently no record factories in Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> This was the performing rights organization which later became the Jam'iyyat Huquq al-Mu'allifin wa al-Mulahhinin wa al-Nashirin ("Authors', Composers', and Publishers' Rights Association"), frequently known by its French acronym SACERAU ("Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de la République Arabe Unie"). According to the present administrative director, Mr. Fathi 'Abd al-'Aziz, the first such organization in Egypt was founded by the French in 1945 and led by a French administration until the 1956 Tripartite Aggression against Egypt (the Suez Crisis). Since that time the administration has been wholly Egyptian, although a strong link to France remains: automated processing of performance and sales data are provided by SACEM (Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique) in Paris ('Abd al-'Aziz 2004); SACERAU members automatically join SACEM as well (Castelo-Branco 1987, 40). SACERAU was founded on November 8, 1960, with responsibility for both performance and mechanical reproduction rights (Castelo-Branco 1987, 39). The anachronistic acronym SACERAU is a relic of Egypt's short-lived (1958–1961) union with Syria as the United Arab Republic (UAR; RAU in French).

<sup>16</sup> A hefty sum in those days, equivalent to roughly 1,020,000 LE or about 177,227 USD in 2006 currency.

<sup>17</sup> For Egypt at least, the distinction is of course Mechian's. However, Fawzy's factory may well have been the first technologically advanced, automated, locally owned operation in the region.

<sup>18</sup> Acquisition of this plot of land was not obstacle-free; apparently when Fawzy returned from Germany with his engineers, he found that the local municipality had converted his site into a soccer field! (*al-Ahram* 1957b).

<sup>19</sup> Philips Phonographische Industries (PPI) was founded in 1950 (Bishop 2005). Advertisements in Egyptian publications indicate that Philips was selling three-speed record player “pickups” and European music records by the mid-1950s (*Akhir Sa`a* 1957a).

<sup>20</sup> The Philips representative in Egypt was Musa Haqqi, brother of renowned author Yahya Haqqi (Lutfy 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Though Fawzy never composed a song for her, the two were said to have been friends; later, during his protracted illness, she interceded for him with Nasir himself.

<sup>22</sup> All of the Misrphon discs I acquired in second-hand markets are 45 rpm, 7 inch; though it is possible that Fawzy might have produced other formats as well, most 33 rpm SonoCairo discs appear to date from later periods.

<sup>23</sup> Fawzy romanized “Misrfun” as “Misrphon.”

<sup>24</sup> Fawzy’s relation to the latter was complex. Their fierce competitiveness assumed artistic, financial, and nationalistic dimensions, yet the two were also close friends, who made a point of seeing each other’s films (Bakr 2004). Fawzy occasionally dined with `Abd al-Wahhab and on at least one occasion he stayed at the latter’s beach house at Ra’s al-Bar (*Akhir Sa`a* 1955; *al-Jumhuriyya* 1959). `Abd al-Wahhab ordered his lawyer, Magdi Amrusi (later his partner, along with `Abd al-Halim Hafiz, in the Sawt al-Fann label), to bring a 10,000 LE lawsuit against Fawzy for recording “Nasir” without his permission; after winning an initial decision he invited Fawzy to dinner and asked what he’d do next. “Appeal,” was his reply. `Abd al-Wahhab answered that he didn’t care to win the lawsuit, and indeed he ultimately lost it, since the courts deemed that since `Abd al-Wahhab had deputized SACERAU to manage his compositions, his songs could be rerecorded so long as mechanical royalties were paid as required by law (al-Bandari 1960, 1961). In print, Fawzy once described `Abd al-Wahhab as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” at once the most noble person in the world, and the opposite, someone who too often lived by his reason rather than by his heart (al-Bandari 1957).

<sup>25</sup> All translations from Arabic are by the present author.

<sup>26</sup> The name is conventionally transcribed “Gamal Abdel Nasser,” often merely “Nasser”; in this paper I use the more scientific transliteration “Gamal `Abd al-Nasir,” but also abbreviate as “Nasir.”

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, his films’ songs can be rightly recognized as precursors to the modern “video clip”; single-song excerpts from musical films are broadcast on music video television stations today.

<sup>28</sup> Some sources state that Fawzy refused immediately (A. al-Hakim 1996), but his secretary, Mary Lutfy recounts that he stayed on for several months before resigning (Lutfy 2004).

<sup>29</sup> This institution was the predecessor to the modern ERTU (Egyptian Radio and Television Union). Later cinema was removed from its purview. Egyptian TV first broadcast on July 21, 1960 (Boyd 1999, 38; Ibrahim 2003–2004).

<sup>30</sup> Oral and written sources at Sawt al-Qahira all give the founding year as 1962 without a more specific date. The problem is that according to the text of Presidential Decree

180 of 1964, the Organization was not founded until Presidential Decree 48 of 1963, evidently before April, for in April of that year the board of this Organization decreed the founding of Sawt al-Qahira (*al-Jarida al-Rasmiyya* 1964). These slight discrepancies require further study.

<sup>31</sup> A concise semiotic analysis of the difference between Fawzy's "Misrphon" and the state-sponsored "Sawt al-Qahira" is instructive: "The sound of Egypt" versus "the sound of Cairo" encapsulates the difference between a countrywide distributed populist nationalism on the one hand, and a state-centralized nationalism on the other (inasmuch as Cairo represents Egypt's center of power)—between the inclusive, democratic, heartfelt and idealistic nationalism to which Fawzy publicly aspired, and the more oppressive reality of centralized state domination, economic and political, as expressed in Nasir's rigidly ideological state-enforced nationalism.

<sup>32</sup> Previously (1959) American RCA had also received the contract for establishing Egyptian television (Boyd 1999, 37; Nasr 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Price equivalencies have been calculated using published IMF consumer price index figures for Egypt.

<sup>34</sup> Fawzy retained his apartment in the Immobilia building, where his son Nabil continues to reside. The family also retained the Misrphon retail outlet on 26th of July Street (near Opera Square), which remains in operation as distributor and producers.

<sup>35</sup> The details of his illness are not completely clear. Most sources who were close to Fawzy point to cancer of the blood or bone marrow (leukemia) (Bakr 2004, 14, #114; Farghaly 2000, 41); others claim he suffered from an extremely rare disease that doctors could not identify (al-Gafi 2004), or even that the disease was named after Fawzy himself (al-Nammar 2001).

<sup>36</sup> After Muhammad Fawzy died, Nabil Fawzy, the singer's son, issued the first of what is today a 10-cassette series of Muhammad Fawzy songs on the Misrphon label, a new company using the old Misrphon name, and based in Fawzy's original retail store on 26th of July Street (N. M. Fawzy 2004).

<sup>37</sup> State-sponsored treatments were arranged when Umm Kulthum learned of his condition; she and `Abd al-Wahhab called Dr. `Abd al-Qadir Hatim, who brought the matter to the attention of President Nasir (A. al-Hakim 1996; al-Nammar 2001). However Fawzy also bore medical costs of his disease, and it seems promised financial assistance was not always forthcoming. According to one source he was obliged to pay half of his treatment costs, financed in part by a loan of 700 LE granted to him by SACERAU (*al-Jumhuriyya* 1965). In February of 1965, *al-Akhbar* newspaper announced that he'd travel for treatment in London at state expense (al-Bandari 1965), but in October of that year the same newspaper reported that Fawzy had sent a letter from London informing Taher `Abd al-Latif, the general inspector for the Ministry of the Treasury, of his imminent operation, and requesting alacrity in providing payment and assisting with his wife's expenses (*al-Akhbar* 1965). By the end of his life he had spent most of his funds on treatments (A. al-Hakim 1996, 72–3).

<sup>38</sup> In 1996, his son Nabil entreated "... those responsible to search seriously for the papers of this artist, because we—his family—don't have any of them" (A. al-Hakim 1996, 72–3). I was unable to locate any Misrphon papers despite extensive research throughout the Sawt al-Qahira administration. If this erasure of the individual artist-entrepreneur by

an impersonal process of nationalization and bureaucratization is a significant historical fact in itself, it is also one that makes research extremely difficult.

<sup>39</sup> As a government-held company, Sawt al-Qahira also had the advantage of being able to draw upon the vast Egyptian Radio archive holdings, and ample use has been made of this resource over the years.

<sup>40</sup> This claim is quite controversial. First, according to former EMI executive John Deacon, recordings made by Umm Kulthum on the HMV and Odeon labels starting in the 1920s remained the property of these labels until passing into the public domain in the 1970s; both labels were owned by EMI since its founding in 1931. Umm Kulthum therefore had no rights over these recordings, and they were therefore not hers to transfer to Sawt al-Qahira (Deacon 2000). Second, according to a respected Egyptian lawyer and music producer, Fawzy's sale of his share in the factory did not legally imply transfer of cultural properties held by Misrphon (al-Rifa'i 2004).

<sup>41</sup> Even in 1984, nearly a decade after her death, sales of Umm Kulthum cassettes and LPs provided Sawt al-Qahira with 75 percent of total revenues, according to the company's financial manager at that time (Castelo-Branco 1987, 37).

<sup>42</sup> The song has sold nearly a million cassette copies to date, and typically continues to sell more than 20,000 copies annually (SACERAU SonoCairo sales data 1974).

<sup>43</sup> Sawt al-Fann was formed June 30, 1960, by Muhammad ` Abd al-Wahhab and ` Abd al-Halim Hafiz as equal partners. On April 5, 1967, they were joined by lawyer Magdi Amrusi as a third partner, with a 20 percent share, the remaining 80 percent being split evenly by the original founders (Ministry of Culture 2004). Salwa el-Shawan states that Cairophone was renamed Sawt al-Fann in the 1950s; while it is possible that he transferred his resources from Cairophone to Sawt al-Fann, this could not have happened until later, and in any case Muhammad ` Abd al-Wahhab shared Cairophone with his Lebanese partners.

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