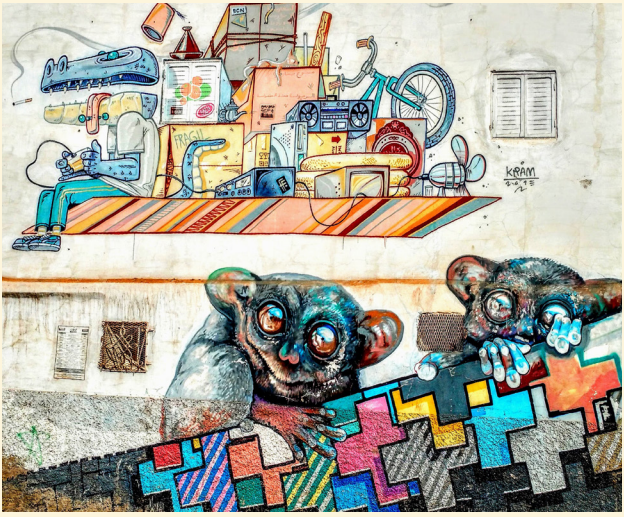
14 Bamberger Orientstudien

Approaches to Arabic Popular Culture

Peter Konerding, Felix Wiedemann, Lale Behzadi (eds.)



University of Bamberg Press

14 Bamberger Orientstudien

Bamberger Orientstudien

hg. von Lale Behzadi, Patrick Franke, Geoffrey Haig, Christoph Herzog, Lorenz Korn, Susanne Talabardon und Christoph U. Werner

Band 14

University of Bamberg Press
2021

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Press
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Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Informationen sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

Herstellung und Druck: Digital Print Group Nürnberg
Umschlaggestaltung: University of Bamberg Press
Umschlagbild: Graffiti, öffentlicher Raum in Marokko. Fotografie © Peter Konerding

ISSN: 2193-3723
ISBN: 978-3-86309-766-0 (Druckausgabe)
eISBN: 978-3-86309-767-7 (Online-Ausgabe)
URN: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-irb-498900
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.20378/irb-49890

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Preface

"Popular culture" is a very ambiguous term, which has been extensively discussed in a variety of disciplines and through many different lenses. Yet, Arabic popular culture is still underexplored and most of the research dealing with it still stands on shaky theoretical ground. This edited volume therefore not only presents a selection of approaches to Arabic popular culture based on a diversity of case studies but equally takes into account manifold theoretical considerations. All articles, in one way or another, deal with popular culture as genre and as practice alike. The lyrics of a song, the narrative in a novel, or the content of a YouTube video place the artefact in a broader context of a negotiation process in which standards, definitions, and canonical questions become object of discussions and power struggles. At the same time, different ways of circulation, reception, and transformation reflect a process of popularization, which rather points at fluid practices than at a static set of genres, shapes, and conditions. Conventional boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture are thus broken; and the specific aesthetics of the artefact gain centrality. If so, is Arabic popular culture a kind of *l'art pour l'art*? Such a hypothesis is certainly too narrow-sighted, but as Andy Warhol once famously declared: "Pop is liking things."[1] In this sense, the artists, authors, and musicians dealt with in this volume as well as their public, readers, and listeners "like" an intriguing kaleidoscope of very different "things," representing the creative vitality and intellectual breadth of today's popular culture in the Arabic-speaking lands.

In her article "The Culture of Laughter in Khayrī Shalabī's Novels" Cristina Dozio analyzes the interplay of popular culture and literature through humor with a focus on satirical literature. By showing how novels integrate and process comical tropes and characters throughout history, she addresses the understanding of popular culture on different levels. The

[1] Geiger, A. "Pop als Ästhetik? Zum Angriff auf die Gattungsgrenzen in Kunst und Populärkultur." In *Zeitgeschichte-online*, edited by Á. von Klímo and J. Danyel, April 2006. Accessed November 2, 2018. https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/thema/pop-als-aesthetik. Warhol's idea is equally quoted as "Pop art is a way of liking things," see McCarraher, E. *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019, 573.

close reading stresses the aspect of popular culture as a collective experience, shifting between local and global points of reference. She furthermore points at popularization as a practice of appropriation by juxtaposing communities, characters, backgrounds, and habits. Familiar patterns are thus unsettled and new identities and counter narratives created.

Kurstin Gatt's article "Popularising the Political: Jihadi Chants as a Popular Medium of Communication in Jihadi Circles" investigates both why and how jihadi chants are used by the "Islamic State" organization as a medium to spread its political messages. Gatt achieves this through analyzing style, content, and intertextuality of this oral literature genre in detail by scrutinizing its appeal grounded in popular traditional practices. He interprets jihadi chants as popular because of their accessibility and catchiness, their contemporaneity and political engagement, and because of their roots in Islamic traditions.

Gisela Kitzler's article "Conceptualizing *mahraganāt* – a Popular Egyptian Music Genre" takes a closer look at a recent appearance of musical performance. *Mahraganāt* are a genre as well as a way of festive gathering, which Kitzler contextualizes historically and within the contemporary musical landscape in Egypt. By presenting the discourse around this phenomenon, she shows how the framework of popular culture serves as a distinguishing criterion. The article furthermore discusses the role of social class, language, and generation, as well as it sheds light on the matter of popular culture as struggle for recognition.

Felix Wiedemann's article "Negotiating Languages in an Arab(ic) Rap Music Fan Community" is a case study about language and script use in an online community dealing with Arab(ic) rap music. In this community, fans transcribe, annotate and discuss rap lyrics in a variety of languages. They use different writing systems ranging from Arabic over a Latin-arithmographemes-mix to purely Latin script. Against a background of observations on the fans' reasons for language and script choices, Wiedemann discusses the usefulness of understanding the term "popular culture" as "counter culture," an expression frequently employed in research on hip hop culture and, more generally, within the field of Arabic studies.

Sabrina Zahren's article "Saudische YouTube-Influencer und globaler Konsens" analyzes Saudi Arabian YouTube influencers, which are a very good example for an understanding of popular culture as industrially produced mass culture. These influencers are marketed through professionally organized multi-channel-networks. Their videos feature a balanced mixture between well-known pop-cultural elements with regard to style and content – what Zahren calls a "pool of consensus" – and the YouTubers' display of individuality providing them with authenticity, the scene's "currency." It is this mélange of advertising clip aesthetics and faked grassroots amateurism, which appeals to their millions of viewers and makes them welcome tools for the neoliberal marketing industry.

Last, but not least, Peter Konerding's introduction "Arabic Popular Culture and the Idea of 'Pop'" gives this volume its theoretical frame. Konerding summarizes the current state of research on Arabic popular culture by focusing on the term's definition in influential works of scholarship. In the process, he criticizes their prevalent focus on societal categorizations and the hitherto lack of the aesthetical approaches to pop in Arabic culture. Addressing this issue, he introduces conceptual considerations adopted from American and British pop art as well as German *Popliteratur* to the discourse and discusses their applicability to the Arabic context.

It is these theoretical questions and considerations that motivated us to organize an international colloquium on "Arabic Popular Culture" at the University of Bamberg on May 5–6, 2017. Contributions to the colloquium dealt with different phenomena including music, literature, and art. In its closing discussion, we talked about our different approaches to the term 'Arabic popular culture,' how we understood the concept, and what this meant with regard to our research. The opinions varied from questioning the usefulness of the term altogether over approaches focusing on the phenomenon's potential for resistance and subversion, to approaches zooming in on its mass appeal or on its aesthetics. This edited volume is meant to take up where we left the discussion in Bamberg.

It is the result of the efforts of a diverse range of involved people: We wish to extend our gratitude to both the participants in the colloquium and the contributors to this volume for their input, commitment, and the fruitful

spoken and written discussions. Furthermore, we are much obliged to the Editorial Board of the Bamberger Orientstudien and the University of Bamberg Press for accepting this volume in their series. We especially thank our editorial assistant Lisa Schor as well as our colleague Safinaz Saad for their meticulous work, proofreading skills, and helpful general support.

Peter Konerding, Felix Wiedemann, and Lale Behzadi

Bamberg, February 2021

Arabic Popular Culture and the Idea of 'Pop'

Peter Konerding

Abstract

Arabic Popular Culture has been an object of academic curiosity in many fields of study, such as literature, anthropology, or sociolinguistics. Within the context of Near Eastern and North African cultural history, the concept has often been left undefined or has been limited to societal practices of the so-called lower classes. Accordingly, it has been described as standing in opposition to the prestigious artistic and intellectual production of more fortunate and powerful circles. This understanding is comprehensible but ignores phenomena of popular culture which cannot be meaningfully explained by societal categorizations only. Examples include American and British pop art as well as German *Popliteratur*. These art movements have repercussions on the comprehension of popular culture itself and may act independently from social boundaries.

Hence, this article discusses some aspects of recent studies on Arabic popular culture and explores the possibilities of extending its theoretical framework to aesthetical considerations. By taking into account pop art and *Popliteratur*, it concludes: Arabic 'pop' has emancipated itself from the conceptual limitations of a merely sociopolitical definition.

Keywords: popular culture, pop, pop culture, pop art, *Popliteratur*, theory of pop, Arabic studies

1 Popular Culture within Arabic Studies

Popular culture has always been central to the study of the Arabic speaking parts of the Middle East and North Africa. One of the finest and earliest examples of the interest popular artefacts have generated among orientalist scholars are without a doubt the folk tales of the *Arabian Nights*.[1] Antoine Galland's adaptive translation based on the Arabic and Ottoman manuscripts[2] available to him initiated a stunning literary movement of creative writing, collecting, and translating[3] which has also lead to the anthology's enormous popularity in the Western world today and thus represents a scholarly debate and a general interest spanning over three centuries. Walt Disney's blockbuster movie *Aladdin* is just one example of how even modern entertainment has been artistically inspired by the *Nights*' 'oriental' content and the ways in which it has heavily profited from it financially.

One might wonder if these remarkably profane circumstances have led to a discussion about the framing of Arab cultural production from a wider theoretical perspective. For example, modern variations of, and debates about, the infamous *Kulturindustrie*, as conceptualized by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in 1944, could constitute a meaningful starting point for an academic endeavor of the kind. Yet, the idea of popular culture as employed by most arabists and historians of the MENA-region does not seem to have taken part in the conceptual development regarding the modern entertainment industry. Rather, they have focused on definitions of popular culture, which simply see it as the cultural practice of a certain fragment of society; namely, the so-called lower classes as opposed to the highly valued court culture or – with regard to more recent times – the intellectual elite.[4] Boaz Shoshan's *Popular Culture in Medieval*

[1] An interesting side effect of the *Nights*' characterization as a rather unsophisticated piece of popular literature is Johann Heinrich Voß' German translation of Galland's French version in the late 18th century: Voß is said to have been less accurate in it compared to his famous translations of Homer due to the bourgeois and popular public envisaged. See Montandon, 2005, 94–95.

[2] For a detailed study of the complex manuscriptal history, see Marzolph, 2020.

[3] *Cf.* Duggan, 2020.

[4] A notable exception is Richard Jacquemond's and Frédéric Lagrange's recently published edited volume *Culture pop en Égypte. Entre mainstream commercial et contestation*. Paris: Riveneuve éditions, 2020.

Cairo is an excellent specimen of this approach. In the introduction to her historical study, she refers to Shorter (1974) and Gurevich (1999) amongst others, and discusses several questions concerning the conceptualization of popular culture:

> With whom should popular culture be associated? Was it the culture of the oppressed classes (as Marxist historians would claim)? Or was it rather the culture of the illiterate? For them popular culture is the culture of the poor, the rural, the subordinated, the laity, the illiterate, and so on. A second question: was popular culture created by the people or for them? The best answer seems to be that both possibilities apply. But in that case the implication is that popular culture, at least to some extent, depends on a dominant culture. Popular culture thus suffers from the ideological imprint of a 'higher,' learned culture, and its existence as a separate entity is doubtful.[5]

This comparatively narrow approach, constrained by questions of societal strata and their treatment within the historical discourse, may seem conservative in the eye of today's scholars of Arab culture and the breadth of their theoretical repertoire. Indeed, Shoshan herself continues by presenting serious doubts about her own reasoning because of its supposedly vague conceptual basis.[6] She nonetheless contents herself by defining popular culture as cultural practice of "those socially inferior to the bourgeoisie; hence, supposedly also illiterate, at least by and large"[7] and even refutes the idea of any further theoretical inquiry by quoting the scholar of religion H. C. Erik Midelfort.[8] Still, Shoshan shows an awareness of theoretical questions within her respective field which happened to be rare at the time of its publication. Even today, as will be discussed below, most approaches to popular culture within an Arab context cannot be compared to the respective conceptual debates in the humanities as a whole.

Admittedly, a positivist view of any intellectual endeavor considered to be worth undertaking has long been the dominating stratagem within Arabic studies – be it in Germany or elsewhere. Furthermore, it continues to be so in many instances, albeit less openly than in the aforementioned

5 Shoshan, 1993, 6.

6 See *ibid.*, 7.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*: "'Theologians, after all, can worship together even if they disagree bitterly in the lecture halls.'"

example. This is true, for instance, with regard to much of the postcolonial debate on modern Maghrebi literature, a field largely overlooked by today's scholars of Arabic culture. It is mainly within the departments of Romance languages and cultures that this particular region and its literary production is dealt with against the backdrop of postcolonial theory. German and Western arabists have mostly stayed silent about the issues involved in this venture. Thus, the sparse studies and research projects dealing with Arabic literature in the Maghreb can by no means compare to the theoretical repercussions generated by scholars of its francophone equivalent. This tendency has less to do with an unwillingness to engage in theoretical discourse, than with the lack of human and financial resources departments of Arabic studies usually face. Even in comparison with other fields of traditional scholarship in the arts and humanities – such as the Romance languages and literatures mentioned above –, their academic productivity is thus severely constrained.[9]

The analysis of popular culture *per se* is an area which cannot thrive but within the context of a larger conceptual debate. As the example of Medieval Cairo's history shows, even in a 'safe space' of philologically based, almost positivist reasoning, "some words should be said about [it]."[10] What was already true in the 1990's studies of Arab history is certainly so today and with regard to research on the contemporary cultural phenomena, this volume intends to investigate. So what are the concepts and ideas about Arabic popular culture, which have been discussed so far and despite the manifold material difficulties the field faces? The following exemplification might give a first insight into an increasingly vivid research area.

[9] Bamberg University, for instance, has a department of Romance Languages and Literatures possessing seven full-time professorships. The Institute of Oriental Studies, located at the same university, similarly consists of seven full-time professorships. But whereas the faculty of the first-mentioned deal with either literature, linguistics, or the culture of the Romance-speaking lands and communities, the researchers of the institute of Oriental studies work in fields as divergent as Jewish and Muslim religion, Islamic art history and archaeology, general linguistics, and the history, literature, and culture of the entire Islamicate world. This might be seen as interdisciplinary strength – or simply as the result of structural underfunding.

[10] Shoshan, 1993, 6.

No academic publication about aspects of Arabic popular culture can ignore Walter Armbrust's groundbreaking monograph *Mass culture and modernism in Egypt*, published in 1996 and its follow-up edited volume *Mass mediations. New approaches to popular culture in the Middle East and beyond*, published four years later. The author delivers one of the most comprehensive accounts of mass entertainment as cultural expression of the Egyptian populace so far. Apart from irrevocably establishing modern popular culture as a subject worth investigating within the sphere of North African and Middle Eastern studies, Armbrust seemingly takes more care in discussing his theoretical approach and by showing a greater interest in the conceptual framework than for example Shoshan and most of her colleagues working on Arabic cultural history at the time.[11] This might be due to the author's thorough anthropological background[12] and is especially interesting in respect of his interdisciplinary point of view. A contemporary review of Armbrust's 1996 monograph rightly forecasts an "increasing pressure"[13] on literature scholars who might need "to understand the popular context of high culture production and its use by the masses of university students, who are one of the main audiences for literature and art."[14] As the reviewer correctly observes, the very concept of culture itself "must be broadened beyond the anthropologist's familiar sense of custom and tradition, as well as beyond the arabist's corpus of high literature and art."[15] Armbrust's thesis as such concentrates on the sociopolitical consequences and the crisis of modernity resulting from his analysis of mass media and entertainment.[16] He mainly relies on the interpretation of visual culture such as cinema, theater, or advertising as well as music. Additionally, he dedicates some attention to the

[11] Armbrust's thoughts on the Cairo-based music scene and its connections to global tendencies illustrate this: "To label these practices 'local' in distinction to the sort of globalization manifested in the 'world music awards' [Egyptian TV program of 1997] collapses a whole range of analytic possibilities to the point of insignificance – including the possibility that in Egypt the nation-state is still (or perhaps in some ways more than it had been in the recent past) a potent player in the construction of musical taste and musical habits." Armbrust, Introduction, 2000, 20.

[12] Armbrust obtained both his master's and PhD degrees in this discipline.

[13] Starrett, 1999, 504.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Armbrust, 1996, 146, Starrett quotes the passage as being crucial to Armbrust's core thesis, 1999, 504.

sociolinguistic situation in Egypt, carefully avoiding any advocacy for existing linguistic models.[17] Everything Armbrust deals with in his study is related to class issues and therefore scrutinized from a sociological and anthropological perspective.

In accordance with this focus, he commences his introduction to the more recent edited volume by accentuating the decisive role popular culture can play "in defining the scale and character of social interaction in the Middle East."[18] What might be called a positivist agenda of pre-1990 orientalist scholarship, intended to explain the region 'as it is,' – or rather –, 'as it was' to the interested academic audience in the West, has thus been modified by the concentration on a more specialized object of study: the society. As strikingly unusual as it might seem (from today's perspective) to call this subject matter 'specialized'; within Arabic studies, it may be considered revolutionary: the epistemological change came along with new sociological and philosophical theories that have not left the field ever since.

Armbrust is certainly not the only and not the first one to introduce these societal issues as focus points of a new kind of philology-based area studies. This movement has been large and groundbreaking. In Germany for example, Verena Klemm has extensively written on literary engagement ("iltizām") in the Arab world. According to Klemm, this dominating literary school of the 1950s and 1960s propagated an understanding of fictional literature as "derived from dialectical materialism"[19] and only comprehendible "in terms of reference to society."[20] By largely focusing on the influence of French existentialist ideas on leftist literary circles in the Arab Mashreq, namely those of Sartre,[21] the scope of Klemm's analysis is

[17] Armbrust is well aware of the fact that the different uses of modern standard Arabic and the colloquial registers might overlap, depending on communicative settings and social groups: "'Colloquial' and 'classical' can function as both markers of taste and as measurable phenomena. This is why colloquial poets can sometimes be considered 'eloquent,' and why a professor of folkloric studies must take care not to blur the line between the potentially vulgar nature of his subject matter and the civilizing and modernizing mission of the institution in which it is taught," 1996, 51–52.

[18] Armbrust, Introduction, 2000, 1.

[19] Klemm, 2000, 52.

[20] *Ibid*.

[21] See *ibid*., 51.

thoroughly anchored in what can be called sociopolitical historiography. She describes the beginnings, the expansion, and the problems the famous Lebanese journal *al-Ādāb* faces during the timespan ranging from the end of World War II to the Lebanese Civil war in the 1980's. The main landmarks structuring her account are thus political turning points, such as "the loss of Palestine,"[22] the Egyptian revolution,[23] or the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1968,[24] around which the intellectual debate in *al-Ādāb* (and the Arab literary scene as a whole) largely circulated. Of course, and that becomes very clear in Klemm's argumentation, this debate has never merely been an office of commenting and judging history after it has happened. Arab intellectuals and writers have engaged with their societies of origin in many different ways and from many different ideological perspectives, –often grounding the path to political developments not foreseen by the general public– just as intellectuals have done and continue to do in Western countries. But, and with regard to the fact that Klemm introduces nothing less than the perspective of French existentialism to the field of Arabic studies in Germany, the concentration on sociopolitical history –as obvious as it might seem in the light of Sartre's very political ideas about literature– is remarkable. The introduction of theory goes along with a special (yet, of course, legitimate) interest for political history. Aesthetic conceptualizations, so it seems, become somewhat less important and are mainly dealt with when they express demands for political action or at least a clear ideological positioning.

What is noteworthy concerning the aim of a better understanding of Arabic popular culture and the research dealing with it, is the striking resemblance between Armbrust's and Klemm's theoretical approaches to Arab art. Although discussing two apparently opposite phenomena, the lucrative entertainment of the masses on the one hand and the sophisticated intellectual debate in existentialist literary circles on the other, they share a focus on political history. Strictly speaking, they do not leave the interpretative scope established by Shoshan almost a decade earlier and within a different academic discipline – Medieval Middle Eastern history. This area has traditionally, and in contrast to the study of the region's manifold

[22] Klemm, 2000, 54.
[23] See *ibid.*, 56.
[24] See *ibid.*, 57.

literary traditions, given much more attention to the political than to aesthetical expressions of the cultures and societies with which it is concerned.[25]

This dualism in the study of literary high culture and popular culture of Arab societies continues in further studies. For example, Andrew Hammond's monograph *Pop Culture in North Africa and the Middle East: Entertainment and Society* (2017) focuses as much on sociopolitical analysis as it lacks an aesthetic conceptualization of the cultural artefacts it explores. Thus, in the introduction to his book he gives a detailed account of the recent political history of the Arab lands providing the backdrop for debates on Arab identity and the struggle for societal modernization.[26] An equally detailed conceptualization of pop culture in its own right is missing. This is partly due to the fact that Hammond's study follows the educational purposes of the book series in which it has been published.[27] Partly though, and from the prospective of literary scholarship, the extensive chapters on contemporary fiction writing, cinema, or music – amongst other aspects of cultural production – put an interesting light on this sociopolitical approach: a comprehensive overview of these art forms on the mere backdrop of political history is difficult to imagine within the context of Western cultures and societies. The German concept of *Popliteratur*, albeit narrowly intertwined with the political, is a significant counterexample and will be dealt with further down. Before that, it seems worthwhile to look at a study dealing with the end of *iltizām*, namely Andreas Pflitsch's introduction to the edited volume *Arabische Literatur, postmodern*, which investigates modern Arabic literature in view of postmodern theory. The problem of the post-*iltizām* literature seems to be clear: the secure political anchorage has gone and so have the possibilities of analyzing literary artefacts from this perspective. Instead of further investigating the new intellectual distance to the seemingly unambiguous political ideologies of the past however, instead of modifying the theoretical approach based on new literary evidence, postmodern Arabic art is

[25] The history of Islamic art and archaeology is of course concerned with the study of exactly these phenomena. Nonetheless, it has developed into an independent academic discipline. It is institutionally separated in a similar way Western art history is from general history.

[26] See Hammond, 2017, XXIII–XLII.

[27] See *ibid.*, XI.

described as profoundly political: it only refrains from ideology at a first glance. Thus, it becomes equally understandable through the analysis of recent political history and without further in-depth contextualization of its aesthetics. Pflitsch argues unmistakably:

> That a profoundly political seam may be entwined with postmodernist aesthetics is evident in most of the work presented in this volume. [...]. On the contrary: the postmodernist skepticism voiced in these works against any claims of absoluteness and one-dimensional explanations, amidst the clamor of Middle East political ideologies on the one hand and religious self-assurance on the other, is highly political.[28]

Although exclusively concerned with literary high culture and its manifold formal and aesthetical implications, Pflitsch is not willing to abandon the political framework as core argument within his approach to literary interpretation. According to this view, the political indeed constitutes a necessary precondition for a meaningful approach to modern Arabic literature. In this regard, his perspective effectively resembles Hammond's idea of popular culture just in the same way Armbrust's research on mass entertainment shows surprising parallels to Klemm's study of engaged literature.

Within Arabic studies, the framing of popular culture as a fundamentally political practice culminates in its definition as power struggle against mainstream culture and sees it as "a form of cultural resistance and intervention."[29] This view though depends on the hierarchical dichotomies between 'high' and 'low' culture it actually intends to deconstruct. To demonstrate this, I will briefly reflect on Walid El Hamamsy's and Mounira Soliman's introduction to one of the most recent and most detailed studies on the subject, namely *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa. A postcolonial Outlook*. Inspired by the Birmingham School, El Hamamsy and Soliman part from the idea that there is a general suspicion against the popular arts in the MENA-region. They see

[28] Pflitsch, 2010, 19. The original German version slightly differs from its English translation: "Dass sich ein zutiefst politischer Anspruch mit postmoderner Ästhetik verbinden lässt, zeigt sich am Werk der meisten hier vorgestellten Autoren [...]. Im Gegenteil ist die in diesen Werken zum Ausdruck kommende postmoderne Skepsis gegenüber jedwedem Absolutheitsanspruch und eindimensionalen Erklärungsmustern im Getöse nahöstlicher politischer Ideologien einerseits und religiöser Selbstgewissheit andererseits hoch politisch." Pflitsch, 2004, 18, *cf.* Konerding 2019, 124.

[29] El Hamamsy & Soliman, 2013, 7.

artefacts, their producers, and their consumers as either part of an elitist intellectual circle – and as such of a socially valued 'high' culture –, or as representatives of the stigmatized cultural expression of the masses, – the 'low' culture –, which is in addition often accused of undermining the society by uncritically adopting hegemonic Western art forms.[30] They then take a stand against this presumption:

> Instead of such narrow and exclusivist categorizations, we argue that much border crossing can and does occur between mainstream and popular culture. For despite individual differences and levels of educational sophistication, social background, and artistic habituation, reality shows that many consumers of so-called 'high culture' equally consume and enjoy forms of popular culture that allegedly fall in a lesser position on the cultural ladder.[31]

Apart from the fact that it is unclear how the respective behavior is being examined and on what ground it can be assumed what consumers do or do not, there is another problem within this argument, that many definitions of popular culture face. If the so-called high culture does not actually exist and if there are no true categorical boundaries between 'high' and 'low,'[32] how can popular culture be described as "constantly attempting to cross that border imposed and protected by mainstream culture to seep into a more legitimate area wherein it can gain more recognition and validity"?[33] It is obvious that the "resistance"[34] El Hamamsy and Soliman present as corner stone of their conceptualization needs something or someone it can oppose. Borders cannot be crossed if they have never been installed. Yet, the definition of 'the other side' is based on exactly the same logic as the bias against popular culture people in Middle Eastern and North African societies – supposedly – cultivate. The authors, referring to

[30] See El Hamamsy & Soliman, 2013, 2–3.

[31] *Ibid.*, 3.

[32] Interestingly – and in opposition to Armbrust –, the authors see the functionally differentiated language use in the Arab world as a clear-cut phenomenon: "There is a distinction in Arabic between classical Arabic, a written variety of Arabic considered standard and widely understood across the Arab world, and colloquial Arabic, local variants of dialects spoken in each country and understood among its people. Though classical Arabic is the official language used in all written transactions and official documents, many do not perceive it as their mother tongue–a language they do not acquire before school age and upon whose acquisition they do not use in their daily lives," 13–14. Especially the last two observations have been empirically questioned; see Albirini, 2016, 33–34.

[33] El Hamamsy & Soliman, 2013, 3–4.

[34] They do so by referring to Stuart Hall's "Dialectic of Cultural Struggle," *ibid.*, 2.

Stuart Hall, try to solve this problem by defining the 'popular' as constant struggle against the dominant culture and as independent from the artefacts' "intrinsic qualities."[35] A glimpse on the cultural practices their edited volume actually deals with though, is revealing: There is rap, there is hip-hop and there is Algerian rai. There are movies, photo-tattoos, and TV-programs as well as comic serials, best-selling novels, and – modernity *oblige* – the new media.[36] These art forms and mass media are suspiciously close to what is generally considered to be the cultural practices of the masses (with the notable exception of photo-tattoos), be it today or twenty years ago or be it in the MENA-region or in the West. The boundaries between 'high' and 'low' seem to be rather intact, and what is 'low' is – according to El Hamamsy and Soliman – the opposite of what Arabic societies wrongly hold in high esteem. Without the artefact's "intrinsic qualities" it seems, this definition of popular culture becomes some sort of circular reasoning. Of course, the volume does deliver many insightful in-depth case studies on numerous aspects of Arabic popular culture and its political and societal entanglements. Why, however, the insistence on the arbitrariness of the artistic product? Emphasizing the role of political developments and the sociological backdrop of interpretation is legitimate and important, as it leads to a better understanding of social practices. Making them the sole approach to modern Arabic culture though, as Western scholarship often does, unnecessarily reduces the analytical scope and overlooks many of the effects any work of art might produce. In the following, I will therefore explore a different perspective, inspired by what is generally called 'pop.'

2 'Pop' as a Concept

In other literary and artistic traditions 'pop' has come to denote an aesthetic concept on its own. This is especially true for two rather specific cultural movements: American pop art and German *Popliteratur*. In the following, I will briefly describe these two phenomena and then try to examine the theoretical basis they share.

[35] El Hamamsy & Soliman, 2013, 3.
[36] See *ibid.*, IX–XI.

2.1 American and British Pop Art

Pop Art emerged in the 1950's in the United States and Great Britain. According to the MoMA's simple and concise definition, pop artists "[...] began to look for inspiration and materials in their immediate environment. They made art that mirrored, critiqued, and, at times, incorporated everyday items, consumer goods, and mass media messaging and imagery."[37] This new phenomenon thus got its name from its "intended popular appeal and [...] engagement with popular culture[38]."[39]

The practices of reusing and reproducing in an almost industrial fashion are at the core of the pop project. Concerning one of the most prominent figures of the movement, Andy Warhol, Priya Wadhera delivers an intriguing study with regard to these procedures as she deals with the famous artist's work. In her book chapter "The Copy in Warhol: Imitation, Enumeration, and Death" she quotes the artist's response to a question of the art critic and journalist David Bourdon, which exemplifies some basic issues of the theoretical framework of pop art. Bourdon wants to know the difference between Warhol's paintings and its sources, whereas the artist replies provocatively, that there is none.[40] Warhol's reply might be seen as the most radical definition of pop art as being fundamentally unoriginal. Wadhera, on the contrary, significantly modifies this idea by describing the artist's copying techniques as "altering the original in myriad ways"[41] and goes on by exploring some of his procedures in detail. Regarding his first works, for example, she points out to "stencils cut from a photograph and photographs of actual cans."[42] These involve motives such as Coca-Cola bottles and Campbell's soup cans, for which Warhol

[37] MoMA Learning, n.d.

[38] Defining pop art by the term 'popular' should not be understood as tautology. Whereas pop art refers to an art movement and its works, popular culture describes the social practices of non-ruling classes as a whole. (*cf.* chapter 1, 8, FN 6.)

[39] MoMA Learning, n.d.

[40] "'B: But for all your copying, the paintings come out differently than the model, because you have changed the shape, size and color. W: But I haven't tried to change a thing! [. . .] B: You don't mean to say that otherwise you have copied the picture exactly. It is so identifiable as your work. [. . .] W: I haven't changed a thing. It's an exact copy,'" Wadhera, 2017, 173.

[41] *Ibid.*, 174.

[42] *Ibid.*

later became famous.[43] Apart from evoking the usual display of these items in "their rightful home: a grocery store"[44] and thus hinting at their "quotidian nature,"[45] Warhol manages through this technique to create the "paradoxical effect of aggrandizing and minimizing the subject"[46] at the same time. The items become "icon[s],"[47] yet lose their meaning, their "significance."[48]

It does not need much imagination to understand that even this episodic example of a single analysis of a certain pop art technique might have far-reaching consequences for any kind of interpretation intended. What does it mean if a Coca-Cola bottle is reproduced, altered, represented, magnified, canonized and belittled 'at the same time'? The sheer endless possibilities of exploration despite the image's concreteness are arguably part of the reason for Warhol's (and others') success with critics and public alike. Yet, in order to start thinking about them in a meaningful way, there has to be a thorough contemplation of form and its immediate aesthetic implications, just as Wadhera demonstrates here. Of course, that does not mean to exclude sociopolitical readings. Wadhera herself maintains that Warhol seeks to "eradicate long-established hierarchies in the realm of art and society"[49] by "elevating [...] the status of Everyman and eradicating strict social strata."[50] Nonetheless, such an interpretation of the artefact depends at least as much on its structure, its form, and its reception as these elements depend on the surrounding social reality. Given this example, the concept of pop art can have repercussions for popular culture as a whole, even if looked at from a non-aesthetical angle.

2.2 Popliteratur

A second example of a rather formal conceptualization of popular culture based on an aesthetical approach is the German *Popliteratur*. In opposition to the Arab context, this literary genre has almost exclusively been

[43] See Wadhera, 2017, 174.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*, 176.
[50] *Ibid.*

studied from the perspective of German literary theory and criticism. As such, its main features may be summarized as follows: the multimedia-staging of its authors, the manifold references to pop music and pop culture,[51] the archiving of brand names, and, more generally speaking, an aesthetics of the superficial.[52] Again and similarly to the conceptualization of the worldlier Anglo-Saxon invention of pop art, it is the artefact itself which creates the aesthetic response leading to the categorization of this aspect of popular culture. The sociopolitical dimension of *Popliteratur* evolves as much from the respective texts themselves as the texts can (but by no means have to) be read on the backdrop of their social and historical environment with the aim of understanding it better. Other focal points such as language, style, emotional effects, or the specific literary techniques of archiving certain aspects of popular culture, –albeit inspired by the sociopolitical phenomenon of industrial production–, may lead to manifold dimensions of existence. Politics and society are just two of those.

This can be observed, among many other texts, in a novel such as *Faserland* by Christian Kracht, a Swiss author and journalist notorious for his adventurous and international lifestyle and the controversial debates his oeuvre has caused among literary critics in German-speaking central Europe. *Faserland* has been interpreted by many and in many ways – some of which see it as generational turning point and primary example of *Popliteratur*.[53] The book is about the journey of a rich nameless protagonist in his late twenties who travels from the beaches of the northern-German island of Sylt (sometimes called the 'German Riviera') to Zurich in Switzerland. On his way, he witnesses the excessive sex parties and drug abuse of Germany's *jeunesse dorée* without really getting involved himself. Perhaps the most striking resemblance to Andy Warhol's staging of branded consumer goods is the narrator-protagonist's obsession with brand names and fashion labels. His ostentatiously worn Barbour-jacket has become a veritable *Leitmotiv* of the critic's approaches to the novel and is

[51] Again, explaining pop through pop should not be understood as mere tautology (*cf.* FN 38). Simply, *Popliteratur* is defined here by the influence of historically prior pop movements in the fine arts and music.

[52] See Degler & Paulokat, 2008, 8–14.

[53] *Cf.* Baßler, 2002, 110–111.

nowadays a frequently used metaphor in the discourse around *Popliteratur*. Heinz Drügh, for instance, interprets a comment about the supposedly liberating effect of *Faserland*'s apparent disapproval of left-wing political mainstream ideas by another German pop author of the same generation, Florian Illies, in this sense: There is more relevance to picking a blue or a green Barbour-jacket than to deciding for which political party to vote.[54]

Of course, the apparent rejection of the political cannot simply be called 'apolitical.' Indeed, it may lead (and has led)[55] to many kinds of sociological or historical interpretations. Yet again, it is the structural surface of the artefact, – a brand name –, which is central to its understanding. Reading this as a critique of society is a possible next step – albeit and arguably a dispensable one.

To my knowledge, not much has been written about the aesthetics underlying the given examples of both pop art and *Popliteratur* in such a way, that a single artistic concept and its connection to popular culture become tangible. One notable exception though is Annette Geiger's article "Pop als Ästhetik? Zum Angriff auf die Gattungsgrenzen in Kunst und Populärkultur," whose main ideas are summarized in the following sub-chapter.

2.3 Geiger's Idea of 'Pop'

Geiger considers pop to be an ideology breaking the boundaries between *high* and *low*, resulting in the rejection of any belief in human progress. It is open to new industrial products and its aesthetics because there is no progress to be made by any kind of critical engagement in the arts:

> Despite Kant, Goethe, humanistic education, democracy, women's suffrage etc., the 20th century has made use of its incredible technical, political, and economic progress for nothing but a previously unknown level of destruction and an equally singular genocide.[56]

[54] See Drügh, 2019, 153. Drügh refers to the German political mainstreem parties CDU and SPD.

[55] See Hausladen & Gerber, 2017, whose edited volume is a good example in this regard.

[56] Geiger, 2006, 9. The German original reads: "Trotz Kant, Goethe, humanistischer Erziehung, Demokratie samt Frauenwahlrecht etc. hat das 20. Jahrhundert seinen ungeheuren technischen, politischen, wirtschaftlichen Fortschritt letztlich nur dafür eingesetzt,

To exemplify her point, Geiger looks at René Goscinny's und Albert Uderzo's comic *Astérix le Gaulois*, the first tome of the famous *Astérix*-series, which appeared as early as 1959. She describes its main idea in very simple terms: The Romans – with their Western rationality and sophisticated civilization have conquered Europe except for a little Gaul village which wondrously manages to withstand their armies.[57] Its "primitive inhabitants carry standing stones on their backs, feed on wild boars, herbs, and magic potion, and live in the most backward community imaginable."[58] This constellation's importance lies for Geiger in the fact that the Gauls do not care about their own success. They are no heroes fighting against an omnipotent oppressor in order to liberate themselves or anybody else: they simply see no point in imitating the cultural achievements of the Roman empire and its complex and bureaucratic social structure. They have more fun without it, whereas the Romans – in all their civilizational glory – do not seem to be particularly happy folks.[59]

On the contrary, a blockbuster movie like James Cameron's *Titanic*, albeit having had a huge commercial success and being a vibrant symbol of Hollywood's film industry, might be called a product of modern entertainment and is as such part of popular culture. Yet, no matter how entertaining and popular it might be, it is not 'pop.' It is love, it is death, it is catastrophe. There is rescue (at least for some) and there is a conclusion, giving a much deeper meaning to existence than the Gauls' *joie de vivre*.

This does not mean that pop is apolitical in the sense that it willingly embraces the submission to existing power structures. On the contrary: by not judging any artefact by standards such as originality or any other concrete categorical value other than the beholder's enjoyment, it opens up the space for more diversity. Rather than heroifying the fighting against societal injustice however, it views political engagement exceeding this liberty as a useless endeavor. It promotes concentrating on the beauty of

um ein bisher nicht gekanntes Maß an Zerstörung und einen ebenso singulären Völkermord hervorzubringen." The notion of "ebenso singulär[..]" (equally singular) seems contradictory, but does not affect the general argument.

57 See Geiger, 2006, 16.

58 *Ibid.*, 16–17. Ger.: "Die primitiven Bewohner tragen noch Hinkelsteine auf ihren Rücken, ernähren sich von Wildschweinen, Kräutern und Zaubertrank und haben in ihrem Dorf das wohl rückschrittlichste Gemeinwesen, das man sich vorstellen kann."

59 See *ibid.*, 16–17.

the artefact and the pleasure it might generate. As such, Geiger's concept could be called a kind of bohemian *l'art pour l'art*. The difference to this nineteenth century credo though lies in its radicalism, as the value of purity is both too categorical and too judgmental with regard to pop's idea of being. Warhol's famous definition thus seems all the more poignant: Pop really is nothing more or less than liking things.[60]

Of course, the question, if all this is an ethically acceptable way of acting within society and understanding art, remains open to debate. As I hope to have demonstrated though, 'pop' can be called an aesthetic concept in its own right, albeit being closely related to and dependent on popular culture as a whole. This concept underlies Western art movements such as pop art or *Popliteratur*. In the following, I will examine if it is also applicable to Arabic culture.

3 Does Arabic 'Pop' Exist?

To answer the question if phenomena similar to the ones described above can be found in the highly politicized context of Arabic cultural production, let me briefly introduce you to the Algerian novel *Lā yutraku fī mutanāwal al-aṭfāl* ('Keep out of Reach of Children'), published in 2012 by the young author Soufiane Mekhnache.[61] This text explores an adolescent woman's problematic yet colorful love life in modern Algeria. Albeit dealing with societal problems a young woman might face in a conservative society still recovering from the 'Black Decade,'[62] the plot largely focusses on the protagonist's love life and her remarkable self-centeredness.

In one episode, the narrator-protagonist recalls her love to Amīn, a boy of her age from her native Sétif in northeastern Algeria. Their affair ends tragically insofar as Amīn has to go underground due to his unlucky connections to the criminal milieu. Instead of focusing on the loss of love and

[60] See Geiger, 2006, 19. Warhol's idea is equally quoted as "Pop art is a way of liking things," McCarraher, 2019, 573. (*cf.* preface FN 1.)

[61] Ar.: "سفيان مخناش ." Further examples of Arabic literary 'pop' can be found in *Aṣābiʿ Lūlītā* ("Lolita's Fingers") by Wāsīnī al-Aʿraj, *Al-Qāhira al-ṣaghīra* ("Little Cairo") by ʿAmāra Lakhūṣ, Jān J[i]nīh fī Ṭanja ("Jean Genet in Tangier"), *Būl Būwl[i]z wa-ʿuzlat Ṭanja* ("Paul Bowles and Tangier's Isolation") by Muḥammad Shukrī, and *Sifr iʿādat al-takwīn* ("Book of the Genesis' Renewal") by Nārīmān al-Shāmilī. See Konerding 2019.

[62] The term refers to the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s.

of a human being though, the nameless protagonist quotes the refrain of Michael Jackson's song *Beat It*. It serves her as imaginary example of a missed warning for Amīn not to get too close to the mafia. Additionally, she accuses him of being the only one responsible for the relationship's end. Her admiration for 'the king of pop', which she feels she has to share with the *lector in fabula*, seems as important to her as the story about her ex-lover. In the end, she even wishes Amīn had gone to prison instead of having escaped the police so that she could visit him there. The idea that he could suffer from being deprived of his personal freedom does not occur to her, nor is she concerned about his fate as long as it has nothing to do with her hurt feelings. His involvement in criminal actions remains unclear: the narrator-protagonist does not bother.

The described episode summarizes only one of the protagonist's four unhappy love affairs and all of them similarly serve as a means of staging her mental state, which is more important to her than the worldly events surrounding her existence. Heidegger's idea of *Befindlichkeit*[63] comes close to the only thing she really cares about and leads the reader into the psychological conditions of a young and remarkably selfish female mind of our time in modern Algeria. The moral and societal questions, which might evolve from this interpretation, do not necessarily deal with recent sociopolitical developments in the North African nation nor the role of women in Muslim majority countries – or any other prominent topic of Middle Eastern cultural history – but rather with issues associated with the human psyche and existence as such. Of course, these themes and their display in the artefact cannot be fully understood outside their social context. Yet, analyzing the artefact's social context alone and its relation towards society equally does not suffice within a holistic approach[64] to art.

It follows that the reading proposed here is not possible without examining the formal and semantic surface structure of *Lā yutraku fī mutanāwal al-aṭfāl*. Without a close look at the "mirrored, critiqued, and, at times,

[63] Engl. approximately: "mental state." See Gendlin, 1988, for a detailed and suitable analysis of the concept.

[64] Understanding an artefact in its totality is unrealistic and certainly not the aim of any serious single study. Nevertheless and within the context of Arabic studies as an institutionalized academic discipline, Arabic cultural production should be approached as a whole and from as many perspectives as possible.

incorporated everyday items, consumer goods, and mass media messaging and imagery"[65] central to any pop aesthetics and the function they perform in the narration, the plot's focal point, – the protagonist's *Befindlichkeit,* – cannot be explored. Those 'pop' elements are abundant in the novel and the use of Michael Jackson's song text is just one example out of many. Another episode for example – Amīn and the narrator are caressing each other on the beach – becomes especially enjoyable for her, as she has been shown her boyfriend's new SWATCH-watch just moments before. His equally new BMW, in which he has driven her to the seaside, additionally increases her happiness.[66]

Speaking with Geiger, the protagonist pursues enjoyment and invites the reader to do the same. The focus is deliberately taken away from her tragic love live and serves at best as melodramatic background for what really counts: Her personal well-being and – as Warhol would put it – the likable 'things' around her. These alone affect her mood and consequently her existence. As morally questionable as this focal point might be, it perfectly fits the logic of pop.

4 Conclusion

Within the context of Arabic studies, the term 'popular culture' has vaguely been used in order to describe the cultural practices of the masses as opposed to the ruling classes. At the heart of the scholarly debate around this phenomenon have been political and social questions: Artefacts of popular culture have thus mainly been interpreted as proof for particular historical developments and less so as having their own aesthetic implications. In view of Western art movements such as pop art or *Popliteratur* though, it seems questionable that merely societal approaches describe Arabic entertainment and the so-called mass culture it is based upon in adequate ways. The aesthetic concept of pop for example, as it has been described by Annette Geiger, seems to be the underlying structure of both pop art and *Popliteratur*. It is largely inspired by popular culture, yet it does not depend on the social and political struggles associated with it. Through analyzing parts of Soufiane Mekhnaches novel "*Lā yutraku fī mutanāwal al-atfāl,*" it becomes clear that Geiger's idea of pop as aesthetics

[65] MoMA Learning, n.d. (*cf.* chapter 2.1. American and British Pop Art.)
[66] For a more detailed discussion of this particular passage, see Konerding 2019, 151–153.

can be a viable means of interpretation even within a North African context. Arabic art forms similar to its well-known Western counterparts are indeed thinkable and have been translated into actual literary practice.

As I hope to have demonstrated, the scope of Arabic popular culture is broader than suggested by previous research. Common explanation patterns grounded in social theory and political history alone cannot fully explain its intellectual and aesthetic implications. May this introduction and the following chapters thus be a first step on the way to the discovery of this enormous potential and the appreciation of its delightful artistic diversity!

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The Culture of Laughter in Khayrī Shalabī's Novels

Cristina Dozio

Abstract

Since the novel is canonized as high culture, its relationship with Arabic popular culture is still understudied. Nevertheless, many novels are adapted into films, TV series and comics, while best-selling books blur the boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow culture. An element of Egyptian culture that cuts across this divide is comedy, since *adab sākhir* (satiric literature) is a best-selling genre and some novels resort to humour as a key stylistic feature. This paper aims at further investigating the interplay of literature and popular culture through humour. In particular, it examines how popular culture is employed to elicit literary humour and create a counter-narrative about history and society in two novels by Khayrī Shalabī (1938–2011), *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī* (1991) and *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* (2000).

Shalabī engages with the culture of laughter in his literary representation of marginal characters and places, linguistic registers, the community of intellectuals he personally knew, and the transmission of *turāth (*cultural heritage). Firstly, he revives the stock character of the wise-fool to involve the audience in his satirical criticism of society shattering some stereotypes about Egyptianness. Secondly, he represents humour as a collective experience and act of subversive creation. Thus, applying Bakhtin's conception, the hash den and the street in the two novels become carnivalesque sites of resistance.

Keywords: humour, contemporary Egyptian literature, popular culture, *Shalabī*, identity, carnivalesque

> We only talk about things that will lighten the mood: films we've seen recently, some interesting new music, tales of the wonders and oddities recited by taxi drivers, the jesters of the city. [...]
> Ihab had with him the English translation of Khairy Shalaby's novel *The Lodging House*.
>
> Ahmed Naji, *Using Life*
> أحمد ناجي. / *ستخدام الحياة*[1]

Popular Culture and Egyptian Fiction

Humour is a key element in Arabic popular culture which operates simultaneously on a highly local and on a cross-cultural level. Among the Arabs, Egyptians are known as *awlād al-nukta* (the sons of the joke) for their ability to crack jokes and laugh in the face of adversity. Some Egyptian cultural productions make fun of this talent, while suggesting that the collective experience of humour contributes to the construction of national identity. For instance, this ambivalent attitude is expressed by the protagonist of *Beer in the Snooker Club*, a novel written in English by the Egyptian Waguih Ghali (Wajīh Ghālī, 192?–1969):

> 'Why did you return, Ram?'
>
> I lit another cigarette and stood by the window once more.
>
> 'You told me so many times you love Egyptians. I, too, Edna, but unconsciously, not like you. Egypt to me is so many different things. Playing snooker with Doromian and Varenian the Armenians, is Egypt to me. Sarcastic remarks are Egypt to me – not only the fellah and his plight. Riding the tram is Egypt. Do you know my friend Fawzi? He can never give an answer that isn't witty... and yet he isn't renowned for it. He's an ordinary Egyptian. Last week I was riding the tram with him when a man stepped on his foot. 'Excuse me,' said the man, 'for stepping on your foot.' – 'Not at all,' said Fawzi, 'I've been stepping on it myself for the last twenty-seven years'... How can I explain to you that Egypt to me is something unconscious, is nothing particularly political, or... or... oh, never mind,' I said.'[2]

In his journey from Cairo to London after the 1956 Suez Conflict, the main character challenges the fixity of Egyptian identity with his search for cosmopolitan agency, which includes cracking jokes.[3] This novel invites to further investigation of the interplay of popular culture and Egyptian fiction through the lens of humour. In the expanding scholarship on

1 Naji, *Using Life*, 122 and 143. Nājī, *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh*, 147 and 172.
2 Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club*, 190.
3 Starr, "Drinking, Gambling, and Making Merry," 271–85.

popular culture in the Middle East and North Africa,[4] aesthetic innovations are discussed more in relation to cinema and music, while literature remains understudied. Nevertheless, literature contributes like other fields of popular culture to wider debates about language, legitimation, hybridity, memory, and ideology.

Firstly, literature interacts with other media for its mass dissemination. Traditionally, novels were serialized in the press and turned into films, while poems were transformed into lyrics for songs. Nowadays, this trend exploits all the new possibilities offered by media transitions (such as pan-Arab TV channels, promotion on the Internet, international literary prizes), and emerging genres such as the graphic novel. For instance, poetry enjoys multi-modal dissemination,[5] while two recent successful Ramadan series (*musalsalāt*) were based respectively on *Dhāt* by the Egyptian Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm (b. 1937) and *Sāq al-bāmbū* by the Kuwaiti Saʿūd al-Sanʿūsī (b. 1981).[6] An episode of the afore-mentioned *Beer in the Snooker Club* was turned into a comic, written in Arabic, published on the leading magazine *TokTok*.[7]

Secondly, the divide between highbrow and lowbrow literature is becoming more blurred. The same reader, in fact, can read texts that enjoy different critical recognition, while the legitimation of a whole genre may change over time.[8] In this respect, El Hamamsy and Soliman question the fixity in the representation of reading practices: "And the consumers of both types of culture are also expected to be intrinsically different. The assumption is that the same person cannot appreciate canonized literature and equally enjoy reading a comics book on the subway."[9] Furthermore, Richard Jacquemond exemplifies the complexity of cultural

4 El Hamamsy and Soliman, eds., *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa*; Hammond, *Pop Culture in North Africa and the Middle East*; Sabry, ed., *Arab Cultural Studies*; Sabry, *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World*; Sabry and Ftouni, eds., *Arab Subcultures*; Valassopoulos, ed. *Arab Cultural Studies*.

5 Casini, "Le poesie della rivoluzione egiziana."

6 Ibrāhīm, *Dhāt*; Naʿūm and Abū Dhikrī, *Bint ismahā Dhāt*; al-Sanʿūsī, *Sāq al-bāmbū*; al-Sanʿūsī and al-Qaffāṣ, *Sāq al-bāmbū*. For the adaptation of Dhāt, see Pepe, "Retour de Dhāt."

7 ʿAndīl, "Bīra," 5–10. For comics and caricatures, see: Guyer, *Oum Cartoon*.

8 Jacquemond, *Entre scribes et écrivains*; Snirr, *Modern Arabic Literature*.

9 El Hamamsy and Soliman, "Introduction: Popular Culture – A Site of Resistance," 1.

practices resisting dichotomy by focusing on the best-seller phenomenon in Egyptian literature at the beginning of the 2000s. He examines the changes in the book market (production), in which new publishers, authors, and venues appear; this market influences the choices of the expanding young audience (consumption), which looks for stories that mirror its own experience with a mixture of realism and social criticism. Jacquemond argues that these elements, consolidated by canonized novels, are now rearranged in realist fiction, detective stories, thrillers, and satirical literature (*adab sākhir*).[10]

Thirdly, everyday reality enters the realm of fiction with several references to global and local culture, ranging from cinema, music, sport, politics, digital communication, and mass consumption. Noting that such references become an archive of popular culture, Peter Konerding suggests examining Pop Literature as a new trend in Arabic fiction, to be compared with this category in the English and German literary tradition.[11]

Humour as Creative Resistance

While satirical literature remains a best-selling genre, some Egyptian post-modern novels interact with popular culture to render the polyphony of contemporary culture, often with comic or satiric effects. In doing so, these works exploit the long tradition of humour in Arabic culture, which comprises jokes, proverbs, anecdotes, ballads, dramatic sketches, poems, and cartoons.[12] In modern and contemporary Arabic literature, some comic tropes and characters have circulated in written texts positioned in a *continuum* between high and low culture, elite and non-elite consumption, raising some issues about their aesthetic value.

For instance, the satirical press has received scholarly attention only recently. In her seminal study, Marilyn Booth examines the early mature production of Bayram al-Tūnisī (1893–1961), mainly written in *ʿāmmīya* and published in magazines.[13] Booth links the author's aesthetic

[10] Jacquemond, "*The Yacoubian Building*." Among these genres, Jacquemond has followed the evolution of satirical literature after the 2011 Egyptian revolution: cf. Jacquemond, "Satiric literature."

[11] Konerding, "Adab al-būb."

[12] Kishtainy, *Arab Political Humour*; Mahfouz, *Cartoons, Satire, and Humour*.

[13] Booth, *Bayram al-Tunisi's Egypt*.

innovations in *zajal* poetry, dramatic sketches and neo-*maqāma* to his political and cultural mission, in the context of insurgent nationalism. According to Ziad Fahmy, the satirical press at the turn of the Nineteenth century was one of the mass media that disseminated a collective experience of the nation among the ordinary Egyptians.[14] Thus, the satirical press was a venue for creative resistance against cultural and political hegemony. Its success was granted by its wide circulation among the elite and non-elite alike, thanks to a humorous language that was immediately understandable and resonant with everyday preoccupations.

These features of humour were activated in another moment of political upheaval, i.e. the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath. The collective culture of laughter created an egalitarian space for voicing the people's claims and temporarily breaking the official discourse. El Hamamsy and Soliman note that the revolution has led to a massive production of popular culture with some innovations such as the close connection between art and the street, the incorporation of the people's feelings as the events unfold, new forms of dissemination through the media, the contribution of youth culture, and the 'activist' participatory attitude.[15] These peculiarities are well-exemplified by humour circulating in that period. In this respect, Salem and Taira illustrate the challenges of translating revolutionary humour, which relies on immediacy and shared cultural references, while Damir-Geilsdorf and Milich cover different forms of political humour in the Arab countries as creative resistance.[16]

The complexity of humour makes it an interesting case for the study of popular culture.[17] It is also a prominent stylistic feature in some Arabic novels, from the great masters of satire such as the Palestinian Imīl Ḥabībī (1922–1996), the Syrian Zakariyā Tāmir (b. 1931) and the Egyptian Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm, to best-selling novels and what is labelled para-literature. When humour enters the realm of fiction, it exploits the heritage of both high and popular culture. For the purpose of this study, popular culture is the set of practices, beliefs and objects with a broadly shared

[14] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*.

[15] El Hamamsy and Soliman, "Introduction: Popular Culture – A Site of Resistance," 13.

[16] Damir-Geilsdorf and Stephan Milich, eds., *Creative Resistance*; Salem and Taira. "al-Thawra al-daHika."

[17] El-Ariss, "Teaching humor;" Stewart, "Humor."

meaning in a community thanks to their mass dissemination. Characterized by its immediacy and connection to everyday life, it is enjoyed and disseminated by the elite and non-elite alike. Its complex relation with cultural institutions makes it oscillate between recognition and resistance. This paper combines literary criticism and the study of popular culture in examining the role of humour in the contemporary Egyptian novel. In particular, it investigates how Egyptian fiction recreates the collective culture of laughter to elicit humour: which aspects of popular culture are selected? Which language is used? Does humour shape alternative communities, voicing resistance? To answer these questions, the analysis focuses on two novels by Khayrī Shalabī (1938–2011) that exploit several comic tropes.

Khayrī Shalabī: an Archive of Popular Culture

Khayrī Shalabī was born in a village in the Egyptian Delta. In his youth, he dropped formal education and did manual jobs, while entering the literary circles in Damanhūr and Alexandria. When he moved to Cairo, he started working as a journalist and later was employed by national cultural institutions.[18] In his prolific career, Shalabī has cultivated his deep interest for popular culture in many ways. Firstly, as a journalist, he got to know many intellectuals and professionals of the media industry. In the Sixties, he attended the Academy for Scriptwriters, wrote some radio dramas, worked for *Majallat al-masraḥ* (Theatre Weekly) and *Majallat al-idhāʿa wa-l-talfizyūn* (Radio and Television Weekly). Secondly, his employment in public institutions allowed him to conduct research in drama and poetry. He was editor-in-chief of *Majallat al-shiʿr* (Poetry Review) and the book series *Maktabat al-dirāsāt al-shaʿbīya* (Library of Popular Studies), attached to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture. These initiatives were part of the institutional interest in folklore promoted by Nasserist cultural policies; at the same time, they stimulated a number of writers in archiving other aspects of popular culture in their literary creations.

In fact, Shalabī set his novels in marginal communities in the countryside and the city, shaping unconventional characters from the lower strata of

[18] Bushnaq, *Der historische Roman Ägyptens*, 495–99.

society.[19] The author was also passionate about *Alf layla wa-layla* (Arabian Nights) and folk epics (*al-sīra*), two popular genres based on storytelling; this influenced his compositional style, which does not follow the straight novelistic order and often reproduces orality. In particular, critics agree that his trilogy *Thulāthīyyat al-amālī* (1990–1995, The Trilogy of Hopes) revives the style of folk epics. This rediscovery of the popular heritage and the use of various linguistic registers exemplify one trend of experimentation within the Generation of the Sixties, to which Shalabī chronologically belongs. However, he followed his own path in his writings and lifestyle: he frequented official intellectual circles as well as popular cafés and marginal neighbourhoods; he also chose the Monumental Cemetery of Cairo as his writing hub. Over his career, his novels were adapted into films and TV series, but his full recognition arrived in the 2000s when his novel *Wikālat ʿAṭīya* (1991; The Lodging House, 2006) won the *Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature* in 2003, paving the way to the *Egyptian State Merit Award* for the same novel in 2004. English and French translations of his novels followed. His latest work *Isṭāsīyya* (2010, Ecstasy) was longlisted for the *International Prize for Arabic Fiction* in 2011.

The two novels chosen for this study are constructed around a series of comic episodes and include meta-narrative reflections about humour. The first one is *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī* (1991), translated into English as *The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets* (2010).[20] It follows the time-travels of the first-person narrator and protagonist, Ibn Shalabī, who travels back and forth between the present (1979) and the past. Without following a chronological order, he witnesses significant events under the Fatimid (969–1171), Ayyubid (1171–1260) and Mamluk (1250–1517) rule. He also visualizes the evolution of Cairene monuments over time, since he remains fixed in the historical city centre (*al-Qāhira al-muʿizzīya*).[21]

Humour is elicited by the frame narrative, which encapsulates each journey in a mechanism of repetition and variation. Furthermore, the narrative device of time-travelling generates temporal incongruities and

[19] ʿUṣfūr, *Zaman al-riwāya*, 309–18; al-Fāris, *al-Ruʾyā al-ibdāʿīya*; Mehrez, "Kitābat al-qariyya."

[20] Shalabī, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*; Shalaby, *Time-Travels*.

[21] Bushnaq, *Der historische Roman Ägyptens*; Bushnaq, "Reise im Zeitraum."

hilarious misunderstandings. Michael Cooperson notes that the fictional device of time-travelling, found both in canonized and popular writings both in the Western and Arabic traditions, complicates the representation of history.[22] Like previous travelogues (*al-riḥla*), Ibn Shalabī's journeys allow an all-encompassing critique of society, highlighting the pitfalls of both historical periods. Moreover, the time-traveller interacts with history in a playful way, meeting his sources, debasing and popularizing them. Another central comic element is the rogue-like nature of the protagonist, who takes on different identities and manages to survive thanks to his ruses.

The depiction of Egyptian society through eccentric characters is enriched by the second novel examined here, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* (2000), translated into English as *The Hashish Waiter* (2011).[23] It follows a group of aspiring intellectuals and friends who regularly meet at a hash den (*ghurza*) in a run-down neighbourhood near Downtown (*Wasaṭ al-balad*). At the hash den they smoke, talk about their projects, discuss serious political as well as cultural issues, and laugh. The relaxed atmosphere is provided by the hashish waiter Ṣāliḥ, who is a repository of popular wisdom and street dialect; when he reaches a status of rowdiness (*hēṣa*) through alcohol, he harshly criticizes society with his puns. All the members of the clique try to emulate Ṣāliḥ, reproducing his way of thinking and talking. In their last meeting, they watch the TV coverage of President's Sadat visit to Jerusalem (1977). Because of his vibrant protest, Ṣāliḥ is taken away by the police and later found dead. The members of the group are scattered and the police cracks down on the hash dens.

As regards humour, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* revives the anecdotic tradition about intoxication induced by wine or drugs, which may lead to a euphoric mood. The link between hashish and humour, well-established in classical and Mamluk literature,[24] is still alive in Egyptian popular culture. The novel recreates this cultural practice and its containment by government institutions by focusing on the collective experience of humour. Frédéric Lagrange remarks that Shalabī elaborates on various aspects of marginality

[22] Cooperson, "Remembering the Future;" Cooperson, "Safar."
[23] Shalabī, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa*; Shalaby, *Hashish Waiter*.
[24] Marino, "Raconter l'ivresse."

(location, characters, language) to capture the essence of Egyptian life, whereas Mara Naaman argues that the author inscribes spatially the group's negotiation for an alternative access to modernity, especially in comparison with established intellectuals.[25]

Khayrī Shalabī was an archive of popular culture, respected by his peers for his wit and wisdom. Reflecting this attitude, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī* and *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* are full of references to Egyptian popular culture to elicit humour. The first strategy, illustrated in the next session, is reviving stock characters to challenge the authenticity (*aṣāla*) of Egyptian identity; the second strategy is portraying the collective experience of humour as a site of creative resistance.

Stock Characters and Their Double

Both novels revive the stock character of the wise-fool who speaks the truth in face of power, without fear of being punished thanks to his ambivalent nature. In Arabic folklore, this character is epitomized by the trickster Juḥā.[26] In *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*, Ibn Shalabī shows his double nature when he meets the rulers, contemporary writers and classical historians, such as al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) and Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 1469/70), all of whom travel in time as well. Besides meeting popular icons of literature, journalism, and television,[27] the narrator popularizes classical historians by treating them as friends and mocking their flowery prose with colloquial idiomatic expressions and wordplay, as in the following passage:

> ووجدت بين الجموع كل أصدقائي الكبار من أمثال ابن عبد الحكم وابن عبد البر وابن عبد الظاهر وابن تغري بردي وابن إياس وابن الفرطوس وابن المركوب وابن المضروب.[28]
>
> There I spotted all my important friends: Ibn Abdel Hakam, Ibn Abdel Barr, Ibn Abdel Zahir, Ibn Taghribirdi, Ibn Iyas, Ibn So-and-So, Ibn Whoever, and Ibn What's-His-Face[.][29]

[25] Lagrange, "Le marginal comme modèle national;" Naaman, *Urban Space*, 71–104.

[26] Corrao, *Giufà: il furbo, lo sciocco, il saggio*.

[27] Among others, he mentions Najīb Maḥfūẓ for his uproarious laughter.

[28] Shalabī, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*, 86. *Ibn al-farṭūs* is an insult deriving from the word meaning 'to sow,' *ibn al-markūb* means 'you son of an old boot' and *ibn al-maḍrūb* refers to a scoundrel.

[29] Shalaby, *Time-Travels*, 76.

This direct approach to the historical sources turns history into something familiar, a mirror to understand contemporary life. In fact, after reporting official historical events, he relates them to shared knowledge about everyday life in Egypt including traffic, poverty, corruption, overpopulation, and political oppression, as in the following example:

> هو طريق طويل طول الزمن الأبدي، كغيره من بقية الطرق المصرية مليء بالحفر والمطبات والأبار والمجاري، فضلاً عن التراب والروث وما أشبه، حتى وأنت داخل القصور المعزية الزاهرة حيث الأرض مفروشة بسجاد أخضر من حشائش ونبات نادر تستحيل هذه الجنة المزهرة في طريق الزمن أو زمن الطريق طريقاً مصرياً فضلاً - ولا فخر - بكل الحفر.[30]

> The road was as long as eternity, and it was filled – like all Egyptian roads – with potholes, bumps, manholes, and sewers, not to mention dust, animal droppings, and the like. Even on your way to the luminous places of Muʿizz, where the ground is covered with a verdant carpet of grass and rare plant species, the flower gardens along the path of time (or times past) tend to transform themselves – not that it's anything to boast about – into an Egyptian roadway full of holes.[31]

In his anachronistic comparisons, Ibn Shalabī refers also to contemporary consumption culture:

> إذا بالأرض تترجرج كأنني أقف فوق السلم الكهربائي في محل عمر أفندي في القرن الرابع عشر الهجري،[32]

> But then the earth began to shake like the escalator at the Omar Effendi department store of the fourteenth century after the hijra.[33]

In this familiar context, Ibn Shalabī reveals his duplicity: on the one hand, he is a journalist, a writer who instructs his public and a social observer; on the other hand, he is the representative of the ordinary Egyptians, a naïve participant, whose weapon of last resort is entertainment. The protagonist's attempt to identify with the ordinary people is proved by the extension of his name to all the Egyptians, collectively called *banū Shalabī* (Sons of Shalaby). Since belonging to a group allows a certain degree of self-mockery, the narrator makes fun of himself and the stereotypes attached to the genuine Egyptian (*al-miṣrī al-aṣlī* or *ibn al-balad*). He mocks

30 Shalabī, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*, 30.
31 Shalaby, *Time-Travels*, 21.
32 Shalabī, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*, 212.
33 Shalaby, *Time-Travels*, 21.

their patience tending to passivity, their meddling in one's affairs and their opportunism. Among the various flaws and virtues of Egyptians, Ibn Shalabi makes fun of the social role of comedy when dealing with the authorities:

البكاء ساعة الضحك..

قدر مصري أ صيل

حقاً أن دمعة المصري قريبة لا شك في هذا. سريعاً ما تهطل الدموع من عينيه خا صة في لحظات الفراق حتى ولو كان المفارق شخصاً بالغ السوء والإنحلال كالسلطان المرح أحمد بن قلاوون. كنت في الواقع أريد أن أوعده قائلاً: 'في ستين داهية ربنا لا يردك ولا يرزأ الديار المصرية بأمثالك مرة أخرى'. لكنني بدلاً من ذلك عانقته والأدهى من ذلك بكيت! هل بكيت من ألم الفراق حقاً؟ أم بكيت بغريزة النفاق التي تأ صلت فينا حتى النخاع نحن بني شلبي المساكين المعدمين؟ واقع الأمر أننا معشر الشلبية من المصريين نضحك ونر سل النكات اللاهية ونحن تحت وطأة الظلم. ونبكي حين يندحر هذا الظلم. فكأنما حبنا للعشرة والمو دة]أقوى[من حبنا للإنتقام. يقول المثل الذي أر سله أجدا دنا الخانعون :'أ صبر على الجار السيء فلربما تجيء مصيبة تمسحه أو ينزاح هو من تلقاء نفسه'. وقد تكفل الواقع المصري التاريخي بتطبيق هذا المثل في الديار المصرية تطبيقاً حرفياً لا يخيب ولا يخطئ على مدى الأزمان.[34]

Crying When It's Time to Laugh: A Genuine Egyptian Talent

There's no doubt about it: Egyptians weep easily. When saying goodbye, especially, they'll cry a river, even when the person leaving is a debauched louse like the merry Sultan Ahmad ibn Qalawun. What I had really wanted to say to him by way of farewell was, 'Good riddance, and may God never bring you this way again, or debase the Land of Egypt with anyone like you!' Instead of saying that, though, I embraced him; and even worse, I cried. Was I really sad to see him go? Or was it the instinct for flattery, so deeply ingrained in the poor and miserable Sons of Shalaby? The fact of the matter is that we Sons of Shalaby of the Egyptian branch laugh and distract ourselves with jokes even as the boot-heels of our oppressors grind us down. Then, when the bad times are over, we weep, as if our love for good company were stronger than the need for revenge. Our servile ancestors used to say, 'Put up with a bad neighbor and wait for some calamity to carry him off, or for him to leave on his own.' Throughout the ages, the historical reality of life here has done its best to apply this dictum as literally and unfailingly as possible.[35]

This passage describes humour as a safety-valve to endure oppression, while mildly criticising the political passivity of Egyptians. In a novel based on the satirical criticism of society, the narrator cannot avoid

[34] Shalabī, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*, 205.
[35] Shalaby, *Time-Travels*, 188.

tackling a central element in the construction of Egyptian identity such as humour. As in the previous examples, he resorts to a shared knowledge about what is considered authentically Egyptian in popular culture, often crystallized by the official discourse.

Similarly, an episode of *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* reveals the circulation of humour across cultural productions. In the novel, the members of the clique are fond of theatre and cinema; one of them is an aspiring actor who becomes a TV star at the end of the story.[36] As mentioned above, they construct an alternative intellectual community, whose central reference is popular culture as embodied by the hashish waiter Ṣāliḥ. The first-person narrator, who is a member of the clique, notes that they all imitate Ṣāliḥ, gradually tending toward an artificial imitation. Then a female character, Ḥayāh, goes to the theatre to watch *Madrasat al-mushāghibīn* (*The School for Troublemakers*),[37] a successful play which featured many comedy stars. She notices that also professional comedians appropriate popular culture, especially the stock character of the simple-minded:

> تجولن في الكواليس حيث سلمن على عادل إمام و سعيد صالح ويونس شلبي وأحمد زكي و سهير البابلي و حسن مصطفى وهادي الجيار. وأهم شيء خرجت به حياة البري من هذه السهرة الفكاهية الضاحكة ـ بعد الترويح عن داليا وأمها ـ هو أنها اكتشفت لأول مرة شيئاً غريباً جداً لم تكن تلحظه من قبل هو أن سعيد صالح وعادل إمام بالذات فيهما لطشة سريعة لكنها واضحة من شخصية صالح هيصة التى سرها أن تعرفت عليها جيداً. قمر المحروقي إذن ليس هو الوحيد المتأثر بصالح هيصة.. هي في الواقع لا تدري إن كان صالح هيصة قد أصبح تياراً جديداً كاسحاً يؤثر في جيل بأكمله أم أن المتأثرين به هم الذين شكلوا ما يمكن أن يكون تياراً]لا[سيما وأن جميع ممثلي الكوميديا على إطلاقهم في بلادنا يشتغلون على شخصية العبيط أو المستعبط أو الذي بيسوق العبط على الهبالة لكيلا يلتزم بأي قانون؛ إنهم يتكلمون مثل صالح هيصة يردون بعض طرائفه يفكرون بطريقته على المسرح وإنها لمتأكدة أنهم قد حششوا عند صالح هيصة غير أنهم كالعادة لم يأخذوا منه إلا القناع والمفردات والخرقاء يضعونها في سياقات من المفترض أنها جادة فتحدث المفارقات الزاعقة. أما صالح هيصة نفسه فإنه فى نظرها شيء ثمين من زاوية ما..[38]

[36] This character is called Zakī Ḥāmid to recall the famous actor Aḥmad Zakī.

[37] *Madrasat al-mushāghibīn* (1973) was written by ʿAlī Sālim, produced by Samīr Khafājī (b. 1930), and performed by the Troupe Artists United (*firqat al-fannānīn al-muttaḥidīn*). It starred ʿĀdil Imām (b. 1940), Saʿīd Ṣāliḥ (1938–2014), and Aḥmad Zakī (1949–2005).

[38] Shalabī, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa*, 207–8.

> They strolled around backstage, saying hello to Adel Imam, Saeed Saleh, Younis Shalaby, Ahmad Zaki, Suhair al-Babili, Hassan Mustafa, and Hadi al-Gayyar. The most important thing about that fun, uproarious evening for Hayat – besides, of course, showing Dalia and her mother a good time – was that she discovered something very peculiar, something she'd never noticed before: Saeed Salih and Adel Imam – in particular – had a certain air about them, which, granted, was only fleeting, but was clearly modelled on Rowdy Salih, whom she was pleased to have got to know very well. So, it wasn't only Qamar al-Mahruqi who'd been influenced by Rowdy Salih's personality. As a matter of fact, she simply couldn't tell whether it was Rowdy Salih himself who was this new, widespread, highly influential trend that had an entire generation in its throes or whether it was the people he'd influenced who'd gone out and created this trend, especially as every single comedian in the country played the part of the idiot, or the fool, or the guy who acts an idiotic fool so that he can get out of following any rules. They talked like Rowdy Salih, repeated some of his funny expressions, they thought like him when they were up on stage. There was no doubting that they'd all gone and smoked hash at Rowdy Salih's, but all they'd taken from him was an attitude and some cutting remarks, which they dropped into serious contexts to cause hilarious dissonances, but to Hayat, Rowdy Salih the man was himself a great deal more valuable than that when looked at from a certain angle.[39]

In the last part of this passage, Ḥayāh defines humour as incongruity, when "funny expressions" and "cutting remarks" are "dropped into serious contexts." Her overall opinion about professional comedy is not negative, since it absorbs popular culture to encourage the audience's identification; only when it silences its original sources, it becomes a farce. Looking at the interplay of art and society, this episode exemplifies the dissemination of humour in various forms of art, including the novel itself, whose protagonist Ṣāliḥ embodies popular culture's creativity and immediate resonance.

The Hash Den and the Street: Sites of Creative Resistance[40]

Another feature of popular culture is its collective process of production. Producers are often anonymous and the evolution of cultural practices and objects is not always recorded. In this respect, the members of the clique in *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* enjoy humour together: each of them contributes to crafting jokes, feeling that hashish blurs the barriers of class, age, and religion.

[39] Shalaby, *Hashish Waiter*, 186.

[40] For a full discussion of humour generating strategies in Shalabi's novels, see Dozio, *Laugh like an Egyptian. Humour in the Contemporary Egyptian Novel*.

In the following episode, the group composes a poem for Ṣāliḥ. The vernacular poet al-Jamal improvises the first three lines, then Ibrāhīm adds the fourth one, Qamar suggests a variation which is rejected, and Muṣṭafā adds the final line:

طرقع الجمل بأ صبعيه فى غبطة:

_ 'جاتني قصيدة جديدة! صالح هيصة دخل التاريخ يجري! راكب حصان من غير لجام ولا سرج!

بيمد إيده يزغد المبسوطين في البرج...'

أضاف إبراهيم القماح:

_'ويخطف منهم الدُرج'

ضحكنا. قال قمر:

_ 'الخُرج أحسن'

قال زكي حامد:

_ 'لا! الدرج أنسب! وأشعر! رمز للفلوس المنهوبة!'

أضاف مصطفى لمعي بمرح مصطنع صوته مشروخ :

_ '.. ويخطف منهم الدُرج! ويوزع اللي فيه ع العُرج!'

ضحكنا بقهقهة غوغائية.[41]

Al-Gamal snapped his fingers excitedly:
'I've got a new poem:
Rowdy Salih went charging into history
On a horse without reins or saddle
He prods the joyful people in the castle.'
Ibrahim al-Qammah added, '*And their cash drawers he swindles.*' We laughed.
'Their 'saddlebags' would be better,' said Qamar.
'No, 'cash drawers' is more on the mark' said Zaki Hamid. 'More poetic. It's a symbol of ill-gotten gains.'
With faked glee, in a cracking voice, Mustafa Lami added,
'*And their cash drawers he swindles,*
handing out what's in them to the disabled.'
We giggled uproariously[.][42]

The poem praises Ṣāliḥ for fighting injustice by comparing him to a folk hero or knight who steals from the rich and gives the poor. Arabic poetry has a long tradition of invective, both in *fuṣḥā* and *ʿāmmīya*, against the excesses of the rulers; this poem achieves this effect through its short length, assonance and fast rhythm. The use of *ʿāmmīya* in this

41 Shalabī, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa*, 198–99.
42 Shalaby, *Hashish Waiter*, 177.

composition reflects the preference for this linguistic variety in modern satirical poems and songs, but the author also refers to the broader development of *ʿāmmīya* poetry in Egyptian literature since the late 1950s. This poetic trend revived the heritage of poetry written in the colloquial by filling it with modern concerns about the life of ordinary people and sociopolitical issues.[43] Its main representatives (Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn, Sayyid Ḥijāb, Fuʾād Qāʿūd and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Abnūdī) were known both for their nationalist poems and for their criticism, expressed with touching or satirical images. Shalabī, who studied this current in his poetry review, expressed his appreciation in other passages of this novel.

The poem's intertextuality allows the clique to criticize the political scenario of the Seventies in an oblique creative way. Their collective creation blurs the boundaries between performers and spectators, while the hashish waiter Ṣāliḥ is crowned as the king. In his motto, Ṣāliḥ defines himself as the king of the rundown (*malik al-kaḥyānīn*).[44] These features make the hash den a site of the carnivalesque, defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as the carnivalization that takes place in normal life and literary texts. Bakhtin argues that the carnival culture allows a "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers"[45], and has a central moment in the crowning of the carnival king who may be a slave or a jester.

In other passages of the novel, the first-person narrator describes the hash den as a stage in which performers and spectators overlap. This performance sheds light on Ṣāliḥ, who is otherwise ignored by the official institutions (for example, he does not have an ID); at the same time, it provides the crew with popular wisdom and wit used to legitimate themselves as counter-intellectuals:

> حينما صرنا هكذا بدأ الحضور الحقيقي لصالح هيصة؛ ليس فحسب لأننا شغلنا به جميعاً وبات سلوتنا وموضوع حديثنا وموضوع تندرنا مثار حكاياتنا؛ وإنما لأنه - إلى جانب كونه كفؤاً لذلك - فيه من كل واحد منا شيء بل أ شياء؛]...[كل تصرفاته وأقواله وأفعاله التي نضحك منها ونعتبرها ضرباً من الجنون

[43] Radwan, *Egyptian Colloquial Poetry*.
[44] Shalabī, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa*, 40, 111, 271; Shalaby, *Hashish Waiter*, 37, 98, 243.
[45] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 15.

المطلق سرعان ما نكتشف بعد برهة أننا ننتشي بها لأنها بعض ما نتمنى أن نفعله أو نقوله. أيا ما كان الأمر فقد أ صبحنا مولعين بترديد مأثوراته باعتبارها من درر التراث الحي.[46]

[A]fter we got to be like that, that was when Rowdy Salih really came on to the scene. It wasn't simply because we'd started fixating on him, because he'd become our amusement, our topic of conversation, the star of our jokes and stories; rather it was because - in addition to being all that - he also possessed something of each of us, more than just one thing. [...] Everything he did and said made us laugh because we thought it was a slice of utter insanity, but we soon realized that it invigorated us; it was everything we wished we could do or say. We obsessively repeated the things he said no matter what they were and claimed them as treasures of a living heritage.[47]

Another carnivalesque site in Shalabī's novels is the street in *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*. The protagonist moves back and forth between two sites of political power, *i.e.* the Citadel where the Mamluk sultans rule and the Storehouse of Banners (*khizānat al-bunūd*) where the prisoners of a previous war are detained and build a state within the state. When the two authorities clash, the underprivileged Cairene population exploits the chaos to invade the streets pillaging the buildings. As carnival unites the opposing poles of life/death and above/below, Shalabī's depiction of the street combines destruction with vital creativity thanks to humour. In the last chapter, the wine stored in the Storehouse invades the streets, creating an upside-down world:[48]

ونظرت فرأيت رجالاً يخرجون من الخزانة يحملون جثثاً عديدة مجندلة أو مكسورة. ويحملون براميل من الخمر يدلقنها في الشوارع حتى غدت شوارع المنطقة أبحراً صغيرة عميقة من الخمر. ورغم أنها اختلطت بالتراب بالدماء بروث الأقدام إلّا أن كثيراً من المتلصصين صبياناً و شباناً و شيوخاً كانوا يحضرون بالأواني المنزلية يملؤونها من أبحر الخمر.. حتى هذا الغثاء له من يشربه ويجد فيه المتعة!..
]...[
كأننا في قاهرة القرن الخامس عشر الهجري حيث تتحول الشوارع إلى أبحر تسبح فيها الجراثيم الإنسانية بفعل قليل من المطر أو إنفجار ما سورة من موا سير المجاري كانت أبحر الخمر تمنع الخلائق من السير، ومع ذلك يبتسم الحرافيش بمختلف أزيائهم وهم يشمرون ثيابهم ويفعلون حركات يعجز عن فعلها البهلوانات لكي يخترعوا لأنفسهم طرقاً تجنبهم البلل والأحوال، برغم ذلك يلقون النكات

[46] Shalabī, *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa*, 33–4.
[47] Shalaby, *Hashish Waiter*, 30–1.
[48] Another example of the carnivalesque is the episode in which the Chief Judge is attacked with kitchen tools on the street near the mosque (Shalaby, *Time-Travels*, 161–62).

الحارقة يسخرون بها من أنفسهم ومن قدرهم ومن كل شيء في الوجود!.. قال أحدهم أن [sic] الأرض قد سكرت من أبحر الخمر.. وقال آخر أنها لم تعد تحس بوقع خطى الأعداء.. وقال ثالث أن ساعة الحظ سوف تطول بها إلى فجر بعيد يجيء ولا يجيء.. فقال رابع أنه ـ الفجر ـ وقد جاء منذ شرعنا في هدم خزانة البنود وطرد الخمور منها. وقال خامس أن كلام صاحبه صحيح وأننا لا نرى الفجر الذي رصدته أجهزة الحكومة.. فقال سادس أننا لا نرى الفجر لأنه يلبس زي الليل البهيم.. فقال سابع من آخر الشارع: الليل بهيم هو الآخر؟ ظننت أننا وحدنا ننتمي إلى قطيع البهائم.. فقال واحد تمكن من صعود ربوة: بهيم يعني من فرط السوادة صار مليئاً بالأسرار المبهمة.. فرد عليه آخر من شباك: أفهمت إذن يا بهيم؟.. وهكذا تضيع المأساة وتتفتت في القلوب المصرية كأننا يا بدر لا رحنا ولا جينا..[49]

I saw men emerging from the storehouse carrying limp and battered corpses, as well as casks of wine. They poured the wine out, flooding the streets in all directions. The wine was mixed with dirt, blood, animal droppings, but the nasty mixture had its takers: men of all ages were coming out with pots and pans and covertly scooping up what they could. [...]

As in my Cairo of the fifteenth century A.H., when a little rain or a burst sewer pipe can turn the streets into a sea for human microorganisms to swim through, the torrent of wine made it impossible for the people to walk. Even so, the harafish in all their motley dress were smiling as they rolled up their pants and performed acrobatically impossible tricks to get around the puddles and the mud, all the while making fun of themselves, mocking their lot, and jeering at everything in existence. The earth was feeling no pain, said one. It didn't even mind being stepped on, said another. 'The fun should last until dawn,' said a third, 'and that's a long way off. It might not come at all!'

'It's already here,' said a fourth. 'It started when we began knocking down the storehouse and pouring out the wine.'

'True,' said a fifth, 'but we don't recognize dawn as observed by the government.'

'We don't recognize it because it's cracked,' said another.

'So the dawn's cracked too?' called another from the end of the street. 'I thought we were the only ones who were cracked.'

'Wise-cracked, maybe,' said another from atop a little hill he had managed to reach.

'Or just wiseass,' retorted another through an open window.

Thus did the Egyptians chew up the tragedy and spit it out as if nothing had happened.[50]

[49] Shalabī, *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī*, 261–62.
[50] Shalaby, *Time-Travels*, 241–42.

Firstly, the sea of wine breaks the religious prohibition of not drinking alcohol and the reference to the bodily fluids ("dirt, blood, animal droppings") reinforces the grotesque effect. Secondly, the narrator compares the absurd circumstances with an ordinary situation in his times, stressing the familiar element that encourages laughter. Thirdly, *al-ḥarāfīsh*, a category broadly corresponding to the riffraff, have no limits in their humour. This corresponds to Bakhtin's conception of laughter, which "is directed not at one part only, but at the whole. One might say that it builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state."[51] Finally, the performers/spectators collectively craft a joke about the possibility of fooling the government all night long until dawn. Told in *'āmmīya*, the joke revolves around the double meaning of *bahīm* as 'livestock' and 'dark colour,' but the English translator has recreated its effect playing with the words 'cracked' and 'wise.' This scene ends, once again, with the wise narrator remarking the continuity of a supposed Egyptianness across history.

Conclusions

This paper investigates the interplay of popular culture and humour in two novels by Khayrī Shalabī, a writer who had a great interest in Egyptian dialect, cultural heritage, and aesthetic innovations. While the novel is usually canonized as high culture, his works containing several jokes and meta-narrative reflections about the culture of laughter creatively re-elaborate popular culture. *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī* and *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* exploit familiar characters and stereotypes to enhance literary humour, since the familiarity of the situation allows the readers to lower their defences and enjoy the reading. These novels also depict humour as a collective experience, shaping alternative communities, albeit temporally and spatially limited.

Shalabī engages with the porous nature of popular culture by putting side by side marginal characters and intellectuals, high and low linguistic registers, classical historians, and contemporary writers that he personally knew. In this context, he focuses on the stock character of the wise-fool or simple-minded, embodied by Ibn Shalabī and Ṣāliḥ. This familiar

[51] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 88.

character challenges some stereotypes attached to the genuine Egyptian, including his attitude towards laughter. Furthermore, its duplicity (Ibn Shalabī has a double personality and Ṣāliḥ is imitated) reveals how artistic productions may appropriate popular culture for its resonance with the audience.

Another feature of popular culture elaborated by Shalabī is its collective nature, which brings together people of different backgrounds in a counter-hegemonic discourse. *Ṣāliḥ Hēṣa* contrasts the established intellectual circles with a community of aspiring intellectuals meeting at the hash den. They are glued together by the culture of laughter and by the hashish waiter, who is an archive of popular culture, especially in his knowledge of Egyptian dialect and subversive attitude. *Riḥlāt al-ṭurshagī al-ḥalwagī* presents the street as a carnivalesque site where the poles of life/death, destruction/creativity join. It highlights the people's *qillat adab* (impoliteness) since they break the rules for the sake of a funny subversion.

Khayrī Shalabī consciously appropriates popular culture as part of his aesthetic project, aiming at redefining the Egyptian identity at times of sociopolitical and cultural change since the Seventies. With his interest in historical writing and the mass media industry, he attempts to rewrite history from below, focusing on the Egyptian ordinary people and some in-between communities. He oscillates between a strong interest in political issues and his characters' denial of any political engagement. This choice of topics is accompanied by a thorough experimentation with linguistic variation, interpolating *fuṣḥā*, *'āmmīya* and slang with comic effects.

On a final note, popular culture is deeply rooted in the local dimension but absorbs global elements and circulates transnationally. The same is true for humour, even though translating it is very challenging. While preserving its immediacy, the translator struggles with word play and shared cultural knowledge between the author and the intended audience in the source language. Yet, when the joke does not fall flat, humour provides fruitful encounters with global audiences.

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Popularising the Political: Jihadi Chants as a Popular Medium of Communication in Jihadi Circles

Kurstin Gatt

Abstract

Over the past decades, political chants in Arabic have played a unique role in the youth culture of several anti-establishment movements in the Arab-Islamic world. Islamist movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and jihadi organisations such as the self-named 'Islamic State' organisation (henceforth, ISO) and al-Qāʿida have skilfully resorted to this popular medium to spread their ideology. From a literary and discourse-analytical perspective, this study examines how jihadi chants are deployed to inculcate a political worldview in the Arabic-speaking environment. More specifically, this chapter deals with four main issues related to this artefact: firstly, it examines the genre's popular appeal in the light of the Arabic-Islamic culture. Secondly, it investigates the chants' socio-political context. Thirdly, it locates jihadi chants within the vast poetic tradition, and finally, it exemplifies how chants are put to jihadist use on the battlefield. The overarching argument made in this work is that ideological chants are attractive and influential among the youth culture because of their resonance with popular traditional practices. By providing multiple examples of jihadi chants, this chapter argues that this genre should be acknowledged as a chief tool of ideological transmission among jihadi groups.

Keywords: jihadism, jihadi chants, *nashīd*, jihadi propaganda, jihadi cultural artefacts, psychological warfare

Introduction

Since time immemorial, the classical Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*) has been instrumentalised as a potent cultural weapon to negotiate power relations in the political sphere. As a chief form of public address, the *qaṣīda* served as the primary means of communication, the principal tool for negotiating authority and a crucial vehicle for doctrinal instruction. Poetry roused warriors to battle, raised awareness of the imminence of death and the importance of leading a virtuous life. After the spread of Islam, poetry called listeners to the new religion and it became an essential component of political and military propaganda. Religio-political groups have actively deployed poetry as a verbal weapon for message propagation and mobilisation of the masses. To date, messages enshrined in the *qaṣīda* form still hold sway over the popular opinion of tribal cultures. Different political movements have deployed modern variants of the multi-functional *qaṣīda* as a powerful tool to disseminate political ideas.[1]

The most frequently used term in Arabic for this chanted variant of the *qaṣīda* is *nashīd* (pl. *unshūda, nashā'id, anshād, anāshīd*) which signifies a song, a hymn, or an anthem. The fourth verbal form derived from the root *n-sh-d* means reciting poetry,[2] whereas the sixth form conveys the meaning of reciting verses to each other.[3] In the twenty-first century, jihadists have engaged in reclaiming the poetic tradition for their benefit. Jihadi organisations exploit the popularity of *anāshīd* to fulfil their political purposes, such as galvanising support for the jihadi cause, spurring aggression against the opponent, presenting an idealistic vision of the battlefield and legitimating acts of terror.

[1] See also Elisabeth Kendall, "Jihadist Propaganda and its Exploitation of the Arab Poetic Tradition," in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, edited by Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 223–46; Kurstin Gatt, *Decoding DĀ'ISH: An Analysis of Poetic Exemplars and Discursive Strategies of Domination in the Jihadist Milieu*, Litkon Series 45 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2020); Samia Mehrez, *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 213–48.

[2] See also Hans Wehr, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, edited by J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Spoken Language Services Inc., 1994), 1132.

[3] See also Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: William and Norgate, 1893), 2793.

1 The Popular Appeal of Jihadi Chants

Popular cultural artefacts and traditions in jihadi circles range from religious rituals, chanted poetry, videos, films, sports, and jokes amongst others.[4] To date, poetry remains one of the most popular art forms in the Arab world.

On the battlefield, chants have become an auditory insignia of jihadists. Jihadi chants often accompany propaganda videos as a backdrop akin to how musical songs accompany Hollywood movies. Contemporary jihadi organisations use chants to lure potential recruits into the ranks of the group, to wage psychological warfare against the group's adversaries and to demarcate the territory on the battlefield.[5]

Chanted poetry serves as a popular communicative medium in jihadi circles. The female poet of ISO known by her pseudonym Aḥlām al-Naṣr ('The Dreams of Victory') officialised her loyalty and her arrival in the supposed caliphate in a poetic composition shared on Twitter.[6] In 2014, the spokesperson of ISO called Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAdnānī (d. 2016)

[4] For a detailed discussion about the jihadi culture and its cultural artefacts, see also Thomas Hegghammer, ed., *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[5] See also Anthony Loyd, "As a Reign of Terror Ends in Syria, Haunting Hymns Used to Recruit Fighters Are its Swansong," *The Times*, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/as-a-reign-of-terror-ends-in-syria-haunting-hymns-used-to-recruit-fighters-are-its-swansong-6kcw5nk5l; Inna Naroditskaya, "The Religious Chants the Islamic State is Using to Woo Recruits," *The Washington Post*, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/14/the-religious-chants-the-islamic-state-is-using-to-woo-recruits/?utm_term=.2d80c1730025; Jonathan Pieslak, "A Musicological Perspective on Jihadi Anashid," in *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists*, 63–81; Menashe Shemesh, "Islamic State Songs – A Major Tool for Reinforcing its Narrative, Spreading Message, Recruiting Supporters," *Right Side News*, 2015, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.rightsidenews.com/2015/08/13/islamic-state-songs-a-major-tool-for-reinforcing-its-narrative/; Nelly Lahoud, "A Cappella Songs (anashid) in Jihadi Culture," in *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 42–62; Nelly Lahoud and Jonathan Pieslak, "Music of the Islamic State," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 60, no. 1 (2018): 153–68; Sara Malm, "ISIS Hacks Swedish Radio Station and Broadcasts Recruitment Song on Repeat for 30 Minutes," *Daily Mail*, accessed April 2, 2018, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5069637/ISIS-hacks-Swedish-radio-plays-recruitment-song.html.

[6] Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 142–3.

versified the foundation of the so-called 'Islamic State' in *wāfir* metre, presumably produced by himself.[7] Information about the death of al-'Adnānī in 2016 was equally circulated through numerous elegies. Shared in the form of a tweet under the hashtag name 'istishhād al-shaykh al-'Adnānī' ('Martyrdom of Sheikh 'Adnānī'), the verses glorified the late spokesperson as a 'fallen hero' who held the battles of his ancestors in high esteem and also demanded to be a protagonist in writing history with his own blood.[8] On a similar vein, the Salafi-aligned group Boko Haram versified its pledge of allegiance to ISO in 2015, and subsequently became known as 'the Islamic State's West Africa Province.'[9]

أَنْشُروا البُشْرى جَميعاً — وَانْثُروا أَغْلــى الوُرودْ
وَارْفعوا التَكْبير دَوماً — وَاهْتفوا أَحْلى نَشيــدْ
أُمّتي فـا سْـتَبْـشِري — قَـدْ تَعَـدَّينا الـحُدودْ
لَمْ تَعُدْ في أَرْضِـنـا — رَسْـمُ أَحْفاد القُرودْ

Spread good tidings to all,
announce the most valuable arrival,
Raise the *takbīr* perpetually,[10]
recite the most melodious chant,
My Muslim polity, rejoice at the news,
we have transgressed the borders,
And no trace has remained on our land
of the descendants of the apes.[11]

There are multiple reasons behind the widespread popularity of chants in jihadi circles. Jihadists exploit chants for their ability to bridge different traditions with modernity. For the purpose of this chapter, 'tradition' is not to be perceived as the binary opposition of 'modernity,' as is often understood in the lens of modernist ideology. In this context, 'tradition'

7 See also Gatt, *Decoding DĀ'ISH*, 135–6.
8 See also Gatt, *Decoding DĀ'ISH*, 133.
9 See also Gatt, *Decoding DĀ'ISH*, 142–3.
10 The term *takbīr* is an exclamatory phrase expressing God's greatness. It is usually followed by the response *allāhu akbar*! (God is Great!).
11 The derogatory term 'apes' refers to the Jews. Qur'anic references to the transformation of Christians and Jews into apes and pigs such as verses 2:65, 5:60 and 7:166 served as Qur'anic models of Israelite punishment and "as a warning against various phenomena of assimilation into Jewish and Christian beliefs and practices for which some heretical trends in Islam were held particularly responsible." See "Children of Israel" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. I–VI (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

and 'modernity' refer to the coexistence of both the past and the present. Edward Shils argues that in tracing the history of the concept, tradition "is whatever is persistent or recurrent through transmission."[12] The concept of tradition, which is closely connected to culture, is not understood as a crystallised, distant knowledge, but a fluid one that regenerates itself.

Chants are popular because they are culturally authentic. Jihadi groups exploit the resonance of tradition as manifested in chants and adapt the long-standing poetic practices and preconceived patterns to the modern-day battlefield. Although chants have come to the fore in the second part of the twentieth century, their form is modelled on the premodern poetic conventions of the *qaṣīda*, including the fixed themes, forms, rhythms, metre, and rhyme schemes.[13] By latching onto the prestigious *qaṣīda*, propagandists create an illusion of authenticity around their messaging, which in turn, gives the group's message legitimacy. However, it is worth highlighting that although jihadi chants are modelled superficially on the conventional rules of the *qaṣīda*, stylistically, the chants do not emulate the 'new style' of poetry constructed around "ambiguity and subtlety of meanings" of which Abū Tammām (d. 845 CE) remains the foremost exponent.[14] The style of this modern variant is intentionally toned down probably due to its instrumentalisation on the battlefield.[15] Contemporary jihadi movements benefit from a simplified poetic style because the artefact is made accessible even to individuals who may not speak Arabic fluently.

In premodern times, simplified poetic verses often surfaced on the battlefield as a propagandistic tool. During the Umayyad Caliphate, religious and political factions such as the Shīʿites, the Kharijites, and the Zubayrids produced ideological poetry that sought to call for action and, at times, to incite violence. Salma Jayyusi claims that premodern ideological movements composed poetry that was "directly related to current events" and

[12] Edward Albert Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 16.

[13] Behnam Said, "Hymns (Nasheeds): A Contribution to the Study of the Jihadist Culture," Studies in *Conflict and Terrorism* 35, no. 12 (2012), 865.

[14] See also Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham (Cairo: American University of Cairo, 2000), 43.

[15] Even in the premodern period, poetry which was instrumentalised on the battlefield tended to be less mannerist in style. One can refer to the poetry of the Kharijites as an example. See also Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 252ff.

that was characterised by a language of "vitality, simplicity, and [...] directness."[16] In contrast to the more embellished style and rich imagery that defined Abbasid court poetry, premodern ideological poetry seemed to free itself from conventions of flowery language.

In contemporary warfare, the simplification of the poetic style into day-like speech contributes substantially towards the attractiveness and effectiveness of this popular medium among jihadists. Chants are likeable because their form resembles a prestigious poetic tradition which subtly arouses positive emotions. Chants are equally effective because of their broad appeal; the underlying poetic message is not exclusively limited to the supposed high culture, but it is expressed in a language that is accessible to every individual with some knowledge of Arabic. For organisational purposes, chants create and consolidate group identity. Jihadi sympathisers with different levels of Arabic language skills can partake in the collective ritual of chanting. This activity facilitates the internalisation of the jihadi values and strengthens in-group cohesion, especially among a culturally diverse and multi-lingual group.

The elements of timeliness and political engagement also contribute towards the chants' popularity. Jihadi chants engage in the contemporary socio-political happenings of the time by offering apparent solutions to the hardship faced by citizens living in war-torn countries.[17] Inherent to the chants' ideological nature, these apparent solutions often tend to simplify the complex political landscape of the battlefield into black or white, good or bad, and the abode of Islam (*dār al-islām*) and the abode of apostasy (*dār al-kufr*). This dichotomous worldview serves as an essential discursive mechanism which overrides gaps in logic and constructs a coherent opponent.

Jihadi chants are also popular because they latch onto mainstream Islamic traditions. Chants have already received broad acceptance among mainstream Islamic culture and are integrated in Islamic education. One of the

[16] Salma K. Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, edited by Alfred F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 413.

[17] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York, NY: Vintage books, 1973), 116.

most famous promoters of Islamic chants was Salīm ʿAbd al-Qādir Zinjīr (d. 2013), who produced Islamic chants for children to contribute towards their Islamic education. Jihadi groups make use of chants as a messaging tool because this genre resonates positively with individuals brought up in predominantly Muslim communities.

Chants also serve as an ideal and popular communicative medium on the battlefield for practical reasons; chants are cheap to compose and easy to diffuse in a harsh and unstable environment. Chants exploit much of the mindset of orality even if with the adoption of high-technology ambience. Jihadi organisations belong to a word-oriented milieu that has remained strongly connected to its oral roots in its daily life. Jihadi chants still bear striking resemblances to traditional lifestyle practices in their participatory mystique, the fostering of a collective sense, the concentration on the present moment, and the use of formulaic expressions. In the oral tradition, "poems treating purely fantastic or imaginary themes are not taken seriously [...] a poem is composed in response to an actual situation, a momentous occasion [...] or a socio-historical issue."[18] The dissemination of the jihadi message takes place by memorising the message and then chanting it verbally to other individuals. The process of memorising the message is enhanced by the psychodynamics of orally based thought. Mnemonic techniques of orality are used to ensure a long-lasting and stable set of memories in an oral setting.[19] One of the techniques is hammering repetition, which is manifested in back looping and pervasive patterns of lexical, morphological, and syntactic repetition. Repetition is also reinforced by the rhythm, fixed metre, and end-rhyme of the chant.

Repetition is crucial because it aids recall and memorisation, especially in an environment characterised by the immediacy of the battlefield and the struggle for survival. For this reason, repetitive patterns are not monotonous but serve as in-built mnemonic tools which ascertain continuity and the preservation of the underlying message. Metred speech, which is accompanied by repetitive structures on the battlefield, is significant because it imposes a regular, predictable pattern that brings tranquillity in

[18] Steven Charles Caton, *Peaks of Yemen I Summon: Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 39.

[19] See also Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 53ff.

an unpredictable environment. Repetition also strengthens a collective message in the shared memory of its populace.

Jihadi chants are popular because of their illocutionary force upon the listeners. Similar to the performative *qaṣīda*, chants do not only describe factual situations and moments, but they also engage in bringing a change to this reality by provoking outrage and inciting violence. Chants transmit socially accepted cultural values and norms that have been reclaimed by jihadists. By chanting jihadi verses, the audience internalises these reinterpreted values and norms to the extent that the values are taken on board mechanically and unconsciously through hammering repetition. The ritual of collectively chanting poetic verses serves as an outward sign of allegiance towards the jihadi organisation. Similarly, individuals signal their willingness to accept and adopt a particular behaviour by accepting to memorise the chant and recite it in a group. The chanting assists sympathisers to place themselves in a satisfying position with the jihadi group.

A prominent Salafi-aligned American Imam of Yemeni descent named Anwar al-Awlaki argues that chants play a potential role in motivating Muslims and in discrediting and demoralising the 'disbelievers.' The Salafi Imam claims that:

> A good nasheed can spread so widely it can reach to an audience that you could not reach through a lecture or a book. Nasheeds are especially inspiring to the youth, who are the foundation of Jihad in every age and time. Nasheeds are an important element in creating a 'Jihad culture.'[20]

Al-Awlaki maintains that jihadi chants require global attention because they seem to encourage individuals to perform *jihād*. Additionally, al-Awlaki ascertains that jihadi chants echo an Islamic ethos by sharing poetic features similar to the cultural practices of poetry during Prophet Muhammad's time.[21]

One final aspect which contributes towards this genre's popularity is its auditory aesthetic. Jihadi organisations benefit most from investing in cultural products which attract the youth because militant jihadi groups

[20] Anwar al-Awlaki, *44 Ways to Support Jihad* (n.a. victorious Media, n.d.), accessed April 2, 2018, no. 42, https://ebooks.worldofislam.info/ebooks/Jihad/Anwar_Al_Awlaki_-_44_Ways_To_Support_Jihad.pdf.

[21] See also Al-Awlaki, *44 Ways to Support Jihad*.

thrive on youth engagement on the battlefield.[22] Ideologically-motivated chants hold popular appeal among youth cadres because the chants tend to be zealous, highly provocative, intensely emotional, and aesthetically appealing. Although chants have been employed for decades by jihadists prior to the emergence of ISO, the high-quality production, and ingenious simulations of battlefield soundscape, which compensates for the Salafi ban on musical instruments, remains unprecedented.[23] The Salafi ideological stream bans the use of musical instruments except under specific circumstances. According to the Salafi scholar Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, chants of a projected Islamic ethos are only allowed if the text is purely Islamic, if there are no musical instruments used except for the *duff* (which is allowed only for women at weddings), if listening to the chants does not distract people from the study of the Qur'an, and if the melody is not similar to the teachings of western or eastern music, which makes people want to dance.[24]

ISO has overcome the Salafi ban on musical instruments by embedding acoustics from the battlefield, including a burst of staccato gunfire, marching boots, clinging of swords, and explosions.

2 Socio-Political Factors Influencing Jihadi Chants

Jihadi chants are intensely linked to their socio-political environment. For this reason, this study also benefits from a discussion about the genre's first appearance in the Arab-Islamic world. Our understanding of this genre also needs to take into consideration similar anti-establishment groups in the Arabic-Islamic tradition that used poetry as a warfare tool. By tracing literary similarities of jihadi chants to other historical political movements, we will be in a more favourable position to locate this genre within the broader framework of modern Arabic literature.

[22] Lizzie Dearden, "Isis Documents Leak Reveals Profile of Average Militant as Young, Well-educated but with Only 'basic' Knowledge of Islamic Law," *The Independent*, accessed March 31, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-documents-leak-reveals-profile-of-average-militant-as-young-well-educated-but-with-only-basic-a6995111.html.

[23] Salafism refers to an ultra-conservative reform branch or movement within Sunni Islam that developed in Arabia in the first half of the eighteenth century.

[24] Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Taḥrīm Ālāt al-Ṭarab*, fourth edition (Maktabat al-Dalīl, 1997), 181ff.

The main historical and political factors worth exploring include the artefact's ideological outlook and its emergence in contemporary times. Jihadi chants are a modern manifestation of the classical Arabic ode. Chants reflect a particular political setting dictated by conflict and resolution. Historically informed, chants were initially a product of the socio-political climate in the Arab and Islamic world during the second half of the twentieth century. The first appearance of chanted poetry emerged in the Islamic world when Taliban deployed chants known as *taranas* as a propaganda tool. These chants were engendered in emotions of sorrow, pride, desperation, hope, and incitement to garner support from among the Afghan population.[25] The chants' primary purpose was to spread ideology, to effectively mobilise grassroots and to nurture cadres and leaders. In the Arabic-Islamic world, chanted poetry emerged during the period known as 'the Islamic Awakening' (*al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiyya*) in Egypt and Syria as a counterculture to the status quo of the time. The Islamic Awakening was an anti-establishment movement that engaged in using legitimation mechanisms through which it could distinguish itself from the Muslim rulers against which it rebelled.[26] Among the most famous *nashīd* singers (*munshidūn*) involved in the production of Islamic and political chants are the Syrian nationals Abū Māzin, Abū al-Jūd, Abū Dujāna and Abū Rātib.[27]

Jihadi chants are politically motivated. Chants transmit a political ideology because they are rooted in a culture of struggle or resistance. Terrorist attacks carried out by jihadi organisations have never been exclusively motivated by a group's religious beliefs. On the contrary, the jihadi trajectory aims at overthrowing the country's ruler and creating a theocratic state. Robert Pape, who studied more than three hundred cases of suicide terrorism, stresses that:

[25] Matthias Weinreich and Mikhail Pelevin, "The Songs of the Taliban: Continuity of Form and Thought in an ever-changing Environment," *Iran and the Caucasus 16*, no. 1 (2012); Thomas H. Johnson, Matthew DuPee and Wali Shaaker, *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Thomas H. Johnson and Ahmad Waheed, "Analyzing Taliban Taranas (Chants): An Effective Afghan Propaganda Artifact," *Small Wars and Insurgencies 22*, no. 01 (2011).

[26] For a thorough discussion about the distinction between Islam, Islamism and jihadism, see also Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 22.

[27] For a more detailed discussion, see also Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 123ff.

> [T]here is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world's religions.... Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.[28]

Taliban and al-Qā'ida, for instance, were founded as a counter-revolutionary movement against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and have subsequently developed according to the political events that have unfolded in the region. On a similar vein, ISO arose in the aftermath of the political vacuum created by the US-led invasion of Iraq.[29]

Ideologically, jihadi chants feed into a particular political narrative which revolves around the reclaimed concept of *jihād*. In contemporary times, the notion of *jihād* has established itself as a contested religious concept among Islamic scholars and counter-terrorism experts alike.[30] However, scholars tend to agree that the stream of jihadism is connected to a minority of Muslims "who use violence in order to pursue their universalistic political agendas."[31] The term is defined as "the peripheral current of extremist Islamic thought whose adherents demand the use of violence in order to oust non-Islamic influence from traditionally Muslim lands en route to establishing true Islamic governance under *Sharia*, or God's law."[32] The political agenda pushed forward by jihadists does not only set itself apart from 'the West,' but it also distinguishes its followers from other denominational groups within Islam by its "singular focus on the violent side of the Jihad concept."[33] Its propagandist characteristics indicate that the underlying message of this genre cannot be taken at face value, but must be interpreted according to the hidden agenda of the political group in question. Ideological chants involve masking and distorting reality as well as creating a 'false consciousness.' Jihadi chants

[28] Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York, NY: Random House, 2006), 4.

[29] The political context is discussed thoroughly in Gatt, *Decoding DĀ'ISH*, 29ff.

[30] See also David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015); Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

[31] Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, 5.

[32] Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, 4.

[33] Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, 5.

conceal reality on the battlefield by offering an idealised image of the battlefield and the role of the combatants.

An imminent characteristic of propagandist discourse is manipulation. Specific elements that resonate positively with a specific populace are deployed to coerce individuals into agreeing with the jihadi narrative. Chants are characterised by intertextual references to Muslim heroes, battles, and Islamic symbology which often allude to the Qur'an or the Prophetic Traditions. The narrative circulated in jihadi chants promises the arrival of a new era of political influence by projecting Islamic glory as the blueprint of modern victory. Historical events and contemporary warfare are selectively reconstructed to push forward a violent jihadi ethos. Parts of the Islamic tradition are taken out of context and repurposed to propagate the group's legitimacy and depict the jihadi agenda as part of mainstream Islamic culture.

In a chant entitled 'The Regiment of My Islamic State,' ISO invites its followers to revive their glorious past by engaging in warfare:

سَـرايا دَوْلَتي هَيَّا أعِيدي مَجْدَنا حَيّا
وَرُدِّي تَـاجَ أمَّتِنا عَلى هَاماتِهَا هَيَّـا

Regiment of my state, arise,
revive our glory,
And restore the crown of our Islamic community
on its head, arise.[34]

By resorting to phraseology derived from a religious corpus, jihadists aim to have their 'voice' becoming the voice of tradition and, most importantly, that of the Qur'anic ethos and their interpretation of it. In this manner, jihadi members are then not depicted as the innovators but the messengers of that ethos. Such manipulation appeals to tradition and authority, but it also uses logical gaps and fallacies by a selective reconfiguration. As a result, the jihadi chants are weaponised in the jihadi milieu.

[34] Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Regiment of My [Islamic] State," *Jihadology: A Clearinghouse for Jihādī Primary Source Material, Original Analysis, and Translation Service*, May 29, 2014, accessed January 22, 2018, https://jihadology.net/2014/05/29/ajnad-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-nashid-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-the-regiment-of-my-islamic-state/.

The ideology of jihadism is starkly influenced by two major intersecting dimensions which are neither reducible to their constituent factors and forces nor fixed and stagnant in history. On a synchronic level, jihadism is shaped by the political events which have moulded the collective memories of modern-day Muslims. The jihadi narrative of struggle reaches out to those individuals whose identity is rooted in a history of shared suffering following decades of invasions, wars, and denied states. The jihadi trajectory prompts identification with a potential group by showing them who or what they may become if they join the jihadi cause. Salafi jihadism is ideologically based on a global outlook, the rejection of electoral politics, the reluctance to make truces or engage in political discussions and compromises, and an exclusive focus on armed struggle.

Diachronically, jihadism is a subset of a particularly violent, conservative, and uncompromising Sunni group which links itself to Islam. Modern-day adherents of Salafism claim to emulate exclusively and meticulously the example of "the pious predecessors" (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), that is, the first three generations of Muslims following the Prophet's death.[35] The radicalisation of Islam advocates the restoration of a previous state of social affairs by seeking to return to the status quo ante that is regarded as absent from the contemporary status quo of a society.

3 Locating Jihadi Chants within the Poetic Tradition

In an attempt to locate jihadi chants within a vast literary tradition, this study considers jihadi chants as a subset of the modern *qaṣīda*. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle lay out four distinct normative sets which represent the evolution of the *qaṣīda*, namely, "the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*, rooted in the ancient Arab tribal code; the panegyric *qaṣīda*, expressing an ideal vision of just Islamic government; the religious *qaṣīda*, imparting different types of commendable religious conduct; and the modern *qaṣīda*, influenced by secular, nationalist, or humanist ideals."[36] In this section, I advance on this classification by arguing that the ideals of the modern

[35] See also Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009), 33–57.

[36] Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 4–5.

qaṣīda are dependent on the ideology of specific groups. In the political stream, the modern *qaṣīda* tends to transmit nationalist, Islamist, and jihadi ideals.

The nationalist trajectory, which promotes unity among the Arabs, asserts that the Arab world constitutes one nation bound together by a common ethnicity, language, culture, identity, geography, and politics. In the nineteenth century, fiery nationalist poetry was mostly oratorical, militant and of an instantaneous effect.[37] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra argues that nationalist poetry "might be condemned as too weak a toy against guns, but in actual fact it was often as good as dynamite,"[38] because it managed to crystallise "political positions in telling lines which, memorised by old and young stiffened popular resistance and provided rallying slogans."[39] Nationalist poetry manifests itself mostly, but not exclusively, in national or official anthems (*anāshīd waṭaniyya*) of Arab countries and poetry related to Arab nationalist and pan-Arab organisations, most of which follow the conventional form of the Arabic *qaṣīda*. The modern *qaṣīda* also served as a mouthpiece for the Baʿth party in Iraq and Syria, especially in the second half of the twentieth century.[40]

The modern *qaṣīda* is a chief transmitter of Islamist ideals. The Islamist stream of the modern *qaṣīda* includes poetry by affiliates of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Hezbollah.[41]

[37] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Modern Arabic literature and the West," *Journal of Arabic Literature* (January, 1971), 77.

[38] Jabra, "Modern Arabic literature and the West," 77.

[39] Jabra, "Modern Arabic literature and the West," 77–8.

[40] Ṣaddām Ḥusayn (1937–2006), for instance, also composed his own poetry. His last written words before his execution were composed in verse. See also Marc Santora and John F. Burns, "Saddam's Last Poem. From Hussein, a Florid Farewell to the Iraqi People," *Spiegel*, accessed January 30, 2018, http://www.spiegel.de/international/saddam-s-last-poem-from-hussein-a-florid-farewell-to-the-iraqi-people-a-457719.html.

[41] To date, the scant analysis that is available about Hamas poetry has shed light on the nuanced cultural, political and philosophical dimensions of the Islamist narrative vis-a-vis the Palestinian struggle and the perceived Israeli enemy. Similarly, scholarly discussions about the poetry of Hizbullah have demonstrated how this organisation shapes its poetic discourse at strategic and tactical levels to transmit its projected identity that is opposed to Israel's presence in Lebanon. See also Atef Alshaer, "The poetry of Hamas," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 2, no. 2 (2009): 214–30; Atef Alshaer, *Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab world* (London: C Hurst and Co Publishers Ltd, 2016); Atef Alshaer, "The Poetry of Hizbullah," edited by Lina Khatib, Dina Matar

Additionally, this sub-category includes resistance poetry (*shiʿr al-muqāwama*) which was produced after the Palestinian exodus known as *al-Nakba* in 1948. In comparison to the jihadi stream, these organisations usually embrace parliamentary politics and are willing to work within existing state structures, often striving to reconcile premodern Islamic law with the modern nation-state.

In a chapter entitled 'The Poetry of Hizbullah,' Atef Alshaer underscores the significance of poetry in the Arab world and its multifaceted functions, ranging from making oaths and sacrifices to spreading ideology, recording history, and hailing Hezbollah fighters.[42] Militant Shīʿite groups are known for producing more flamboyant chants, including the engagement of marching bands and the use of musical instruments.[43] The Palestinian Islamic resistance movement known as Hamas also uses poetry as a propaganda tool against the opponent.[44] Several Islamist leaders have instrumentalised the quasi-magical efficacy of poetry in their political discourse. Mushīr al-Maṣrī (1976–) is an epitome of a powerful Hamas speaker and leader who is known for producing his own poetry and performing it to his audience, sometimes during his political speeches.[45] Ideologues like Ḥassan al-Bannā (1949–1928), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, are also known for penning their own poetry.[46]

The modern *qaṣīda* is a conveyor of jihadi ideals. It is deployed by the jihadi stream and its underlying poetic message is concerned with a narrow conceptual understanding of *jihād*. This genre tends to follow a fixed number of recurring motifs such as references to past glory, the arrival of a new era, the value of death or sacrifice in order to achieve paradise, and conveyance of fraternal bonds. The ancient tribal virtues of chivalry, piety, and courage also feature extensively in jihadi verses. However, the meaning of these values and Islamic symbols is reconfigured and aligned with

and Atef Alshaer, *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013).

42 See also Alshaer, *Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab World*.

43 Brian Schatz, "Inside the World of ISIS Propaganda Music: Songs have become increasingly Vital to the Organisation's Identity," accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/02/isis-islamic-state-baghdadi-music-jihad-nasheeds/.

44 Alshaer, *Poetry and Politics in the* Modern Arab *World*, 169–92.

45 Alshaer, *Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab World*, 188.

46 Alshaer, *Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab World*, 169.

the jihadi paradigm.[47] The reengineering of the classical *qaṣīda*, with its rigid metre, flowing rhythm, and end-rhyme coupled with allusions to religious texts, historical battles, and Islamic figures, contribute subtly to the process of memorisation, recitation, and, by extension, the diffusion of the jihadi ideology.

4 The Functions of Jihadi Chants

Jihadi chants fulfil three basic functions that often operate simultaneously, namely, communicational, social, and emotional.[48] In jihadi circles, poetry is not only a form of literary expression in the eyes of the group, but it is an equally powerful ideological medium of communication that motivates people to rally behind jihadism and fight on the battlefield. The Arabic language plays a significant role in the transmission of the jihadi message because the universality of Classical Arabic "enables ideas to travel quickly, imperceptibly, cheaply, and, once absorbed into the collective memory, permanently."[49] The Salafi scholar al-Awlaki lists "learning Arabic" as one of the ways of supporting *jihād*, claiming that:

> Arabic is the international language of Jihad. Arabic also happens to be the predominant language of the foreign mujahideen in every land of Jihad. It is important for the mujahideen to be able to communicate through a common language and Arabic is the proper candidate.[50]

Statistically, Arabic-speaking jihadists on the battlefield contribute to 72% of the foreign fighters,[51] apart from a substantial number of other jihadists joining the Iraq-Syria region from within the Islamic countries and outside.[52]

[47] See also Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 99ff.

[48] The functions of jihadi poetry among al-Qāʿida and DĀʿISH groups are discussed in Elisabeth Kendall, "Yemen's Al-Qaʿida and Poetry as a Weapon of Jihad," in *Twenty-first Century Jihad: Law, Society and Military Action*, edited by Elisabeth Kendall and Ewan Stein (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 247–69; Gatt, *Decoding DĀʿISH*, 132ff.

[49] Kendall, "Jihadist Propaganda and its Exploitation of the Arab Poetic Tradition," 227–8.

[50] Al-Awlaki, *44 Ways to Support Jihad*.

[51] See also "Exclusive: 1736 Documents Reveal ISIS Jihadists Personal Data," *Zamān al-waṣl*, accessed March 31, 2018, https://en.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/14541.

[52] A large number of foreign fighters who joined the battlefield in the past decade migrated from non-Arabic-speaking countries like Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Burma and Singapore. Sympathisers from these countries could still communicate in Arabic with other jihadists in Classical Arabic through their religious

Jihadi chants serve as a communicative vehicle which circulates the groups' worldview and political agenda among a predominantly Arabic-speaking populace. Chants also serve as a chief tool for negotiating authority by establishing and maintaining asymmetrical relations between the rulers and the ruled. The attractiveness of chanted wording facilitates doctrinal instruction and memorisation of ideological principles on the battlefield. Detailed debates presented in theological books are not practical for dissemination purposes, especially in an environment that is characterised by the immediacy of the battlefield.

Jihadi chants fulfil several social functions within the jihadi organisations such as dictating instructions, legitimising violent actions, and serving as a membership to the group. Chanted verses act on the imagination of the youth culture to shape a sense of belonging and inspire a bellicose spirit by appealing to the ideas of sacred glory and sacrifice. A communal and idealised image of the battlefield is created through the heroic mode whereby jihadists memorialise military deeds in light of Islamic history. Additionally, chants set the standards of militant conduct and produce a warlike mood by inciting militant jihadists to seek military distinction through blood vengeance.

Jihadi chants serve as an expression of communal values, which, in turn, helps create a group identity and reinforce the social bonds. In jihadi chants, there is a marked emphasis on the core thematic coherence of the traditional values, the interpretation of which is entrenched in the jihadi code of conduct such as honour (*al-sharaf*), courage or forbearance (*al-ṣabr*), steadfastness (*al-thabāt wa-l-ṣumūd*), and moral strength (*al-ʿazīma*). These reconfigured traditional values are exploited to compel prospective followers to assume their duty in lieu of being shamed before an expectant community. In a video production entitled *The Purification of Souls*, a child is heard chanting in *mutaqārib* metre and rhymed in couplets about courage and steadfastness surrounded by a group of men.[53] The men also engage in choral repetition:

indoctrination. See also Elani Owen, "The Next Frontline of the Battle Against the Islamic State? Southeast Asia," *Cornell International Affairs Review* 10 (2), accessed October 20, 2018, http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1648.

[53] This rhyme scheme (AA, BB, CC, etc..), which deviates from the premodern mono-

سَلَكْتُ طَريقي وَ لا لَنْ أحيدْ عَـزمْـتُ المَـسيـرَ بِعَـزْم الحَديـدْ
وَوَ دَعَتْ دُنْيايَ قَلْبٌ عَـنيـدْ تَـوَجَّـهَ طَـرْفـي لأَرْض الأُسودْ
فَيا أَمُّ لا تَـحْـزَني لِفِـراقـــي فَإِنّي مَـضَـيْـتُ لأَرْض العِراقْ

I pursued my way, and I will not deviate,
I determined my path by the firm will of the iron,
My world let go of the stubborn heart,
my gaze was directed to the land of the lions,
O mother, do not grieve for me being apart,
for I went to the land of Iraq.[54]

Although the aesthetic fulfilment of jihadi chants is intrinsic to this genre, this is not the sole intention of producing chants in the jihadi milieu. Emotionally-charged verses enable jihadists to formalise the experience on the battlefield by building up social pressure among the jihadi adherents to uphold the group's norms. In multiple chants, jihadists project martyrdom as a noble Islamic act that helps fighters to climb the ranks of the organisation. Valour is prized and is collectively defined and ratified by the community. The trance-like chant entitled *O Victory in Obtaining Martyrdom* (*yā fawza man nāla l-shahāda*) is an epitome of a chant that beautifies death, glorifies martyrdom, and instructs the audience to follow suit. The communal dimension of the chant helps increase the effectiveness of group actions and present martyrdom as a collective political choice for group affiliates:

يا فَـوْزَ مَنْ نالَ الـشَّهادَةَ صادِقاً تُمْحى الذُّنوبُ إِذا الدِّماءُ تَقَطَّرُ
وَإِذا الزُّهورُ تَعَطَّرَتْ بِعَبيرِهَـــا مِسْكٌ تَفُـوحُ جِـرَاحُـهُ وَتُعَطَّرُ
وَتَجَـهَّـزوا يا إِخْوَتِـي لِعَدُوِّكُـمْ وَتَسَلَّحـوا بِالـحَقِّ لا تَتَأَخَّروا
قوموا لِحَيَّ عَلى الـجِهـادِ فَإِنَّهُ عِـزٌّ إِذا ما نَسْتَجيبُ وَ مَفْـخَرُ

O victory for those who have received martyrdom truthfully,
the sins will be erased when the blood starts dripping,
If the flowers exude fragrance,
his wounds emit musk and are perfumed,

rhyme, is also a feature of the neo-*qaṣīda* in neo-classical poetry.

54 See also (14:57) in Aaron Y. Zelin, "Purification of the Souls–Wilāyat al-Raqqa," *Jihadology* (blog), June 20, 2017, accessed March 30, 2019, http://jihadology.net/2017/06/19/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-purification-of-the-souls-wilayat-al-raqqah/.

My brothers, be prepared [to fight] your enemy,
be armed with the truth, and do not linger,
Rise to perform *jihād*,
when we answer the call, we will rise through the ranks with pride.[55]

The third function of jihadi chants is emotional coercion. Jihadi chants appeal to the individuals on an emotional level to coerce them into operating on a functional level. Emotions are intended to generate social pressure by overriding gaps in logic and making individuals cling irrationally and passionately to a course of action. Chants evoke emotions by focussing on the woes of multiple societies of discriminated Muslims around the world and linking their suffering to the jihadi battlefield. In Iraq, for instance, ISO exploited the incidents such as the officially sanctioned torture at Abū Ghraib prison to provoke outrage and to garner support among mainstream Muslims. The images shared on social media showing torture and suffering of detainees in the US- and British-run jails in Iraq contributed to "stroking rage and hatred towards the West in general and the US and the UK in particular."[56] These political events are preserved and relived through the ritual chanting of poetry.[57]

By linking the suffering of Muslims to the jihadi battlefield, jihadists imply that the struggle in Iraq is the central battlefield in which one has to fight the war against the perceived enemies of Islam. Additionally, the projection of the jihadist struggle as a universal conflict resonates with the emotional need for unity and solidarity among mainstream culture. The jihadi message reaches out to those whose identity is rooted in a history of shared suffering following decades of invasions, wars, and denied

[55] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Ajnād Foundation for Media Production Presents a New Nashīd from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām: 'Oh Victory in Obtaining Martyrdom,'" *Jihadology* (blog), May 1, 2014, accessed April 30, 2019, https://jihadology.net/2014/05/01/ajnad-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-nashid-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-oh-victory-in-obtaining-martyrdom/.

[56] Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 39.

[57] For an analysis of the images at Abū Ghraib prison, see also Avinoam Shalem, "Abu Ghraib, die Medien und die Entstehung einer Ikone," in *Tinte und Blut: Politik, Erotik und Poetik des Martyriums,* Andreas Frank and Thomas Krass (Frankfurt: Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), 118–39; Matti Hyvärinen and Lisa Muszynski (eds.) *Terror and the Arts: Artistic, Literary, and Political Interpretations of Violence from Dostoyevsky to Abu Ghraib* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

states. For members of historically opposed or marginalised groups, the narrative of struggle prompts identification with a potential group by showing them who or what they may become if they join the jihadi cause.

5 An Analysis of the Chant 'al-Mālikī Will Be Vanquished'

The chant entitled 'al-Mālikī will be vanquished' was released in summer 2014 as an audio file through an ISO affiliated media outlet.[58] Soon after, it became popular in jihadi circles. The chant surfaces in several propagandist videos produced by ISO, including a video dealing with tourism in the jihadi compound, in which a group of militant jihadists are collectively captured reciting this particular chant.[59] This chant celebrates ISO's capture of Mosul which took place between the sixth and the tenth of June 2014. The form and content echo a similar chant which had previously been attributed to al-Qā'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The chant deploys an identical poetic metre, a similar message and chorus, namely, 'Ibn al-Qamish will be vanquished.'[60] The AQAP chant celebrated the attack on a prison in Yemen's capital Ṣan'ā' on the thirteenth of February 2014, in which twenty-nine al-Qā'ida operatives were freed. The chant also lampooned the director of Yemen's Political Security Organisation (PSO) called Ghālib al-Qamish, who had fought unsuccessfully against AQAP in Yemen for decades.

The similarities of expression between the two distinct jihadi groups demonstrate how jihadi groups latch onto known formulaic patterns which gain currency in a particular period, and develop these techniques

[58] See also Aaron Y. Zelin, "Al-Mālikī is Vanquished Tomorrow," *Jihadology*: *A Clearinghouse for Jihadi Primary Source Material, Original Analysis and Translation Service*, accessed April 3, 2018, http://jihadology.net/2014/08/16/ajnad-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-release-from-the-islamic-state-al-maliki-is-vanquished-tomorrow/.

[59] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Tourism of my Ummah of Jihad in the Way of God–Wilāyat Kirkūk," *Jihadology*: *A Clearinghouse for Jihadi Primary Source Material, Original Analysis, and Translation Service*, Accessed November 3, 2018, https://jihadology.net/2015/02/18/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-tourism-of-my-ummah-of-jihad-in-the-way-of-god-wilayat-kirkuk/.

[60] In Arabic, the chant is called *Ibn al-qamish ghadā maghūra*. For a snippet of the AQAP chant, see also Elisabeth Kendall, "Militant Jihadi Culture: Poetry as a Weapon," *The University of Oxford*, The Changing Character of War Centre, accessed April 3, 2018, 39:30–40:33, http://www.ccw.ox.ac.uk/events/2016/10/25/title-tbc-dr-lis-kendall.

to address a novel context.[61] The fact that ISO chose to channel its successes in verse through the same formulaic expressions and metre previously used by AQAP signals ISO's explicit intention to connect both events. This connection needs to be understood in light of the political relationship between the two leading jihadi organisations during the time of publication. The chant 'al-Mālikī will be vanquished' was published in the Summer of 2014 after AQAP's split with ISO. In February of the same year, the two organisations parted ways after a disagreement erupted over their operational code. Therefore, ISO might have exploited the poetic links and patterns to its advantage, possibly to show off its superiority over its rival AQAP.[62] In this context, the artefact serves as a popular platform where multiple groups vying for political power project their victories through similar literary devices.

The chant 'al-Mālikī will be vanquished' is composed in *basīṭ* metre and its overarching message is to delegitimise Nūrī al-Mālikī as the Prime Minister of Iraq.[63] The chant is divided into three phases; in the first phase, the chant sets the scene by identifying the addressee of the chant and the adversaries. The second phase provides a list of the recent territorial victories ensured by ISO in Iraq. The chant then moves into the third phase by announcing the creation of the 'Islamic State.'[64]

As indicated in the chorus of the chant, the poetic message ensures that al-Mālikī would be defeated in close proximity. This promise appeared to be fulfilled when al-Mālikī submitted his resignation as the Prime Minister of Iraq a few days after the jihadists captured Mosul.[65]

العالَم اليَوْم غَدا مَبْهور — وَأميركا وَأوباما كَلْب الروْمْ
يا ابْن الرَما دي عَلَيْهم ثور — عَلى الرَوافِض وَأَنْصار المَظْلومْ
الحَمْدُلله أنا مَنْصُور — لاَ خَوْف وَلاَ ذُلّ بَعْدَ اليَومْ

[61] Premodern poets were accustomed to emulating (*mu'āraḍa*) other poetry intentionally by using the same metre, monorhyme and formulaic expressions.

[62] See also John Turner, "Strategic Differences: Al-Qaeda's Split with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 26, no. 2 (2015): 208–25.

[63] Nūrī al-Mālikī served as the Prime Minister of Iraq from 2006 to 2014.

[64] The full transcription of the chant is appended to this chapter.

[65] The chant *al-Mālikī gad ghadā maghūr* originally appeared during the first half of August 2014, whereas al-Mālikī handed in his resignation on September 8, 2014.

The world today became dazzled,
including America, and Obama [who is] the dog of the Byzantines,
Oh son of Ramadi, revolt against them,
against the refusers and the supporters of the oppressed one,
Praise be to God, I am victorious; after today,
[there will be] no more fear or humiliation.

The chant sets the scene in its first verse by presenting a dichotomous worldview of 'us' and 'them.' It explicitly classifies America, Europe, and Shīʿite Muslims as opponents. The opening verse also dehumanises America's former president Barack Obama by calling him the 'dog of the Byzantines' (*ubāmā kalb al-rūm*), a derogatory term loaded with historical allusions. In the Arabic culture, the dog denotes uncleanliness (*najāsa*) and baseness (*ḥaqāra*) and is only second in dirt to the pig. Historically, the pejorative term 'dog of the Byzantines' (*kalb al-rūm*) was used by several Arabs to insult the Byzantine emperors. In a response letter sent by the fifth Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809 CE) to Nicephorus I (d. 803 CE), a Byzantine emperor, Hārūn al-Rashīd addresses his letter as follows: "from Hārūn al-Rashīd, Commander of the Faithful to Nicephorus *kalb al-rūm*."[66] The negative presentation of the 'other' as a 'dog' is also extended to Europe later in the chant.[67] Additionally, Shīʿite Muslims are also considered as part of the out-group. In jihadi parlance, Shīʿites are often implied through the terms *al-rawāfiḍ* ('the refusers') and *anṣār al-maẓlūm* ('the supporters of the oppressed one'). Jihadists accuse them of refusing authentic Islam by following Imam al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (d. 680 CE), whom they label as 'the oppressed one.'[68]

The introductory verses also allude to the addressee of the chant, namely, the son of Ramadi (*yā ibn al-ramādī*). The Sunni-dominated Iraqi city of Ramadi is the capital of al-Anbār Governorate province, and it occupies a highly strategic location between the Euphrates river and the road west into Syria and Jordan. The chant is probably addressed to one of the most

[66] Hugh Kennedy, "Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy in the Near East from the Islamic Conquests to the Mid Eleventh Century," in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, edited by Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992): 133–43.

[67] *Amrikā nisfayn qaṣamnāhā…wa-kilāb urubbā saḥaqnāhā* is translated as "we have divided America in two, and we have crushed the dogs of Europe."

[68] Al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 CE) and the son of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE) who ruled as the fourth Rashid caliph of Sunni Islam and is regarded as the rightful immediate successor to Prophet Muhammad by Shīʿite Muslims.

senior leaders of ISO, who is a native of Ramadi, called Abū Zayd al-ʿIrāqī (d. 2018).[69] The message resonates with the Iraqi population through the traces of the local dialect.[70] Expressions such as *jibnāhā* ('we brought it') and *shillnāhā* ('we lit it up'), and the realisation of /q/ as [g] throughout the chant in terms like *maghūr* ('vanquished') and *gasamnāhā* ('we divided it') are two examples of dialectal features in this chant.[71]

Every poetic verse in the introduction is followed by the choral 'al-Mālikī will be vanquished' (*al-Mālikī gad ghadā maghūr*), serving as a stark reminder that al-Mālikī – like America, Obama, and the Shīʿite Muslims – is part of the out-group and his overthrow is the militant group's immediate goal. The third verse of the first phase echoes a recurring motif in jihadi poetry, namely the end of an era plagued by Muslim defeat and humiliation.

Morphological patterns are also mobilised to drive the message home. The affirmative statement *anā manṣūr* follows a parallel grammatical structure *al-mālikī…maghūr*, which is repeated five times throughout the chant. The terms *manṣūr* and *maghūr* are both passive participles of the first verbal form. Both participles refer either to the present state (*anā manṣūr*) or the immediate future as implied in *al-mālikī gad ghadā maghūr*. The phrase *anā manṣūr* in the first-person singular is linked through repetitive morphological patterns to the underlying message of the chant, namely, defeating al-Mālikī. As a result, this structural resemblance

[69] Ismāʿīl ʿAlwan Salman al-Ithāwī known by the *kunya* of Abū Zayd al-ʿIrāqī was considered as part of the inner group of the militant jihadi leader. He was responsible for religious edicts, finances and designing the educational curriculum for schools in ISO-controlled regions. He was captured in February 2018 by Turkish authorities and was consequently handed over to Iraqi agents. He was later condemned to death in September 2018 by the Iraqi court. For further information, see also Maher Chmaytelli, "Exclusive: Iraq Used Baghdadi Aide's Phone to Capture Islamic State Commanders," *Reuters*, May 10, 2018, accessed November 17, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate-excl/exclusive-iraq-used-baghdadi-aides-phone-to-capture-islamic-state-commanders-idUSKBN1IB1N2.

[70] See also Aaron Y. Zelin, "Al-Mālikī is Vanquished Tomorrow," *Jihadology: A Clearinghouse for Jihadi Primary Source Material, Original Analysis and Translation Service*, accessed April 3, 2018, http://jihadology.net/2014/08/16/ajnad-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-release-from-the-islamic-state-al-maliki-is-vanquished-tomorrow/.

[71] The Iraqi dialectal feature of realising /q/ as [g] is represented by (ڴ) in the Arabic transcription.

personalises the mission to overthrow al-Mālikī by identifying the one chanting it as the protagonist of the poem, whereas al-Mālikī is characterised as the main antagonist.

فـلّـوجـة الـعِـزّ أَخَـذْناهـــا وَزويَع وَأَبو غريب عَبَرْنـاهـا

كُـلّ الـرمـادي كـسِـبْناهـــا وَ سـامـرّاء وَالـعوجا جِبْناها

تكريت وَالـدور حَـرَّرْناهـــا وَبيجي وكركوك غَزَوْناها

راوة وَعـانة نَـصَـرْنـاهـــا وَكائمْنا بِالـشَّـرْع حَكَمْناها

حديثة وَالـكـرمة شِـلّـناهـــا وَالصحوة فِيهِـن شَوَيْناها

الموصل أرتال دَخَـلْناهـــا وَالـصـفـويـة دَحَـرْناها

عـا شـواري بـا دوش هَدَمْناها وَأَغْلَب الأَسْـرَى فَكَكْناها

اربيل بِالـسَـيف أَرْعَبْناهـــا وَزُمـار و سـنجار وَطـأناهـا

ديالة الـحَـرْب خُـضَـنـاهـــا وَكُلّ الثُّكانات اكتَحَمْناها

جُـنْـد الرَوافـض أَسَـرْنـاها وَألفيـن مِـنْهـم نَـحَـرْناها

بغـداد هـارون وَ صَـلْـنَاهـــا وَ شـمـالـهـا گد سـكـنـاهـــا

We seized the beloved Fallūja,
we crossed Zawbaʿ and Abū Ghraib,
We gained all of al-Ramādī,
we took Sāmarrāʾ and al-ʿAwjā,
We liberated Tikrīt and al-Dūr,
we raided Bayjī and Kirkūk,
We triumphed over Rāwa and ʿĀna,
we ruled our [city] al-Qāʾim by Shariʿa,
We paralysed Ḥadītha and al-Karma,
we roasted the Sunni Awakening tribesmen that lived there,
We entered Mosul with military convoys,
we defeated the Safavids,
We demolished the Shīʿites of Bādūsh,
we released most of the prisoners,
We terrified Irbīl with the sword,
we flattened Zumār and Sinjār,
We defeated Diyālā in war,
we stormed all the military bases,
We captured and imprisoned the soldiers of the disbelievers,
we slaughtered two thousand of them,

We reached Hārūn's Baghdad,
we inhabited its northern part.

In the second phase, the chant delves into a trance-like state by listing multiple military victories through the rhythmic and repetitive morphological pattern *nāhā*. This morphological pattern is built upon the verbal utterances consisting of proper nouns referring to specific groups of people, countries, or ethnicities (the out-group) followed by a verb in the past tense ending in *nāhā* which refers to the in-group. The exhaustive list of battles fought by ISO epitomises the positive presentation of the jihadi group and the negative presentation of the adversaries.

The victories listed in the second phase are dated to the second half of 2014 when ISO started gaining territory in Iraq. The first-person plural of the perfect tense indicated by *nā* does not only contribute towards the rhythm of the poem, but it also helps to create and consolidate group identity by emphasising the success of collective action. The past tense creates a sense of accomplishment which bolsters the group's credibility on the battlefield. The list of military victories also serves as a source of motivation for militant jihadists on the battlefield, by providing fighters with a guarantee for future victories. The rhythmic flow created by the repetitive *nāhā* also serves as a threat or warning (*tawa"ud*) to dishearten the opponents.

Apart from celebrating the organisation's victories in Iraq, the second phase also dichotomises the political landscape by continuing to discredit other denominational adversaries. Shīʿite Muslims, for instance, are once again implied in the terms *al-ṣafawiyya*, *ʿāshawārī bādūsh,* and *al-rawāfiḍ*. The term *al-ṣafawiyya* alludes to the Safavid dynasty that ruled large parts of modern-day Iraq between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In modern parlance, the term carries negative connotations. The chant also refers to ISO's attack on Bādūsh prison in June 2014, which resulted in the massacre of more than 670 Shīʿite prisoners.[72]

Additionally, one of the verses refers to the mass killing of the Yazidi citizens during ISO's capture of Sinjār and its neighbouring towns in August

[72] See also Mohamed Mostafa, "Relics of 500 Prisoners from 2014 Massacre Found in Mosul," *Iraq News*, accessed April 3, 2018, https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/relics-500-prisoners-2014-massacre-found-mosul/.

2014. Following the defeat against the Kurdish Peshmerga Forces, ISO perpetrated the Sinjār massacre, killing up to 5,000 Yazidi men and forcing between 5,000 to 7,000 Yazidi women into slavery.[73]

The chant also makes subtle references to the Kurds by indicating specific geographical locations. Zumār is located in north Nīnawā Governorate in Iraq and is home to a sizeable Kurdish population.[74] References to Diyālā evoke memories of ISO breaking into the barracks of the Peshmerga forces in Diyālā province.[75] Rāwa and ʿĀna alongside al-Qaym and Ḥuṣayba are four cities in the Western parts of the Anbār province that are situated along a highway that stretches from Syria to Baghdad.[76]

Lastly, the chant also makes use of the term *al-ṣaḥwa* which is often translated as Sunni Awakening. The term *al-ṣaḥwa* refers to the Sunni tribesmen who aided the US army troops to evict al-Qāʿida in Iraq (AQI) from the Anbār province in 2006 and 2007. The 'Islamic State' organisation responded to this alliance by launching a campaign calling for the assassination of the Sunni tribal leaders and the remnants of the Awakening movement in Iraq's al-Anbār province.[77] At a later stage in the chant, the message confirms that 'we have chopped off the heads of the *ṣaḥwa'* (*ruʾūs al-ṣaḥwāt gaṭaʿnāhā*).[78]

[73] See also Richard Spencer, "Isil Carried out Massacres and Mass Sexual Enslavement of Yazidis, UN Confirms," *The Telegraph*, accessed April 3, 2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11160906/Isil-carried-out-massacres-and-mass-sexual-enslavement-of-Yazidis-UN-confirms.html.

[74] See also "ISIS Takes over Iraq's Biggest Dam," *Al Arabiya English Edition*, accessed April 3, 2018, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/08/03/Islamic-States-captures-Iraqi-town-and-nearby-oil-field-.html.

[75] This event was documented in an ISO-related propaganda video at a later stage. See also Aaron Y. Zelin, "Storming the Barracks of the Peshmerga–Wilāyat Diyālā," *Jihadology: A Clearinghouse for Jihadi Primary Source Material, Original Analysis, and Translation Service*, accessed April 3, 2018, http://jihadology.net/2015/01/31/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-storming-the-barracks-of-the-peshmerga-wilayat-diyala./

[76] See also Michael Martinez, "Four Western Iraqi Towns Fall to ISIS Militants," *CNN*, accessed April 3, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/21/world/meast/iraq-crisis/index.html.

[77] See also Orla Guerin, "Iraq: Sunni Tribe 'left for Slaughter' by Islamic State," *BBC News*, accessed April 3, 2018, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29984668.

[78] See also appendices verse 24.

Interspersed among the group's victories is the outright rejection of Western political manoeuvres that were imposed on the Arab world by the outgroup. At one point, the chant polarises the worldview by depicting the Sykes-Picot agreement and Shari'a as two dichotomous forces:

سايكس وبيكو كَسَرْناها وَنَهْج الشَّريعَة أَكَمْناها

We have broken the Sykes-Picot [borders],
We have adopted the path of Shari'a.

The chant builds up a climax through its repetitive rhyme *nāhā* in preparation for the punchline which introduces the third phase:

وَالـيَـوْم خِـلافَـة أعـلـنّاهـا رَغْـم الطّواغيت أعَدْناهـا

مَـبْروكِ مَبْروكِ يا المَأسور وَالمالِكي كَدْ غَـدا مَكْهور

Today, we have announced a caliphate,[79]
despite [having] the apostates as our enemies,
Congratulations, congratulations O prisoner,
al-Mālikī will be vanquished.

The change in rhyme demarcates the transition between different phases. The first phase entails a fettered rhyme (*muqayyada*) in the first and second hemistich, namely *ūr* and *ūm* consecutively. On the contrary, the second phase consists of a loose rhyme (*muṭlaqa*) ending with a prolonged *a*, namely, *hā*. The fettered rhyme wields power in melody by strengthening the powerful affirmation that 'I am victorious' (*anā manṣūr*). On the other hand, the loosened rhyme *hā* establishes a steady flowing rhythm throughout the chant giving the impression that the successes of ISO are voluminous and never-ending. The transition between the second and third phase is demonstrated by reverting from the loose rhyme (*nāhā*) to the fettered rhyme (*ūr*). The third phase of the chant reverts to the rhyme *ūr* that was introduced at the beginning of the chant. The change in rhyme also breaks the rhythm developed throughout the second phase, creating a stark contrast between past successes of the group and the plans to overthrow al-Mālikī.

In brief, this chant is an apt example of how jihadi groups deploy this literary artefact to drive the message home. Hammering repetition, which

[79] ISO 'officially' declared its movement a caliphate in June 2014.

consists mostly of reiterated morphological patterns and back looping, is indicative of the oral mindset of the jihadi groups. The political landscape is clearly simplified into 'us' and 'them'; different Muslim denominations and religious factions are all grouped as a unified opponent. From a functional view, this repetition communicates the message effectively by stating clearly its underlying intention to overthrow al-Mālikī. The list of victories motivates jihadi supporters to participate actively in the group's political campaigns and battles. The chant also serves as a deterrent against the supporters of al-Mālikī by threatening to 'roast,' 'slaughter,' and 'chop' their heads off.

6 Conclusion

Chants have gained popularity in the jihadi milieu because of their rootedness in a popular literary tradition. Jihadi chants are popular because they are based upon traditional practices and preconceived patterns that are adapted to current day-to-day events. In the jihadi realm, ideological transmission is more effective if it is encapsulated in Classical Arabic, expressed in traditional themes, framed in a traditional poetic form, following a specific metre and fixed rhyme. These mnemonic techniques, which contribute towards the popular appeal of jihadi chants, facilitate memorisation of the underlying message on the battlefield. This article has argued that this genre is also popular due to its auditory appeal, its practicality on the battlefield and its apparent interconnectedness with mainstream Islamic culture.

The illocutionary effect of these chants, which is derived from the classical Arabic ode, contributes towards the effectiveness in warfare propaganda. Chants assume manipulative powers among the youth sub-culture by influencing, motivating and directing collective behaviour, and by manoeuvring actions, such as inciting violence against the opponents. Additionally, the arguments proposed in this research have demonstrated how superficial associations with Islam are exploited to win the hearts and minds of a predominantly Muslim audience. The Islamic tradition is recalibrated by jihadists to a new political and technological order, to its rhythms, its political incitements, and its call to active participation in jihadism.

On the literary level, the arguments outlined in this study and as exemplified in the chant, indicate that the millennia-old *qaṣīda* form of poetry is retooled in jihadi circles to propagate militant activism. Jihadi chants gained their popularity mostly because of their group recitation, which provides jihadists with a communal experience on the battlefield. The study has also argued in favour of classifying jihadi chants as a distinctive part of the modern *qaṣīda*. The analysis of this genre needs to take into consideration the socio-political atmosphere surrounding these chants as well as the tradition and innovation that led to the development of this popular artefact.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the chant 'al-Mālikī will be vanquished.' Jihadists employ chants to memorialise their stories of success and military action on the battlefield. This particular chant deploys polarisation as a poetic tool to consolidate the worldview of ISO among the recipients and threaten the opponents. Polarisation is manifested poetically through the repetitive grammatical structures that are aided by a paratactic build-up of ideas and alternating rhyme schemes. The strategic positioning of al-Mālikī's name in the choral verse 'al-Mālikī will be vanquished', identifies the antagonist and reinstates the underlying message of the poem, namely, overthrowing al-Mālikī. An intriguing finding to emerge from this study is that the in-group is generalised through the first-person plural *nā*, while the perceived enemies are singularly identified. This technique explicates who the out-group is and directs the recipients' behaviour towards a specific target. The identification of the organisation's out-group also serves as a warning. It forms part of a strategy based on fear-mongering targeting al-Mālikī.

In conclusion, jihadi chants are a product of the traditional and the modern, the political and the poetical. On the battlefield, jihadi chants popularise politics and help mobilise grassroots. By acknowledging and giving this cultural product its due importance as a communicative medium, jihadi chants can help decipher the mindset of this puzzling yet gradually growing worldview in the Arab-Islamic world.

Al-Mālikī Will Be Vanquished

1. العالَم اليَوْم غَدا مَبْهـــــور وَأَميركا وَأوباما كَلْب الـــروم
وَالمالِكي گَدْ غَدا مَگْهور
2. يا ابْن الرَما دي عَلَيْهم ثـــور عَلى الرَوافِض وَأَنْصار المَظْلومْ
وَالمالِكي گَدْ غَدا مَگْهور
3. الحَمْـدُ لله أَنـا مَنْصـــور لا خَوْف وَلا ذُلّ بَعْـدَ اليَـوْمْ
وَالمالِكي گَدْ غَدا مَگْهور
4. فلّوجة العِزّ أَخَذْناهـــا وَزوبَع وَأبو غريب عَبَرْناهـا
5. كُلّ الرما دي كِسِبْناهـــا وَ سامرّاء وَالعوجا جِبْناهـا
6. تكريت وَالدور حَرَرْناهـــا وَبيجي وكركوك غَزَوْناهـا
7. راوة وَعانة نَصَـرْناهـــا وَگائمْنا بِالشَّرْع حَكَمْناهـا
8. حديثة وَالكرمة شِلّناهـــا وَالصحوة فِيهـن شَوَيْناهـا
9. الموصل أرتال دَخَلْناهـا وَالـصـفـويـة دَحَـرْناهـا
10. عا شواري با دوش هَدَمْناها وَأَغْلَب الأَسْرَى فَكَكْناهـا
11. اربيل بِالسَيف أَرْعَبْناهـا وَزُمـار و سنجار وَطَأْناهـا
12. ديالة الحَرْب خُضَناهـا وَكُلّ الثُكانات اگتَحَمْناهـا
13. جُنْد الرَوافض أَسَرْناهـا وَألفين مِنْهُـم نَـحَـرْنـاها
14. بغدادا هارون وَ صَلْناهـا وَ شِمالَها گَدْ سَكَنّاهـا
15. عِراگا اليَوم فَتَحْناهـــا وَبالخَير وَالجود صناهـا
16. نَجَف الأَنْجاس هَدَدْناهـا وَبالأَحْزمة وَالله جِئْـنـاهـا
17. أَغْلَب الأَهْداف أَصَبْناها وكربلاء اليوم رَصَدْنـاها
18. الروحُ لله بعناهـــــا وَدَرْب الشَهادة سَلَكْناهـا
19. شَريعَة الله بسطناهـــا وَالبَصْرَة لا ما نَسَيْناهـا
20. حَيّ البَكْر نار شَعَلْناهـا وَالصَحْوَة فيها دَفَنـاهـا
21. جَرْف الصَخْر دَمّ رَوَيْناها وَرايات الإِسْلام رَفَعْناهـا
22. أميركا نُصْفين گسمْناهـا وَكِلاب أوربا سَحَگْناهـا
23. بِعِراگنا الـمُرّ سَگَيْناهـا وَالصّاع صاعين رَدَدْناهـا

24. رُوؤس الصَحَوات گطَعْناها بوريشة وَإيران ذَبَحْناها
25. بيكب و شا صات فَخَّخْناها عَلى المَراگِد ضَرَبْناها
26. تلعفرالخَير رَجَعْناها وَكُرْد البيكيكا نَسَفْناها
27. أگْوى العُبوات وَضَعْناها وَجَماجِم الكُفْر دَسَناها
28. سايكس وبيكو كَسَرْناها وَنَهْج الشَّريعة أَگَمْناها
29. أَغْلى الغَنايم غَنَمْناها وَكُلّ الذَّخائر سَلَبْناها
30. المَرْوحيات رَكَبْناها ومحلى الهمر حين سگناها
31. دَوْلَة الإسْلام عَشَگْناها فيها الحگائِگ لَمَسْناها
32. ضَرْبات الله يا مَحْلاها عَلى الكفر آه ما اگساها
33. وَاليَوْم خِلافة أعلنّاها رَغْم الطَّواغيت أعَدْناها
34. مَبْروكِ مَبْروكِ يا المأسور وَالمالِكي گَدْ غَدا مَگْهور

وَالمالِكي گَدْ غَدا مَگْهور
وَالمالِكي گَدْ غَدا مَگْهور

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Conceptualizing *mahraganāt*[1] – a Popular Egyptian Music Genre

Gisela Kitzler

Abstract

This article deals with a genre of urban Egyptian popular music called *mahraganāt* and its representation in the Egyptian public discourse, newspaper articles in English, as well as amongst performers of the genre itself. *Mahraganāt* originated in Cairene lower class areas around 2005 and is performed in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic making use of youth slang. The genre has become enormously popular, especially with Egyptian youth. However, *mahraganāt* and its performers are met with harsh criticism by parts of the cultural elites. *Mahraganāt* music has been excluded from Egyptian mainstream media and was even officially banned in 2020, which is why it is distributed mostly informally. Examining the different discourses on *mahraganāt* shows that there is an ongoing discussion about the legitimacy of certain forms of music along the lines of concepts of "high culture" and "low culture" closely linked to the social status of its performers and listeners. Furthermore, *mahraganāt* is frequently ascribed a revolutionary context in newspaper articles in English, which is denied by the performers themselves who see *mahraganāt* as a means of authentic cultural self-representation through a new way of artistic expression. *Mahraganāt*, being neither fully incorporated into mainstream culture nor seen as subcultural by its performers, oscillates between being considered too popular to be acceptable and not popular enough for being "authentically Egyptian."

Keywords: popular culture, popular music, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, *mahraganāt*

[1] I will be adhering to the Egyptian pronunciation of the word *mahraganāt* in my transcription, where [a] in the penultimate syllable is shortened. The transcription of passages in Egyptian Arabic will also deviate from DMG-standard.

Introduction

Anyone visiting Cairo during the last decade will inevitably have come across pervasive sounds: fast, hypnotic, electronic rhythms blasting from wedding celebrations, small colorful feluccas cruising the river Nile at night, as well as blaring from cars, taxis, motorcycles, microbuses, and *tuktuks*[2] driving by. Considering the density of traffic in Cairo, this way of distributing the musical genre of *mahraganāt* in itself makes it impossible to ignore. At second glance, it is striking that the lyrics are entirely sung in a low register of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic[3] heard in everyday conversations on Cairo's streets, making extensive use of slang expressions only used amongst the youth.

For many decades, Egyptians have proudly considered the city of Cairo as the Arab world's center of cultural production.[4] Egyptian music is listened to all over the Arab world, and its superstars are well-known across borders. During a period now nostalgically referred to as *zaman il-fann ig-gamīl* ("the time of beautiful art"), modern Egyptian music is said to have reached its aesthetical peak with singers such as Umm Kulthum, Mohammed Abdelwahab, Farid al-Atrash, and Abdel Halim Hafez, to name only a few. However, from the late 1970s on, the patriotically inspired pride in Egypt's musical production started to decline. With the emergence of a new musical genre in Egyptian urban popular music called *mahraganāt*, first appearing in 2006 in Cairo's underprivileged suburbs, produced by youth from working-class-environments, musical taste is considered to have hit rock-bottom. Since this musical genre is relatively new to Egypt's musical landscape and fiercely attacked by cultural elites for being trivial, tasteless, culturally debased, and even destructive to morals and the Egyptian identity, this paper aims at examining its perception and categoriza-

[2] A *tuktuk* is a popular means of transport in Cairo's crowded, informal areas. The three-wheeled vehicle has an engine and seats a maximum of five people in addition to the driver. *Tuktuk*s usually have a flashy, individual decoration and loudspeakers.

[3] Badawi proposes five linguistic levels for the language situation in Egypt based on socio-economic groups: Badawi, S. A., *Mustawayāt al-ʿarabīya al-muʿāṣira fī miṣr: baḥth fī ʿalāqāt al-lugha bi-l-ḥaḍāra*.

[4] Concerning Cairo's role as a cultural capital of the Arab world, see Sadek, Said, "Cairo as Global/Regional Cultural Capital," in *Cairo Cosmopolitan. Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, edited by Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (Cairo - New York: AUC Press, 2009), 153–90.

tion from different perspectives. The various concepts used for describing *mahraganāt* mirror the struggle for visibility and legitimation in the cultural field that members of Egypt's lower classes face.

This paper will first discuss the term "popular culture" in the Egyptian context, including the meaning of the term *shaʿbī* ("popular"), then give an overview of the most dominant musical genres currently present in Egypt (*ṭarab*, *shabābī,* and *shaʿbī*) in order to place *mahraganāt* in the musical context appropriately. The second part of the paper will be analyzing the way *mahraganāt* is seen from three different perspectives: the first one is concerned with the way this genre is written about in English-language newspaper and magazine articles from inside and outside Egypt. The second perspective is the one the Egyptian state-sanctioned media convey in the shape of TV programs featuring discussions with *mahraganāt* singers and their critics. All these discussions are in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. Relevant quotes from these sources will be offered in transcription and translation.[5] The third perspective shows the way *mahraganāt* singers perceive their music and how they describe and place it in the Egyptian context. The data for this perspective was collected in personal interviews I conducted during field research in Egypt in summer 2016 and 2017. To begin with, I will define which concept of popular culture will be relevant for this article.

1 Popular Culture = *al-thaqāfa al-shaʿbiyya*?

Definitions of popular culture are numerous. What seems to be a shared feature amongst them is that popular culture is usually depicted by saying what it is not, by contrasting it to an opposing concept such as high culture (the opposite concept of which would be low culture) or mass culture (as opposed to "authentic" folk culture).[6] Thinking about a paper for this volume, it seemed impossible not to consider *mahraganāt* a phenomenon of Egyptian popular culture. At the same time, classifying the Egyptian musical field along the lines of concepts being divided into "serious," high-quality art music performed in high-culture contexts for art's sake and popular music being merely produced for the inferior purpose of

[5] All Arabic (Egyptian and Standard Arabic) texts used in this paper have been translated by the author.

[6] Storey, *Cultural theory and popular culture,* 11.

entertainment would not be adequate. Music considered by Egyptians to be high culture, for example Umm Kulthum's songs, is listened to for entertainment purposes all across the social spectrum. Similarly, a quantitative definition of mass culture vs. high culture is not applicable to the Egyptian context. Even genres of Egyptian music enjoying high prestige and belonging to *zaman il-fann ig-gamīl* aim at the people, the masses, at being widely consumed and distributed.

Therefore, I found it necessary to clarify what I am referring to when I call *mahraganāt* a phenomenon of popular culture: I chose to adhere to Holt Parker's definitions of popular culture as consisting of

1) "[...] the productions of those without cultural capital, of those without access to approved means of symbolic and cultural production."[7]

2) "[...] products that require little cultural capital either to produce or else to consume."[8]

Adding another definition, he proposes: "Popular culture is unauthorized culture."[9]

All three of these categories apply to *mahraganāt*. On the one hand, it is produced by a social class that is excluded from official institutions of music production. In addition, *mahraganāt* is produced and distributed informally, and therefore easily accessible, its musical structure is not very complicated, and the language variety used for the lyrics is understandable even for people with a low level of education. Finally, the established cultural institutions despise and reject *mahraganāt* completely and deny it any access to authorized spaces: state television and radio stations do not play *mahraganāt* songs and performers are usually not acknowledged by the Egyptian Musicians Syndicate,[10] which is necessary for playing concerts officially.

7 Parker, "Toward a Definition of Popular Culture," 161.

8 Parker, 161.

9 Parker, 165.

10 The Musicians Syndicate is responsible for giving permits to musicians so they can perform at a venue legally. However, the Musicians Syndicate judges musicians and their work according to "moral appropriateness" and artistic value, which means that it has the power to deny permits to musicians who are not deemed worthy. Cf. Hessen Hossam, "A battle for existence: How the combined forces of censorship and security shaped

1.1 What Does *shaʿbī* Mean?

In order to understand the notions associated with the word *shaʿbī* ("of/from/belonging to the people; popular; traditional"), from *shaʿb* ("people"), it is helpful to look at two competing meanings implied in the usage of *shaʿbī*. Armbrust describes two different perceptions of the *shaʿb* in Egyptian discourse: On the one hand, there is a *shaʿb*, considered by elites to be uncorrupted by modernity and adhering to "true" Egyptian values. It is therefore able to produce culture desirable for official discourse. The other perception of *shaʿb* is of a backward, uneducated, vulgar *shaʿb*, which resists modernity or is easily corrupted by foreign influence and therefore harms the "true" values of Egyptian society. As a consequence, its cultural products become illegitimate and undesirable. This *shaʿb* is not mature and knowledgeable enough to speak for itself, therefore, it needs to be spoken for by an educated elite.[11] Famous Egyptian writer and feminist Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī remarks:

> The word 'people' in our country is glorified or even sanctified in the dictionaries of the ruling class, or in the culture of the elite [...]. However, their glorification is but empty words. Rarely do they try to get to know the people in their daily reality [...].[12]

Al-Saʿdāwī implies that the people, who are frequently praised as a unified and abstract concept, are preferably spoken for by the elites, since there is no actual interest in letting the people themselves voice their concerns in an unmediated, direct way.

In urban Egyptian Arabic language use, *shaʿbī* usually refers to a place, precisely an urban working class-environment, as well as the lifestyle, the

Egypt's music scene in 2017," 2. Januar 2018, https://madamasr.com/en/2018/01/02/feature/culture/a-battle-for-existence-how-the-combined-forces-of-censorship-and-security-shaped-egypts-music-scene-in-2017/. Hossam, "A Battle for Existence: How the Combined Forces of Censorship and Security Shaped Egypt's Music Scene in 2017," Ayman Helmy, "Singing a crime: On the judicial police powers of the Musicians Syndicate," 11. Februar 2016, https://madamasr.com/en/2016/02/11/feature/culture/singing-a-crime-on-the-judicial-police-powers-of-the-musicians-syndicate/. Helmy, "Singing a Crime: On the Judicial Police Powers of the Musicians Syndicate," and Charles Akl, "The power of arrest and the future of music in Egypt," 24. November 2015, https://madamasr.com/en/2015/11/24/feature/culture/the-power-of-arrest-and-the-future-of-music-in-egypt/. Akl, "The Power of Arrest and the Future of Music in Egypt."

11 Armbrust, *Mass Culture*, 37–39.

12 Saʿdāwī, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader*, 180.

language variety used, and the cultural products consumed by people living in it. These places are considered the home of *shaʿbī* and *mahraganāt* music.

The same contradictions that appear with the term *shaʿbī* ("popular"), extend to *thaqāfa shaʿbiyya* ("popular culture") and *mūsīqā shaʿbiyya* ("popular music"). Armbrust states:

> There is no satisfactory gloss in Arabic for 'popular culture.' *Al-thaqāfa al-shaʿbiyya* is one obvious possibility, but the phrase conjures images of saints' festivals, healing rituals, mannerisms of speech, and certain types of clothing thought to be typical of traditional people – 'folklore,' in other words.[13]

In the same way, the term *mūsīqā shaʿbiyya* denotes traditional, originally rural genres of music also described as "folklore"[14] or traditional music rooted in oral, shared traditions without individual authorship. It is also sometimes considered to be backward and of low prestige, but at the same time it can be valued as a vehicle for keeping the authentic Egyptian music, considered to be *turāth* ("cultural heritage"), alive. *Aghānī shaʿbi(yya)* ("popular songs") on the other hand, labels the modern urban musical genre emerging from working-class districts, void of the prestigious notions of cultural heritage considered to be authentic.

Since all the terms used in Arabic to describe and classify musical genres have rather different implications from Western conceptions of popular music, I consider it vital to describe music along the classifications used in the respective society and language. Consequently, the following chapter will describe the musical landscape in present-day urban Egypt using the Arabic terms employed for this purpose.

2 Urban Musical Genres in Present-Day Egypt

In order to place *mahraganāt* in the Egyptian musical field, I will first outline the different musical genres currently present in Egypt. Genres of traditional rural music will be excluded, as well as religious music,[15] since none of them occurs frequently in the discourse about contemporary music in Egypt and therefore are never put into relation with *mahraganāt*.

[13] Armbrust, *Mass Culture*, 37.

[14] Puig, "Sha'abî, 'populaire'," 34.

[15] For detailed information on these Egyptian musical traditions, see: Marcus, *Music in Egypt*.

There are small musical scenes in Cairo that are usually labeled "alternative"[16] like Metal,[17] experimental and electronic music,[18] as well as singer-songwriter music sung in Arabic, however, they will also not be included in this analysis.

There are three main musical genres featuring prominently in Egyptian's daily lives: *mūsīqā al-ṭarab*, carrying the prestige of the past, cultural heritage, and aesthetical value; *shabābī*, the light mixture of Western and Oriental beats giving special value to visuals and lyrics rarely venturing beyond the topic of love; and *shaʿbī*, catering to the taste of the ordinary, simple people in terms of topics, musical aesthetics, and language. *Mahraganāt* developed from the latter. It is interesting to note that many concepts of popular culture present in Western contexts do not apply to the naming of genres in Egypt. However, the high-low split and the opposition "real art" (though with an emotional component represented by *ṭarab*) vs. lowly entertainment is present, especially in the discourse on *mahraganāt* in Egyptian media. I will begin with the most prestigious of them, which can boast the widest range of names implying a variety of associations: *mūsīqā al-ṭarab*.

2.1 *Mūsīqā al-ṭarab*

Mūsīqā al-ṭarab is music able to put the listener into a state of *ṭarab* ("bliss induced by particularly beautiful linguistic or musical performances, or a combination of both"). Other terms used to refer to this genre are: *mūsīqā al-turāth* ("music of the cultural heritage"), *mūsīqā ʿarabiyya* ("Arabic music"), *mūsīqā qadīma* ("old music"), *mūsīqā klāsīkiyya* ("classical music"). *Mūsīqā al-ṭarab* consists of various distinct musical subgenres, however, we will only be concerned with the concepts people associate with the terms named above. Just like Lagrange, Graf distinguishes in his seminal work on popular music in Egypt and Lebanon between what he calls "Kunstmusik,"[19] art music, which is chronologically placed before superstars

[16] The alternative music scene in Cairo is addressed in: Burkhalter, Thomas, "Alternative Musik in Kairo: Aufbruch und Verwirrung."

[17] See LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam*, chap. 2., Fariborz, *Rock The Kasbah - Popmusik und Moderne im Orient*, chap. 2.

[18] For electronic music in the Arab world see: Burkhalter, Dickinson, and Harbert, *Arab Avant-Garde*.

[19] Cf. Graf, *Mazzīkā!*, 52 ff.

like Umm Kulthum and Abdelwahab, which are categorized as "Unterhaltungsmusik,"[20] entertaining music. However, the average Egyptian citizen would most likely not make this distinction, even though it is very common in the musicological discourse on music in Egypt.[21] Interestingly, the distinction mentioned above is not implied in any of the Arabic terms mentioned here: they either refer to the music's formal, cultural frame, as in *mūsīqā ʿarabiyya*, the period of time it is associated with, *mūsīqā qadīma*, its value as constituting identity, *mūsīqā al-turāth*, or its aesthetical characteristics, *mūsīqā al-ṭarab*. Merely *mūsīqā klāsikiyya* alludes to a European concept, implying the distinction between "serious" or art music and music produced for entertainment.

A common feature to all of the expressions listed above is their placement in a high culture context. This means that this kind of music is usually performed in special venues made for the consumption of artistic products, and, interestingly enough, without doing any harm to its prestigious status, in movies. A second feature is that it is based on the tonal and rhythmical system of Arabic music, as well as being performed with an orchestra typical for urban Arabic music.[22] Another characteristic of this genre is that it is associated with meaningful, poetical lyrics, which can be sung in *fuṣḥā* or in a high register of Egyptian Colloquial.[23] However, being placed in a high culture-context does not prevent it from being, in the true sense of the word, enjoyed by a wide majority of people. The idea of *ṭarab*, an emotionally empowering sensation felt by audience and performers alike, is a key feature to understanding Arabic music. The noun *ṭarab* translates to "delight, pleasure, exultation, ecstasy," and it is precisely this emotional aspect of *ṭarab* that differentiates it, according to the views of famous traveler and writer Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq in the mid-nineteenth century and Guillaume André Villoteau at the end of the eighteenth century, from what they perceived as Western music: Arabic music

[20] Cf. Graf, 58 ff.

[21] Cf. Lagrange, *Al-Tarab*.

[22] A traditional orchestra called *takht* would consist of the following instruments: *ʿūd, qānūn ("zither"), nāy ("flute"), riqq ("tambourine")*, violin. The solo singer would be accompanied by a background choir highlighting certain parts of the performance, (cf. Lagrange, *Al-Tarab*, 74–77.).

[23] For a description of the registers of Egyptian Colloquial see Badawi, S. A., *Mustawayāt al-ʿarabīya al-muʿāṣira fi miṣr: baḥth fi ʿalāqāt al-lugha bi-l-ḥaḍāra*.

highlights the strong emotional aspect of enchanting the listener, whilst stressing the direct relation between artist and audience, while on the other hand Western music is much more conceptualized, structured, and kept in a reserved mode when being performed.[24]

The contents of *ṭarab* music include love and emotions (in a poetical form considered to be pure and therefore morally accepted), but also extend to patriotic themes.

2.2 *Shabābī*[25]

Acknowledging the highly prestigious, emotionally overpowering tradition of music being able to invoke *ṭarab* as the most cherished type of music in Egypt makes it hard for any other genre to live up to these standards. *Shabābī* music stepped away from this tradition by presenting merely short songs, limiting the lyrics to romantic, mostly distant longing for the loved one sung in a light version of the colloquial language, while at the same time putting emphasis on looks. These features made it especially attractive for young listeners, since *mūsīqā al-ṭarab* is frequently considered *ti'īl* ("heavy") and *'adīm* ("old-fashioned"). It was eventually named according to its main audience, and likely the eternally youthful look of its performers: *shabāb* ("young people"). Instead of getting its listeners deeply involved emotionally, *shabābī* presents easy listening, dreamy songs about romance and love, and, if video-clips are involved, perfect looks and affluent lifestyles in contexts rather out of reach for young people in present-day Egypt, featuring expensive cars, revealing clothes, huge villas, financially backed idyllic family life including exotic holiday destinations.

As far as its musical elements are concerned, *shabābī* music sticks to a limited range of oriental modes and rhythms. However, it appears to be fond of borrowing elements from various Western musical genres, such as sounds associated with Spanish and Latin music, as well as mixing techno beats with oriental beats.[26] *Shabābī* music is very popular amongst teenagers and listeners roughly up to the age of 35, especially those

[24] See Racy, *Making music in the Arab world*, 1.

[25] For a comprehensive study on the consumption of *shabābī* music in Cairo, see: Gilman, *Cairo Pop*.

[26] Cf. Graf, *Mazzīkā!*, 94 f.

belonging to the middle class, all across the Arab world. Lyrics are usually sung in Egyptian Arabic (even by singers who are not originally Egyptian), which is understood throughout the Arabic-speaking world. This makes it easy to follow and enjoy as music for light listening and (controlled) dancing. A number of internationally well-known superstars such as Amr Diab, Nancy Ajram, Sherine Abdelwahab, Haifa Wehbe, and Tamer Hosny, produced smash hits and rose to fame within this genre. *Shabābī* songs started to appear from the end of the 1980s onwards. They are officially produced and distributed, and frequently played on radio and TV stations. The success of these songs would have been impossible without the emergence of satellite television, since most of the songs feature video clips, *klibāt*, displayed on TV, which explains how visuals came to be of vital importance to this genre. Critics of *shabābī* music frequently claim that looks made up for a lack of musical talent. Even though *shabābī* video clips still spark scandals every now and then because they are considered inappropriate due to their display of the female body, the criticism has mostly moved away from *shabābī* since *shaʿbī* started to become more visible on TV-channels.

2.3 *Shaʿbī*

Shaʿbī and *shabābī* are usually named next to each other as contrasting forms of music that have abandoned older, more prestigious styles such as *mūsīqā al-ṭarab*, aiming merely at superficial entertainment. Both *shaʿbi* and *shabābī* are enormously popular with audiences, considering the number of listeners. What sets *shaʿbī* apart from *shabābī* is primarily linked to the social context these genres are associated with and produced for. As mentioned above, the term *shaʿbī* is used for describing the lifestyle of a social class that does not pertain to the cultural and economic elite of the country, and at the same time preserves a set of ideas and character traits, which are considered traditional or typically Egyptian. Depending on the context, this can be a positive (steadfast, true, honest, good-hearted, light-hearted) or a negative asset (backward-thinking, irrational, superstitious, illiterate, unrefined). Urban *shaʿbī* music has not been enjoying much support from cultural and media institutions. Performed primarily at street weddings and other festivities in *shaʿbī* neighborhoods or in night clubs, the infamous *kabarehāt*, distribution also happened in an informal

way. For *shaʿbī* music, the medium of distribution were audiocassettes and public means of transport like microbuses, taxis, and *tuktuk*s playing these songs. Nowadays, *shaʿbī* music is mostly distributed via the internet, still avoiding institutional modes of production, distribution, and censorship.

The first star of urban *shaʿbī* music is Aḥmad ʿAdawiyya. His rise to fame during the 1970s has often been considered a symptom of the absence of any ideological hopes after the *naksa* 1967[27] and a distraction and form of superficial entertainment in the face of the traumatic experiences.[28] *Shaʿbī* music is sung entirely in Egyptian Colloquial, using the language heard and spoken in the street directly in songs, including proverbs, puns, and phrases clearly located amongst the urban lower classes. The lyrics of *shaʿbī* music are primarily concerned with the common people's experiences and concerns in their daily life. The music is usually played live, featuring electronic elements nowadays. Driving rhythms are central to *shaʿbī* songs, the musical structure is comparably simple and repetitive, and musical elements from outside of Egypt are used much less frequently than in *shabābī*. On the contrary, musical elements rooted in rural traditions like call and response techniques, *mawwāl*[29]-elements, the use of instruments like the *mizmār*[30] and excessive use of the *ṭabla*[31], and, as Lagrange calls it, a "screeching"[32] singing style employed by singers are integral parts of this genre.[33] In an article about musical genres excluded from official discourse, Abdel-Latif sums up the characteristics of *shaʿbī* songs as follows:

[27] *Naksa* is the Arabic term for the Six-Day War 1967 during which Israel occupied vast areas of several Arab countries.

[28] See Grippo, "What's Not on Egyptian Television and Radio! Locating the 'Popular' in Egyptian Shaʿbi," 144.

[29] A *mawwāl* is a vocal form performed in the Colloquial, used in both rural and urban Egyptian music. It is rhythmically free, usually includes puns and allows the singer to present his/her proficiency by improvising *mawwāl*s. The most famous part of a *mawwāl* is the introduction to a song called *layāli*, consisting of variations on the words *yā lēl yā ʿēn*, ("O night, o eye"), which are stretched decisively for this purpose. Cf. Lagrange, *Al-Tarab*, 157.

[30] The *mizmār* is a type of oboe used in various Egyptian rural music genres.

[31] The *ṭabla* is a goblet drum, also called *darbukka*.

[32] Lagrange, *Al-Tarab*, 137.

[33] Cf. Graf, *Mazzīkā!*, 161–64.

> The songs in this genre typically open with the folk *mawwal*, including its *layali* prelude, following which the singer takes up the song proper and its core themes, often cursing time [...] and treating sensual love in a manner rarely, if ever, found in the big song productions approved by 'respectable' media. With the artistically primitive performance of the singers and their gravelly voices, resonating with the music, the effect presents the din and rhythm of the crowded city interspersed with melodies, flirting, here and there, with folk themes.[34]

To the cultural elite, this very present musical self-expression of the working classes has at best been called *hābiṭ* ("vulgar"),[35] "[c]onsidered illegitimate, by the guardians of normative culture,"[36] and, in general, a shocking display of bad taste that needed to be censored, or at least kept restricted to its informal context. Having been the dominant sound of Cairo's lower classes for decades, *shaʿbī* is still enormously popular with Egyptian audiences. Against hopes and expectations of musical critics that this might merely be a quickly passing phenomenon, a new musical genre, *mahraganāt*, has developed from the *shaʿbī* domain. It is met with the same criticism from the cultural elite like Aḥmad ʿAdawiyya in the 1970s, and its fiercest critics also hope that it will quickly disappear again. However, *mahraganāt* has reached an even wider public than *shaʿbī* since its emergence around 2006, challenging prevailing boundaries between social classes and musical tastes in Egypt. Therefore, the following quote by Grippo is valid for *mahraganāt* in the same way as it is for *shaʿbī* music:

> Yet, as a result of its absolutely pervasive presence, *shaʿbi* continues to push the boundaries of socioeconomic class acceptability, speaking to and empowering a burgeoning working class eager for a new music that expresses vernacular culture, including folk wisdom and a good laugh.[37]

2.4 *Mahraganāt*

Mahraganāt translates into "festivals," which is, according to *mahraganāt* performers, associated with crowds, noise, dance, music, and colors. The word *mahraganāt* evokes pictures of contemporary urban folk culture. Another term used to refer to this genre is *electro shaʿbī*. The most striking feature that sets *mahraganāt* apart from its predecessor *shaʿbī* is the age

[34] Abdel-Latif, "Music of the Streets: The Story of a Television Program," 130.

[35] See Armbrust, *Mass Culture*, 180 ff.

[36] Puig, "Egypt's Pop-Music Clashes and the 'World-Crossing' Destinies of Muhammad 'Ali Street Musicians," 528.

[37] Grippo, "What's Not on Egyptian Television and Radio! Locating the 'Popular' in Egyptian Shaʿbi," 157.

group engaging in its production and consumption: it has become an essential part of urban Egyptian youth culture, which is practiced by teenagers and young adults roughly up to the age of 30. Therefore, the lyrics frequently consist entirely of, or make excessive use of, youth slang expressions. This might be one of the reasons why the older generation tends to describe *mahraganāt* as incomprehensible. However, this sometimes also applies to young people from the upper class, since the youth slang normally used in *mahraganāt* songs stems from lower class environments. The topics revolve, similar to *shaʿbī*, around the daily life of urban Egyptian youth, featuring friendship, relationships, poverty, manliness, fate, and the neighborhoods the singers live and perform in. A big majority of *mahraganāt* songs present the situations they talk about in a humorous, satirical way.

Mahraganāt has widely replaced live *shaʿbī* groups at street weddings, since *mahraganāt* does not need much equipment or many musicians to be performed: its basic form consists of a DJ and optionally one or more performers; therefore, it is an inexpensive alternative to a live *shaʿbī* band consisting of several members. *Mahraganāt* is, just like *shaʿbī*, usually distributed in informal ways, bypassing censorship: produced in simple home studios with various computer programs, songs are uploaded to the internet and shared, downloaded, and eventually heard in public places sounding from means of transport or from wedding celebrations. *Mahraganāt* has undergone enormous changes in terms of its presence all across the social spectrum since its appearance. Shunned by cultural elites in the beginning, wedding celebrations have become nearly unimaginable without *mahraganāt* sounds. Its performers frequently play at weddings in high-class-venues. Even though the genre is still excluded from national TV and radio stations, there are many private satellite channels which play *shaʿbī* and *mahraganāt*. Ironically, *mahraganāt* stars have become people of public interest, which means that the singers themselves do appear on television programs, usually being confronted with harsh criticism. Due to its enormous popularity, *mahraganāt* music also features highly in advertisements of all kinds and movies.

In terms of *mahraganāt*'s musical properties, its tempo is the most striking feature in comparison to *shaʿbī*: it is much faster and relies heavily on

electronic rhythms. The music is produced on computer programs and incorporates elements from "Western" music styles, primarily hip-hop and electronic dance music. Since rhythm is of prime importance to *mahraganāt*, dancing is an integral part of the genre when performed. *Mahraganāt* performances and parties in the streets are one of the few opportunities for young people to burn off energy in public spaces.

After this introduction to the urban Egyptian musical landscape, the focus will now move to the way *mahraganāt* is perceived and discussed by different actors in the Egyptian cultural field.

3 Representations of *mahraganāt* from Different Perspectives

Since *mahraganāt* is a relatively new phenomenon in Egypt, there has been a wide range of reactions to it. This article highlights three different perspectives on *mahraganāt*: Newspaper articles written in English usually focus on the 2011 Revolution when reporting about *mahraganāt* while highlighting its subversive potential. Cultural elites and concerned citizens confront the genre with harsh criticism because they see future generations endangered by a musical genre associated with low culture perceived to distribute debased ideas. Finally, *mahraganāt* singers and producers themselves do not claim revolutionary legitimacy. They state that their aim is to express the simple people's realities while defending their music as an undeniably (commercially) successful genre of its own.

3.1 Discourse on *mahraganāt* in English Language Newspaper Articles

In this chapter, the way newspaper articles written in English describe the phenomenon of *mahraganāt* will be discussed. All of the newspaper articles were retrieved from the web. Egyptian as well as non-Egyptian sources will be included.

A general feature that all of these newspaper articles share is the purpose of wanting to inform readers about a newly emerging genre that represents a change to the musical landscape in Egypt in many respects. The focus usually lies on the issue of social class, as well as the lyrics. For Egyptian standards, they are shockingly daring and blunt, taking up, among other topics, taboos like drugs, sex, and the not very picturesque conditions young people from the lower classes live in. Written in a

generally admiring, benevolent, and anti-elitist tone towards the *mahraganāt* scene, these articles in English differ decisively from the official Egyptian media discourse in Arabic on the topic, as will become clear in the following chapter.

Author Andeel directly takes up issues of class and revolution in his article "You just got mahraganed" on *Mada Masr,*[38] in which he describes *mahraganāt* as a sort of revenge for the contemptuous behavior the lower-class youth are met with on part of elites and states the following about the *mahraganāt* fanbase:

> These kids know what it feels to burn a police vehicle and how to transport a wounded protester on a stolen bike. These kids know there are people in the country who are much richer than them, who don't like them and think they are disgusting. They respond with insanely annoying music.[39]

There are countless examples of *mahraganāt* music being directly linked to the revolution, some of which I will list in the following: The online version of *Egypt Independent* quotes the organizers of a concert that had taken place in October 2011 in the famous Azhar park, featuring *mahraganāt* stars, as saying that they wanted to present "'new meaning in music, music that reflects the political and social changes associated with the 2011 Revolution, reflects the voices of the young, the poor, those often overlooked by mainstream media.'"[40]

Vice online magazine also links *mahraganāt* to the revolution from the first sentence on, mentioning only songs that deal with politics.[41] In fact, these songs are few, not necessarily explicitly political and not very well known amongst audiences in Egypt. In the same way, the Berlin-based 14.4 km-network, engaged in enhancing dialogue and understanding between Europe and the MENA-region, entitles a film review of the documentary "Electro Chaabi" by Hind Meddeb with the headline "Mahragan – Music as Revolution." The film review establishes a direct link between

[38] *Mada Masr* is an online magazine that publishes articles in English and Arabic. It has been banned in Egypt by the current regime and is the Egyptian medium that takes *mahraganāt* most seriously, regularly publishing critiques of concerts, reviews of movies and festivals that deal with *mahraganāt,* and introducing bands.

[39] Andeel, "You Just Got Mahraganed. There's No Getting Away from the Sound."

[40] El-Saket, Ola, "The Shaabi Music Breakthrough."

[41] Perry, Kevin EG, "Mahraganat hilft den Ägyptern, sich auszudrücken."

the 2011 Revolution, *mahraganāt,* and an increase in social mobility. A critical approach in its lyrics is attested as a significant difference to *mahraganāt's* predecessors, which are not named.[42] The review even goes on to compare *mahraganāt* with hip-hop and blues "which share a comparable, emancipatory connection to the American civil rights movement."[43]

Generally, the critical contents and the socially revolutionary potential of *mahraganāt* and its effect on Egyptian society are highly overestimated. However, this is probably due to the fact that these hopes were primarily linked to the 2011 Revolution and transferred to *mahraganāt*, which was seen as directly connected with the protests.

Egyptian experimental musician Hussein Sherbini takes up this perceived western fixation on *mahraganāt* or *electro shaʿbī* in his song "Etneen Arba3a."[44] As he puts it, it's perceived by Westerners to be "real" and "authentic" music coming from Egypt's lower classes: "Law kān fāriʾli l-ʿālam il-gharbi kuntĭ ʿamaltĭ shaʿbi w sammētu electro shaʿbi, yiʿgibhum yishtirū, abʾa ana kida ʾaṣli." ("If I gave a damn about the Western world, I would have done *shaʿbī* and called it electro *shaʿbī*, they would have liked it and bought it, would that make me authentic?").

Whenever the topic of revolution is taken up, one song by *mahraganāt*-artists Sadāt, 7a7a and Figo is continuously referred to in order to reinforce the *mahraganāt*-revolution-link. It ironizes the 2011 Revolution slogan: "al-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām" ("The people want the fall of the regime"), ridiculing it into a very down-to-earth demand for phone credit: "il-shaʿb yurīd khamsa gnē raṣīd" ("The people want 5 Egyptian pounds worth of phone credit").[45] Repeatedly quoting this song as a proof of *mahraganāt*'s involvement with the revolutionary process is problematic. First of all, it is difficult to find other *mahraganāt* songs dealing explicitly with the revolution or with political issues, and secondly, turning a demand for regime change into a joking demand for a ridiculously small amount of

[42] Benzler, Steffen, "Mahragan – Music as Revolution."

[43] Benzler, Steffen.

[44] Sherbini, Hussein: *Etneen Arba3a*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXpSgQcCnJg

[45] See e.g.: Swedenburg, Ted R., "Ted Swedenburg on Egypt's Post-Revolution Music;" Elshamy, Mosa'ab, "Mahraganat: New Hybrid Music Wave Sweeps Egypt;" Hubbard, Ben, "Out of Egypt's Chaos, Musical Rebellion;" Swedenburg, Ted R., "Electro Sha'abi: Autotune-Rebels in Cairo."

telephone credit does not convey an overwhelming will for societal or political change. On the other hand, implying that what really matters to part of Egypt's population is five pounds of phone credit could be considered as a hint at the lack of political participation amongst certain social classes caused by their time-consuming occupation with getting by on a daily basis.

However, there are voices who realize that the connection between *mahraganāt* and the revolution in these media outlets is indeed overemphasized. Salma Tarzi, director of another documentary on *mahraganāt* called "Underground/On the Surface" is critical of her own assumptions about *mahraganāt* artists: "'I had a lot of theories about their political stance or lack of it – and this is one side of the arrogance of the revolution in thinking that everyone who is poor is for the revolution.'"[46] The music magazine *Afropop* mentions in the article: "*Mahraganat* – Musical Revolution in Egypt" that the perception of *mahraganāt* abroad has not always been correct in terms of its designation (e.g. *electro shaʿbī*, Egyptian rap,...) and political aspects, quoting singer Sadāt:

> 'We aren't the product of the fall of the regime. We have been making the music since way back in 2007 and already then we were discussing our lives and the society we live in... I've been telling all these people to stop using all those terms. We made music and we gave it a name: mahraganat. Call it that. Just that.'[47]

An article published in *The Guardian* by Patrick Kingsley in 2014 also highlights that, according to *mahraganāt* singer Sadāt, politics is indeed overemphasized when reporting about *mahraganāt*, since the lower classes remain unheard and excluded from national discourse.[48]

Another complex of topics frequently (positively) highlighted in English language newspaper discourse on *mahraganāt* music is the sex-drug paradigm,[49] which makes *mahraganāt* lyrics seem very liberal and

[46] Elnabawi, Maha, "From Tok Toks to TV: New Film Gets to the Heart of Mahraganat. Underground/On the Surface."

[47] Jawad, Ferida, "Guest Bloggers Around the World: Mahraganat – Musical Revolution in Egypt."

[48] Kingsley, Patrick, "Cairo's Street Music Mahraganat Both Divides and Unites. Sound of the Slums Likened to Grime Music Becomes Egyptian Capital's New Soundtrack but Musicians Struggle for Acceptance."

[49] See Loccatelli, Giovanna, "Sadat: 'Mahraganat Is Pure Energy.' Cairo Is Ringing to Mahraganat, a Hectic Home-Grown Fusion of Electro, Hip-Hop and Shaabi. DJ Sadat Is One

progressive to a readership from outside Egypt. It is true that many famous *mahraganāt* songs treat these topics amongst others; however, they rarely focus exclusively on it, since *mahraganāt* usually take up a wide variety of topics within one song. Even though the songs ironize many of the social phenomena perceived as being typical for Egypt, they do not speak up for more sexual freedom, the rights of women and girls, or for a more liberal lifestyle. Therefore, an exaggerated focus on the occurrence of topics like sex, drugs, and revolution seems to be inappropriate given the associations this brings along with foreign readerships.

The idea of *mahraganāt* being an indicator of a desired social change and a movement towards more freedom of speech is usually depicted positively in English-language media. However, these topics are perceived as the exact opposite in Egyptian official discourse on *mahraganāt* music as it appears in television programs in Arabic, as the next chapter will show.

3.2 Discourse on *mahraganāt* in Arabic in State-Sanctioned TV Programs

The large majority of Egyptian media in Arabic language tends to either ignore the phenomenon of *mahraganāt* or launch attacks on its performers. With few exceptions, most of the discourse about *mahraganāt* shown on television cumulates in the defamation of talk show guests. For this paper, I included data from three different TV formats: two episodes from *Ṣabāyā l-khēr*[50] by TV host Rīhām Saʿīd about *mahraganāt* songs and what is considered to be the "real" *shaʿbī* music from 2012, aired on Al-Nahār TV,[51] Ṭōnī Khalīfa's confrontational talk show format *Ajraʾ al-kalām,*[52] hosting *mahraganāt* singers Okka and Ortega, *shaʿbī* singer Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and composer and musical critic Ḥilmī Bakr[53], aired 2013 on *al-Qāhira wa-n-nās* and Wāʾil al-Ibrāshī's *Al-ʿāshira masāʾan*[54] discussing

of the Godfathers of the Sound."

50 *Ṣabāyā l-khēr* is a TV program that combines fundraising with the discussion of societal (taboo) topics. Recently, the focus has shifted to the discussion of mysterious incidents and cases of murder. The format includes phone calls by the audience.

51 Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-khēr. ʿAn al-aghānī al-shaʿbiyya"* and "*Ṣabāyā l-khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*."

52 *Ajraʾ al-kalām* discusses controversial topics covering politics and society by inviting guests with opposite views.

53 Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 1;" "Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 2."*

54 *ʿāshira masāʾan* presents the most salient Egyptian news and treats current societal topics

the case of the arrest of several *mahraganāt* and *shaʿbī* performers for inciting debauchery. The discussion brings together *mahraganāt* and *shaʿbī* performers, Ḥilmī Bakr, and two lawyers representing their differing views, aired on Dream TV in 2018.[55]

The attacks on *mahraganāt* music aim at three different aspects: the artistic and moral value of the music, the attested meaninglessness and indecency of the lyrics, and the singer's social background.

3.2.1 Criticism of Moral and Musical Aspects in *mahraganāt*

Speaking about the link between music and its moral impact, the idea of popular songs expressing a nation's character has already been highlighted during the Romantic era. Observing the discourse about *mahraganāt* music in Egypt, it becomes clear that this idea has a strong presence in the argumentation of critics: an article published in *Al-Waṭan's* online-version states that there is a

> fāriq bayna akhlāq jīl nashaʾ ʿalā aghānī hādifa dhāt qīma wa-maʿnā li-kull min Umm Kulthūm wa-ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ wa-Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb wa-sh-shaykh Sayyid Darwīsh […] wa-jīl nashaʾ ʿalā aghānī hābiṭa qāʾima ʿalā l-ithāra wa-l-kalām al-fāḍiḥ.[56] (huge difference between the moral standards of a generation that grew up listening to purposeful, valuable and meaningful songs by the likes of Umm Kulthum, Abdel Halim Hafez, Mohammed Abdelwahab and Sayyid Darwish, and a generation that grew up listening to trivial songs built on excitement and scandalous lyrics.)

In a more dramatic way, Ḥilmī Bakr expresses his complete rejection of *mahraganāt*: *"nōʿ il-ghuna da dukhānu l-azraʾ akhṭar mi-b-burshām! mudammir li-z-zōʾ il-ʿāmm."*[57] ("This kind of singing's blue smoke[58] is more dangerous than pills [drugs]! It destroys public morality!")

This perceived unworthiness of *mahraganāt* due to its triviality and its detrimental effect on a whole generation is also mirrored in the expressions

in a talk show format. The audience is included via phone calls.

55 *al-Ibrāshī, "Al-ʿāshira masāʾan. Maʿa Wāʾil al-Ibrāshī ḥawla ḥabs muṭribī aghānī al-mahrajānāt al-shaʿbiyya."*

56 Mamdūḥ and Sharīf, *"Min aghānī 'Umm Kulthūm wa-l-ʿandalīb' ilā 'Okka wa-Ortega'…al-suqūṭ ilā hāwīyat al-fann."*

57 Khalīfa, *"Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 2,"* sec. 23.20.

58 The colors blue and black are commonly used for describing negative things in Egyptian Arabic. They also frequently appear in swear words. See Stewart, Devin J., "Color Terms in Egyptian Arabic."

people use to refer to the genre or to the people who sing it. A common solution for critics is to call them *aghānī hābiṭa* ("trivial/vulgar songs"). It is important to note that the Arabic root *h-b-ṭ* implies a downward movement, a fall, a decrease. Therefore, calling cultural products *hābiṭ* always carries a notion of decaying levels of art. *Aghānī hābiṭa* are usually contrasted with *aghānī hādifa*, ("meaningful songs"), putting the focus on a judgement of the content or message of a song's lyrics. TV-host Rīhām Saʿīd mostly chooses an indirect way to describe and at the same time evaluate the songs: *il-aghāni illi btiṭla*ʿ[59] ("the songs that are appearing"), *ughniyya ʾabīḥa*[60] ("a gross song"), *il-aghāni il-fashla zayyǐ di*[61]("lousy songs like those"). She also uses irony: *ughniyya qayyima zayyǐ di w ʿaẓīma zayyǐ di*[62] ("a precious and grand song like this one") and implores God to free Egyptians from a perceived calamity that has come over them: *rabbina yiʿfīna min il-ʾaghāni di*[63] ("may God free us of these songs"). Not naming the genre by the name its producers and performers use, or by any special term referring to it as a cultural product, and choosing instead to use judgmental expressions that refer to the music's moral value, shows a refusal to perceive it as an (independent) form of music. Composer and musical critic Ḥilmī Bakr usually lashes out at *mahraganāt* performers whenever they try to explain the kind of music they make. Neither is *mahraganāt* a valid term for him, nor does he accept their use of the terms "rap," "electronic," "hip-hop," or even *shaʿbī*. In fact, any connection of their musical genre to anything close to an established musical genre is deemed inacceptable by Bakr. He also argues that anyone who has not studied music and is therefore unable to define musical genres should not speak about them and use musical terms.[64]

Judging the musical aspects of *mahraganāt*, the arguments revolve around the music being repetitive, inauthentic due to the computer-based mode of production and lament missing musical composition and talent, as Ḥilmī Bakr puts it:

[59] Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-Khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*," sec. 27.38.
[60] Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-Khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*," sec. 28.19.
[61] Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-Khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*," sec. 1.34.55.
[62] Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-Khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*," sec. 20.02.
[63] Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-Khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*," sec. 1.31.27.
[64] See Khalīfa, *"Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 2."*

> awwalan da ghinā' 'an ṭarī' il-aghiza, 'an ṭarī' il-ototyūn, 'an ṭarī' il-melodayn,[65] [...] zayyī ma agīb qiṭa' akseswār w trakkibha tinṭa'. [...] lamma ghannu 'uddāmak dilwa'ti fēn l-melodi? il-melodi fēn? mish il-melodi ya'ni fī laḥn? ya'ni fī ṭāli' w nāzil gawāb w qarār?[66] (First of all, this is singing based on machines, on Auto-Tune and Melodyne, [...] as if you got pieces of accessories and put them together so they would make a sound. [...] When they [*mahraganāt* singers Okka and Ortega] sang in front of you now, where is the melody? Where is the melody? Doesn't melody mean that there is structure? That there is up and down and theme and variation?)

For Bakr, the absence of classical means of composition used in *ṭarab* music and the lack of originality caused by the strong role of machines in music production devalues *mahraganāt* as a musical genre. The excessive use of musical elements considered to be Western, like rap and electronic elements, as well as the basic DJ-setup is also criticized. This is perceived to make *mahraganāt* a deeply un-Egyptian type of music and therefore deprives it of its legitimacy to express the views of "the Egyptian street," as *mahraganāt* singers claim for themselves.[67] (See chapter 3.3).

Another important element of Egyptian media discourse on *mahraganāt* are the terms used for naming the singers themselves. The most respectful term for addressing a singer in Arabic is *muṭrib*. A *muṭrib* is a person who is able to create *ṭarab* by making music. Critics consider *mahraganāt* to be completely lacking *ṭarab*, which is mirrored in their refusal to call a *mahraganāt* singer *muṭrib*. On the same prestigious level there is the designation *fannān* ("artist"). The next level is a *mughannī* ("person who sings"). As Racy notes, calling a singer *mughannī* is a "potentially offensive designation [...] usually connotative of the less sophisticated or pedestrian public entertainer."[68] Further down on the prestige scale, there is only the term *mu'addī* left, which adequately translates to "performer." *Mahraganāt* singers are frequently confronted with TV-hosts and critics telling them that they are not to be considered *muṭrib*. Interestingly, *mahraganāt* singers do not refer to themselves as *muṭribīn*. They would rather use the word *mu'addī* or *mughannī mahraganāt*, only rarely the word *muṭrib sha'bi*. This shows that they acknowledge that their genre is completely different from *ṭarab*.[69] As Racy explains, a *muṭrib* is expected to

[65] Both Auto-Tune and Melodyne are software programs for pitch correction.
[66] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Sha'bān 'Abd al-Raḥīm fī Ajra' al-kalām 2,*" sec. 08.10.
[67] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Sha'bān 'Abd al-Raḥīm fī Ajra' al-kalām 1,*" secs 13–15.
[68] Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World*, 32.
[69] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Sha'bān 'Abd al-Raḥīm fī Ajra' al-kalām 2,*" *sec. 35.30.*

have an exemplary and dignified character, since: "An immoral artist is said to constitute an *ihānah lil-fann* ("insult to art")."[70]

3.2.2 Criticism of *mahraganāt's* Attested Lack of Decent Content

Considering *mahraganāt* lyrics, they are another reason for Egypt's cultural elite to deny any connection between a *mahraganāt* singer and a *muṭrib*. Song titles like "*hāti bōsa ya bitt*" ("Give me a kiss, chick!"), "*mish harūḥ*" ("I won't go [to visit a girl who is waiting for him alone at home]"), "*aḥḥa sh-shibshib ḍāʿ*" ("Shit, I lost my slipper"), and "*fartaka fartaka*" ("Shred it!")[71] may sound shockingly profane to parts of the audience. However, the accusation of singing meaningless, vulgar lyrics that incite improper behavior not respecting the prevalent rules in Egyptian society is as old as *shaʿbī* music itself. Armbrust writes that Aḥmad ʿAdawiyya also was rebuked for his "frank appeal to the masses – without any rhetoric of 'raising their cultural standards.'"[72] The same applies to *mahraganāt* songs: their songs do not even try to aspire to a different social background or a different cultural environment than the one they live in. Naturally, the lyrics reflect what they experience, in terms of topics and the language variety used in *mahraganāt* songs. Speaking about a song called "*Dalaʿ takātik*" ("*tuktuk*-coquetry"), lawyer Samīr Ṣabrī argues that the "*alfāẓ*" ("expressions") used in these songs are part of an

> [...] aženda li ḍarb il-fann il-maṣri wa-l-qaḍā ʿalē tamāman ʿan ṭarīʾ bass hāzihi l-garasīm tuʿud tghanni k-kalām da. lamma yiṭlaʿlak wāḥid yitnaṭṭatli [...] w yiʾūl shwayyit kalām la huwwa mafhūm wala mitnayyil maʿrūf biyiʾūlu ʾē wala r-risāla illi biyihdif bīha."[73] ([...] agenda to attack Egyptian art and to destroy it completely through these germs who sing this stuff. When one of them goes jumping about, saying stuff that's neither understood nor can you damn figure out what they are saying or the message they're trying to communicate.)

One of the singers of "*dalaʿ takātik*" has been arrested "*bi-tuhmati ḫtiwāʾihi ʿalā alfāẓin takhdishu l-ḥayāʾa l-ʿāmm*" ("because of the charge of containing expressions offending public modesty"), because the song was considered "*isfāf*" ("triviality") and "*taḥrīḍ ʿalā l-fisq*" ("incitement to

[70] Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World*, 34.

[71] *Fartaka* is a word used in Egyptian youth slang. *Fartik / yifartik* originally means 'to tear, rip apart, to shred.'

[72] Armbrust, *Mass Culture*, 184.

[73] al-Ibrāshī, *"Al-ʿāshira masāʾan. Maʿa Wāʾil al-Ibrāshī ḥawla ḥabs muṭribī aghānī al-mahrajānāt al-shaʿbiyya,"* sec. 56.06.

debauchery").[74] The expression *khadsh al-ḥayā'* is also used for cases of sexual harassment and abuse. The accusation of *taḥrīḍ ʿalā l-fisq wa-l-fujūr* usually occurs in charges of prostitution and homosexuality (which is considered indecency by Egyptian law).

Apparently, the use of youth slang as it is heard in everyday speech in Cairo's streets in songs is an enormous affront to the cultural establishment. Music is, according to the prevalent normative view amongst Egypt's elites concerning the function of music, supposed to leave the listener either a better person, on a personal level or, on a national level, a better citizen. Obviously, a song about a *tuktuk* driver singing about a very flirtatious female passenger he hooked up with in a dark corner will not contribute to the discourse of decency and progress stressed in Egyptian media who aim at educating the Egyptian people (who is, according to them, in dire need of enlightenment). The same goes for the song about the lost slipper bought for a packet of hash, which begins with a common all-purpose swear word "aḥḥa!," which Rīhām Saʿīd contrasts with patriotic songs by ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm:

> zamān kān il-aghāni l-waṭaniyya līha guz'ī kbīr min ḥamās ish-shaʿb [...] dilwa'ti iḥna binghanni sh-shibshib ḍāʿ ʿashān ʿayzīn niʿla bi-baladna?[75] (Back in the days the patriotic songs played a big part in motivating the people [...] nowadays, we're singing "the slipper is lost" in order to improve our country?)

This comparison is somewhat strange, since the big majority of *mahraganāt* does not aim at improving the country or at developing it to be a better, more progressive place – rather, the songs are very subjective audio-snap-shots of situations experienced by the singers. *Mahraganāt* lyrics are faced with opposition because of a perceived lack of content and of educative messages to the Egyptian people. In fact, there is a constant accusation that the songs are not working in the right direction of developing Egypt in order for it to have a brighter, modernized future.

3.2.3 *Mahraganāt*, Social Class and Space in Urban Contexts

It is important to note that this criticism is also linked to the social background that reverberates in *mahraganāt* songs: the danger in the shape of

[74] al-Ibrāshī, *"Al-ʿāshira masā'an. Maʿa Wā'il al-Ibrāshī ḥawla ḥabs muṭribī aghānī al-mahrajānāt al-shaʿbiyya,"* secs 1.18–1.23.

[75] Saʿīd, *"Ṣabāyā l-khēr. ʿAn al-aghānī al-shaʿbiyya,"* sec. 22.00.

"bad language" is thought to be coming from a certain social class, a class that is perceived to be uneducated, dangerous, and despicable due to its rough manners. In fact, *mahraganāt* was developed in Cairo's informal living areas inhabited by financially weak families. In the following quote, Rīhām Saʿīd questions in what context the scandalous slipper-song could possibly be sung. This reveals the places she deems appropriate for listening to music, and, at the same time, she marks these places as the only legitimate places for listening to music. Thereby, she delegitimizes a song which was originally made for a completely different context. It becomes clear that *mahraganāt* (and certain kinds of *shaʿbī*) songs are not to be placed in high-class contexts:

> ana ʾult inn il-aghāni di bititsimiʿ fi ʾaʿdāt il-mukhaddarāt. tiftikru l-aghāni di mumkin nismaʿha w-iḥna ʾaʿdīn fēn? fi-g-gamʿa? fi-n-nādi? fi-l-bēt w-inta maʿa ḅaḅāk w ṃaṃtak?[76] (I said that these songs are listened to in drug sessions. Where do you think it's possible to listen to these songs? When we're at university? At the club? At home when you're with your mom and dad?)

According to Saʿīd, these songs are made for people who consume drugs. All of the three "clean" contexts she names are mostly out of reach for people coming from a *shaʿbī* neighborhood with restricted access to higher education. The *nādi,* for example, is a recreational club one needs to pay a membership fee for in order to get access to this private space closed to the public who is not able to afford it. Hanging out at a prestigious *nādi* is most likely not part of the everyday life of youth coming from a humble social background. Just the same, spending time at home listening to music with parents called *ḅāḅa* and *ṃāṃa* is a feature associated with people from the middle class upwards. In lower social contexts, parents are usually referred to as *ab* and *umm*, or *wālid* and *walda*. As mentioned above, the connection between this music's delegitimization and drug consumption is mentioned repeatedly. Just the same, *mahraganāt* singers are frequently named along with criminals. In discussing the arrest of the *tuktuk* song's singers, one of the talkshow guests remarks that she feels sorry for the singer's mother, a simple woman working as a janitor, seen crying in a video report. She is immediately met with lawyer Samīr Ṣabrī's comment: *"umm il-irhābi bitʿayyaṭ barḍu"*[77] (*"*The mother of a terrorist also

[76] Saʿīd, *"Ṣabāyā l-khēr. ʿAn al-aghānī al-shaʿbiyya,"* sec. 33.12.

[77] al-Ibrāshī, *"Al-ʿāshira masāʾan. Maʿa Wāʾil al-Ibrāshī ḥawla ḥabs muṭribī aghānī al-mahrajānāt al-shaʿbiyya,"* sec. 1.53.20.

cries [for him]"), which places a *mahraganāt* singer in the same category as a terrorist.

As mentioned above, it is important to note here that *mahraganāt* has long crossed into upper-class realms. Weddings at five-star hotels have become venues for *mahraganāt* singers and concerts organized in expensive shopping malls or concert halls are set up for an upper-class audience. Lower-class audiences would not be able to afford attending a concert in such a place, and at the same time, it is possible for them to attend the same gigs in their neighborhood. *Mahraganāt's* usage for advertisements has also become common for anybody wanting to attract young people, not merely the lower class.

Social class and behavior associated with it is a recurring topic in criticism or outright attacks on *mahraganāt* singers. Just like *shaʿbī* music, *mahraganāt* also owes much of its fame to *tuktuk* and microbus drivers who play this music in their vehicles, thereby making it heard to a wide range of people. Drivers in public transport do not enjoy high prestige and respect in Egypt's social hierarchy. In public discourse in Egypt, they are frequently depicted as cunning and greedy. Greed and the longing for quick success, be it financially, or by gaining fame, is also attested to *mahraganāt* singers. They are seen as putting commercial success before considering the possibly detrimental effect of their music on society. Critics claim that they use bad language in order to attract attention, and the only reason given for people listening to them is *ḥubb istiṭlāʿ* [78] "curiousness." In fact, there appear to be very few explanations to the enormous success of *mahraganāt* music. Apart from *ḥubb istiṭlāʿ*, the only other reason that makes people want to listen to *mahraganāt*, according to Egyptian media discourse, seems to be a sensationalistic reflex caused by the scandalous lyrics.

All the features attributed to *mahraganāt* singers, be it criminal energy, drug abuse, greed, the longing for a quick rise to fame, the use of bad language, indifference in the face of doing harm to society, and being uneducated, add up to a poor moral character, which rules out the chances of being respected as a *muṭrib* and as an artist in a more general way. In recent years, state-sanctioned media coverage of *mahraganāt* stars has

[78] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 2*," sec. 23.15.

become slightly less aggressive. However, even in favorable TV show formats, subtle skepticism about the legitimation of *mahraganāt* music appears. An example is TV host Munā al-Shāzlī's interview with *mahraganāt* superstars Okka and Ortega (who enjoy most media attention) after they had wrongly been arrested. In the show, they are seen in a somewhat distressed manner remembering their time in custody. However, they announce their decision on only producing purposeful songs conveying important messages to the youth from now on. This implies that, before their arrest, they did not pay much attention to the moral responsibility they have due to their stardom and the influence their songs have on young audiences. Munā al-Shāzlī announces that their change of mind can be considered breaking news.[79] The first song Okka and Ortega released after this difficult phase is called *"il'ab yala!"* ("Get it goin' sonny!"). It describes scenes familiar to many young people who want to return to being more religious, but cannot motivate themselves to get up and pray, because the devil keeps convincing them of simply having a good time by whispering: "*il'ab yala*!" Ironically, this song immediately turned into a smash hit and had people from all over the Arab world upload videos to YouTube of themselves dancing to irresistible devilish beats, happily shouting "*il'ab yala*!" Okka and Ortega comment on this ironic twist contained in the song in the spoken introduction of the track, which is deleted in most unofficial song versions uploaded to YouTube. Mentioning both the important message they want to convey with this song and the fact that everybody is going to dance to the track is a clear statement: both meaningful lyrics and entertainment can be merged into one song.

Having had a close look at the fierce criticism *mahraganāt* has to face, the perspective of *mahraganāt* producers and singers themselves will be analyzed in the following chapter.

[79] al-Shāzlī, "*Ma'ākum Munā al-Shāzlī. Liqā' khāṣṣ ma'a Okka wa-Ortega wa-qiṣṣat al-qabḍ 'alayhim wa-ḥabsihim wa-ta'thīr al-azma 'alā qarārātihim* (part 4 of the TV program)."

3.3 *Mahraganāt* Singers and Producers in Interviews and TV Programs[80]

Two frequent terms used by *mahraganāt* singers and producers when talking about their music are, obviously, *mahraganāt* and *mazzīka*. *Mahraganāt*, as mentioned above, translates to "festivals," while *mazzīka* is a hip version of the Classical Arabic *mūsīqā*. Since *mūsīqā* carries the weight of a many centuries old tradition of Arabic music, it does not seem appropriate to be used for a contemporary genre like *mahraganāt*. Secondly, CA /q/ is perceived to be a "heavy" sound for young Egyptian speakers. The term *mazzīka* is not restricted to use in *mahraganāt* environments, it is generally used by youth to denote contemporary types of "light" music that are not marked by a long cultural heritage or by its rural origins.

3.3.1 *Shaʿbī* or *mahraganāt?*

Another important feature in *mahraganāt* producer's and singer's discourse on the music they make is that they explain their genre to outsiders by combining different musical genres with the word *shaʿbī*, for example: rap *shaʿbī*, electro *shaʿbī*, *mahraganāt shaʿbī*, while the usual term used for the older *shaʿbī* music is *aghāni shaʿbi(yya)* "*shaʿbī* songs." This displays a recognition of the fact that *mahraganāt*, even though it is musically different from *shaʿbī*, has its roots in *shaʿbī* music. The two genres share the same function, status, and, most importantly, associations with working-class environments. In the terms named above, the adjective *shaʿbī* added to a certain musical genre underlines that it belongs to the simple people, that it takes up their concerns in the shape of lyrics, and that it is produced by ordinary people with restricted means. However, singers of the older *shaʿbī* genre are keen to deny this connection between *shaʿbī*, which they perceive as real art of the simple people and *mahraganāt*. The latter is seen as something new, detrimental, that invaded Egypt and will eventually extinguish *shaʿbī* music seen as the original. *Shaʿbī* singer Aḥmad Sharīʿī describes it as follows: "*gih vayrus gidīd giddan ʿala maṣr ismu fann id-DJ. ʾē id-DJ da ya ʿamm?!*"[81] ("A very new virus invaded Egypt. It's called DJ-ing. What should that DJ be, man?!") Similarly, *shaʿbī* star Ṭāriq ish-Shēkh

[80] All of the interviews were conducted by the author during field research in Cairo and Suez in summer 2016. Some of the statements are transcriptions from Egyptian TV programs.

[81] Interview with *shaʿbī* singer Aḥmad Sharīʿī, Suez.

states in an interview in Rīhām Saʿīd's TV show about the difference between proper, good *shaʿbī* music and songs wrongly perceived as such, when asked how these new songs with disgraceful lyrics developed: "*biyuˇudu maʿa baʿḍ il-aṣḥāb biyuˇudu yishtimu baʿḍ bi-l-aghāni di yaʿni hiyya mish ughniyya asāsan, wala fī kalām wala fī ḥāga.*"[82] ("They hang out together, a group of friends, and they're insulting each other by these songs, I mean, it's not even a song, there are no lyrics, no nothing.") Both *shaʿbī* singers do not even pronounce the word *shaʿbī* anywhere near their comments about *mahraganāt*, since it seems so absurd to them to use one word for these two genres. They seem to be appalled by the idea that this, next to their own musical work, could be called *shaʿbī* music as well.

3.3.2 Strategies of Defense

In the face of harsh attacks, *mahraganāt* singers use a range of arguments to justify the presence of their music and their right to perform it. One of them is, obviously, its undeniable success (which has been ongoing since approximately 2006). A frequent phrase used by both critics and supporters for describing this success is *faraḍit nafsaha ʿala…* ("it imposed itself on…"). By saying that *mahraganāt* music imposed itself on Egypt's street, youth, music scene, and cultural landscape, the responsibility for this is veiled, giving performers the chance to argue that they merely play what people ask for. Another aspect is that it is seen as a force of nature impossible to resist or to oppose. The expression does not carry positive associations, but it brings across the undoubted omnipresence and success of *mahraganāt* music. Just as *mahraganāt* imposed itself on the Egyptian street, it also imposed itself on commercials of all kinds. Any company marketing a product in Egypt that does not merely aim at the upper class will resort to *mahraganāt* music at some point. Even if *mahraganāt* artists used to face harsh criticism, the fact that their art is used for commercials, by famous artists, in movies, and in upper-class wedding parties, proves a certain recognition from different social classes. However, they still lack institutional recognition in Egypt. This is particularly painful for *mahraganāt* artists because many of them have been invited to play gigs outside Egypt, and have become known internationally, while cultural

[82] Saʿīd, "*Ṣabāyā l-khēr. Al-fann al-shaʿbī al-masmūʿ*," sec. 29.45.

institutions in their home country still do not recognize their music as an art form.

Another form of defense is a humble approach towards one's musical abilities and knowledge. *Mahraganāt* singers are keen to remark that they did not enjoy good (musical) education and that they started producing their own music by very simple means. Similarly, they point out that their musical genre is different from other genres and does not lay claims to belonging to high culture or to being considered art officially. In general, *mahraganāt* performers display awareness of the fact that there are different musical genres representing different moods or having different functions. *Mahraganāt* star Ortega, asked about a comparison and a possible competition between themselves and older *shaʿbī* music, puts it as follows: "*humma ṭarīʾit mazzīka w-iḥna ṭarīʾit mazzīka tanya khāliṣ.*"[83] ("They play a certain kind of music and we play a completely different kind of music.") For him, *mahraganāt* seems to be an independent genre, and he does not see *shaʿbī* and *mahraganāt* as musical genres competing with each other for audiences. In the same way, they are keen to emphasize that they do not sing *ṭarab*, that their music has a different function and that they do not even lay claim to the honorable title of *muṭribīn*. However, they are still blamed by critics for *not* being *ṭarab*, which implies that the only musical genre considered to have legitimacy is *ṭarab*. Ortega tries to make this point clear by saying: *"iḥna mish binʾūl ṭarab wala binʾūl maʾamāt iḥna binʾaddi l-mazzīka btaʿitna…ʾadā […] rāb […] w b-ṭarīʾit ik-kalām ish-shaʿbi btaʿna."*[84] ("We don't sing *ṭarab* and we don't sing *maqāmāt*, we perform our music….performance….rap…with our *shaʿbī* language that we speak.")

They do not aspire to be *muṭribīn* and they do not compose their music in accordance with the *maqāmāt* system, which is what Classical Arabic music is based on. Their declared goal is not to create a product of "high culture," but to reach the simple people in their own language, the language they are used to, and to speak their mind and express what moves people from their social environment in their daily life experiences. However, they do want their *fann* ("art") to be recognized:

[83] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 1,*" sec. 11.37.
[84] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fī Ajraʾ al-kalām 1,*" secs 10.47–11.10.

> iḥna mustaʿiddīn bassī niʾaddim li-n-nās shughlina w fikrina w fannina w k-kalām illi ʿala lisanhum. iḥna binʾulhulhum bi ṭariʾithum. yaʿni iḥna ʿayzīn niʾaddim ḥāga min nafsina iḥna.[85] (We can only present our work, our ideas and our art to people and the things they want to say. We say it for them in their way. So, we want to present something from ourselves.)

What becomes clear from this quote is the idea of *mahraganāt* music expressing the simple people's feelings, of the singers voicing their concerns in a way that is understood by them and actually mirrors their reality; in short, in an authentic way. Most *mahraganāt* singers note that *mahraganāt* used to be badly produced, and even the lyrics had been, when *mahraganāt* was still newly emerging, crude, and not thought out well. However, they stress that lyrics and music have gone through an important process of qualitative refinement while still representing the social class they hail from. The criticizing elite, though, does not recognize this development.

3.3.3 Considering the Class Split

Personal pronouns like "we" – "they," "our" – "their" are prevalent when *mahraganāt* artists explain their music and style. Even though the "other," being represented by "they," is never precisely named, it becomes clear from the context that "we" usually refers to a social class perceived as low. Sometimes, the term *ghalāba* ("simple/poor people") is employed, or *ish-shāriʿ* "the street." There is a strong awareness of the poor background most *mahraganāt* singers come from and their responsibility to make themselves heard by people who mostly ignore them. Singer and composer of the "lost slipper song," Maḥmūd Fīgo, describes their topics along a vertical societal line:

> binitkallim ʿala l-faʾrī illi-ḥna fī, binitkallim ʿan iz-zull ill-iḥna ʿayshīnu. binitkallim innu fī nās fō' w-iḥna f-ḥitta tanya.[86] (We speak about the poverty we're in, about the humiliation we're living in. We talk about the fact that there are people up there and we're somewhere completely different.)

Even though the songs do not contain clearly pronounced criticism of the upper class and those causing injustice, their provocatively direct

[85] Khalīfa, "*Okka wa-Ortega wa-Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm fi Ajraʾ al-kalām 1*," sec. 22.23.
[86] Interview with Maḥmūd Fīgo, *mahraganāt* singer/producer, Cairo.

language and the "insanely annoying"[87] sound of their songs is enough to draw attention to those at the lower end of the social scale.

Language plays an important part in representing experiences and authentically affirming identities: the language register used in *mahraganāt* songs is, according to Ortega, not just dirty expressions and swear words – on the contrary – it is the very normal variety of colloquial Egyptian Arabic that everybody can hear in the streets: *"iḥna binitkallim akinni bakallimak w batkallim bi l-lisān il-maṣri illi huwwa fi-sh-shāri' 'ala 'asās inni batkallim kida ana mumkin aghanni kida."*[88] ("We speak as if I was talking to you face to face, and I speak in the Egyptian language of the streets, and since I can speak this way, I can also sing this way.") Apparently, *mahraganāt* singer Ortega does not see any problem in using the language heard in everyday life in Cairo's streets in songs. It is interesting to note that the connection between speaking and singing in Arabic music has a long tradition. Music used to be a medium to convey a message, as can be seen when looking at the peripheral role instruments played when, for example, folk tales or poetry was recited. Until now, it is common to say that a singer *biyi'ūl ughniyya*, that he literally "says a song."[89] It seems to be only logical, then, that a singer should sing the same way he would talk to people. Another *mahraganāt* singer, Maḥmūd Fīgo, states concerning the language used in *mahraganāt*:

> fi-l-mahraganāt ma-bin'ulshī wala limāza wala ayna wala k-kalām da ma binitkallimshī bi-lugha 'arabiyya iḥna binitkallim bi-lughitna bitā'it ish-shāri'.[90] (In *mahraganāt*, we don't say things like 'limāza' and 'ayna' and this stuff, no, we don't speak sophisticated Arabic, we speak our language, the one belonging to the street.)

Remembering the critic's views that *mahraganāt's* success is only caused by people's curiosity toward anything new, especially if it is scandalous, *mahraganāt* singers present a different explanation for their music's success:

> huwwa l-mahraganāt illi shahharha w illi n-nās ḥabbetha kullaha inn-iḥna binkallim bi-ism ish-shāri' [...] in-nās illi fō' mish miḥtāga ḥadd yitkallim 'alēha lākin illi taḥt...in-nās lamma itkallimit 'alēha w kidahowwat fa ḥabbu l-mahragān bi-sabab

[87] Andeel, "You Just Got Mahraganed. There's No Getting Away from the Sound."
[88] Khalīfa, *"Okka wa-Ortega wa-Sha'bān 'Abd al-Raḥīm fī Ajra' al-kalām 1,"* sec. 46.20.
[89] Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World*, 32.
[90] Interview with Maḥmūd Fīgo, *mahraganāt* singer/producer, Cairo.

> kida.[91] (So, what made mahraganāt famous and what everybody liked about it is that we speak in the name of the street [...] the people on top don't need someone to speak for them, but those down below...the people liked the *mahragān* when they found that there was someone speaking about them, because of this.)

From this point of view, the most important aspect that made *mahraganāt* successful is that it appears to represent a stratum of society which is located *taḥt* "below," and apparently, it does so in a satisfying, honest way. *Mahraganāt* singer Ṭāriq is-Saffāḥ points out the credibility that makes them successful amongst Egypt's youth: *"ik-kalām ill-iḥna ḥassīnu biyiṭlaʿ minnina biyuwṣal. biyuwṣal maʿa g-gīl bitaʿna."*[92] ("The words we feel reach people directly when we say them. They reach our generation.")

Highlighting that *mahraganāt* brings together credible performers singing about and for a social class that is felt to be underrepresented in music, state-sanctioned culture, and official discourse in general, in a language register that is able to reach them directly, is a strong statement. It also shows that there is a (perceived) gap between official discourse and "the street." This goes back to official discourse, be it cultural or political, being distributed in a language that does not reach "the street" or is not understood to a degree that it moves people and makes them feel properly represented.

4 Conclusion

The state-sanctioned media discourse on *mahraganāt* displays concern about the (acoustic) omnipresence of *mahraganāt*, a product of popular culture deemed improper by Egypt's cultural elites. It lacks any kind of authorization from above, instead, it is legitimized from below. The ongoing debate about the legitimacy of *mahraganāt* makes the social class split in Egypt visible. Apparently, there has been a musical and cultural void that *mahraganāt* performers stepped in to fill. An important aspect of this representational void is that *mahraganāt* addresses the youth, which, even though it forms the biggest part of Egypt's population, is widely ignored in official discourse. This does, however, not imply that *mahraganāt* is directly linked to the 2011 Revolution or involved in political activism of any kind. Even though *mahraganāt* singers show awareness of the class

[91] Interview with Maḥmūd Fīgo, *mahraganāt* singer/producer, Cairo.
[92] Interview with Ṭāriq is-Saffāḥ, *mahraganāt* singer, Cairo.

split and socioeconomic problems in their country, not one of them mentioned the desire to change society into a certain direction, or that revolutionizing Egypt and its social structure by singing *mahraganāt* songs is a goal. Therefore, over-emphasizing the connection between the 2011 Revolution and the appearance of *mahraganāt* music as "soundtrack of the revolution," is a perspective from outside not shared by *mahraganāt* singers. Apart from the fact that the music became more famous and widespread after the 2011 Revolution, there is no causal connection between *mahraganāt* song lyrics and changes in Egyptian society. However, the simple fact that music stemming from a social class with low prestige has become widespread in Egypt and well-known even outside Egypt, is a new phenomenon. It might be "insanely annoying"[93] to some, but *mahraganāt* is impossible to ignore. After all, popular music carries a potential to make a social class that tends to be sidelined by elites in Egypt more visible.

[93] Andeel, "You Just Got Mahraganed. There's No Getting Away from the Sound."

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Negotiating Languages in an Arab(ic) Rap Music Fan Community

Felix Wiedemann

Abstract

Not only since the revolts of what was once called the "Arab Spring," the academia has mostly portrayed Arab(ic) hip hop as a voice of the voiceless and a tool in the struggle of oppressed peoples. This romanticized view of "popular culture" as a "counter culture" neglects hegemonic power imbalances within the supposed "counter culture" itself. Because Arab(ic) hip hop is still mostly an underground and niche phenomenon, its communities rely heavily on online social networks to interconnect. This contribution outlines how the Arab(ic) online hip hop community on the platform genius.com creates its own field, which sorts of capital are used in this field and how the field regulates itself. By identifying community-internal regulations with regard to the use of different languages and scripts, it makes visible how power imbalances among users are created by an uneven distribution of community-specific forms of capital and how they can lead to the exclusion of users and to a consolidation of the status quo. If a "popular counter culture" like hip hop internally has the same hegemonies it rebels against externally, we are led to discuss the applicability of the term "popular culture" in its "counter culture" understanding.

Keywords: rap, hip hop, Algeria, social network, popular culture, language, script

1 Introduction

The academia has mostly portrayed Arab(ic)[1] hip hop as a counter culture, as a "voice of the voiceless" and a tool in the struggle against oppression. In this article, it will be shown that this romanticized view on a "popular counter culture" is on the one hand justified, but, on the other hand, it neglects hegemonic power imbalances within Arab(ic) hip hop culture itself.

As Arab(ic) hip hop is still mostly an underground and niche phenomenon, the communities rely heavily on online social networks to interconnect. One such network is the Genius platform (genius.com). The platform enables its users to upload, explain and interpret rap lyrics and to interact with artists. This contribution outlines how the Arab(ic) online hip hop community on Genius creates its own field, which sorts of capital are used, and how the field regulates itself. Exemplarily, I explore these community-internal regulations by focusing on the community's use of different scripts and languages. My fieldwork builds on three years of active membership in the Arabic language editing community on Genius.

In this contribution, community-internal conventions with regard to the use of different languages and scripts are identified. These linguistic conventions help identify power imbalances among users, which stem from an uneven distribution of community-specific forms of capital. The latter leads to an exclusion of users and to a consolidation of the status quo. Since "popular counter cultures" like hip hop have internally the same hegemonies they fight externally against, we are led to discuss the applicability of the term "popular culture" in its understanding as "counter culture."

In the first part of this article, the notion of rap music as part of a form of popular counter culture is outlined. An introduction to Genius and an explanation of my methodological approach follow. In the main part of this

[1] I've chosen to write 'Arab(ic)' instead of 'Arab' or 'Arabic' because I assume that some of the connections uniting the members of the community are based on concepts of a shared 'ethnicity,' whereas others are based on an understanding of a shared Arabic language – or shared Arabic languages.

article, the field of rap enthusiasts on Genius and their language use are analyzed.

1.1 Arab(ic) Rap through a "Popular Culture" Lens

In this article, I will not dive deeper into all the different meanings the term "popular culture" brings with it, as both the term "popular" and the term "culture" are highly ambiguous – which a look at the other articles in this collected volume shows. I will instead concentrate on one interpretation of "popular culture," which is very commonly associated with hip hop culture and rap music: popular culture as a form of resistance / a counter culture against hegemonies.

Rap music is part of hip hop culture. Hip hop is commonly seen as consisting of at least the four core elements: rapping, DJing, breaking, and graffiti. It originated in the Bronx in the 1970s, where it provided a means of expression for youth who could not afford mainstream disco culture. Since these days, it has risen from a local do-it-yourself phenomenon to one of the economically most dominant cultures on a global scale. This process of commercialization has already been criticized as "selling out" by many lamenting the "death of hip hop." In other words:

> When the rebel himself is being commodified, the rebellion has become part of the very system it rebels against. The rebellious posture inherent in the founding myth of hip hop-culture could in this way be made to lose much of its impact.[2]

However, many rappers, journalists, and academics still focus on hip hop's potential as a counter culture and corrective for society. The latter is especially true for rap music in the MENA region. If rap in this part of the world is noticed at all by academia from outside, it is mostly seen as "a fresh force of sociocultural and political dissent."[3] This perspective seems to be a commonly accepted one, as much scholarship concentrates on its "voices of resistance,"[4] seeing it as "a form of cultural resistance against

[2] Igor Johannsen, "'Popular Culture' and the Academy," *Middle East - Topics & Arguments* 7, no. 0 (January 27, 2017): 104, https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6379.

[3] Nouri Gana, "Rap and Revolt in the Arab World," *Social Text* Vol. 30, No. 4, no. Ausgabe 113 (2012): 25.

[4] Mark LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, 1st ed. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008), 448 / 480 [ebook edition].

different forms of global and local domination,"[5] and focusing for example on its "pro-democracy aspirations and liberation struggles."[6]

If particular forms of culture are branded "popular culture," and if we understand them as "counter culture," we are led to believe that it is their struggle against some form of oppression that qualifies them as "popular culture." This would mean that the "popular culture" is the struggling, whereas the "non-popular" hegemonic culture is the culture that is struggled against. However, if we find the hegemonic power structures and struggles against these hegemonies *within* a supposed "popular culture," this would question the validity of a term like "popular culture" in its understanding as "counter culture." This article pursues the goal of deconstructing the "counter culture" understanding of hip hop by analyzing the Arabic language rap fan community and their linguistic struggles on Genius.

1.2 (Rap) Genius 101

On Genius, visitors find rap lyrics and other sorts of texts alongside user-generated annotations that debate and explain these texts line by line. When the platform was founded in 2009, it ran by the name "Rap Exegesis," which was later and due to its "complexity" changed to "Rap Genius." Dropping "rap" reflects the website's ambition to "annotate the world," i.e. provide a platform where users can also annotate speeches, news items, other sorts of lyrics, poetry or prose, webpages – basically all kinds of texts. The platform did not come out of the blue, nor was or is it the only website dedicated to rap lyrics. For example, since as early as 1992, the "Original Hip-Hop Lyrics Archive" (OHHLA / ohhla.com) has been providing a free archive of rap lyrics. However, OHHLA's

> archival efforts are streamlined because they focus solely on the transcription of rap albums. There is no annotation or context offered with the transcription. Rap

[5] Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman, "Introduction: Popular Culture - A Site for Resistance," in *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook*, edited by Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman, vol. Routledge research in postcolonial literatures (London: Routledge, 2014), 7.

[6] Caroline Rooney, "Music sans Frontières? Documentaries on Hip-Hop in the Holy Land and DIY Democracy," in *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook*, edited by Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman (Routledge, 2013), 33.

> Genius extends OHHLA's model of lyrical archiving by encouraging users to provide social-cultural context to the lyrics via annotations.[7]

It is this Web 2.0[8] approach that sets Genius apart from other platforms and that makes it especially interesting for research. Web 2.0 services are characterized by "prosumers," i.e. users who are both actively producing content and passively consuming it.[9] Genius' registered users can upload new lyrics, correct older ones, and explain these lyrics line by line. When explaining lyrics, the users mark the part(s) they want to annotate and are then able to add annotations. These can contain explanations of slang or other uncommon words, additional information, especially on intertextual crosslinks and content like videos, memes, or images, which illustrate the respective verse.

However, who uses Genius? The platform itself does not publicly provide user statistics. There are only approximate statistics through third-party options like the statistics provider Alexa Internet, Inc. This company creates its statistics through a browser toolbar, which tracks its users, and by "aggregating data from 'multiple [other] sources.'"[10] These are, however, just like Alexa's ranking algorithm, not known to the public. Therefore, Alexa's statistics can only show part of the full picture. If you grant Alexa some credibility, you can access the following information for free:[11] Genius ranks 151 in website popularity in the USA and 314 worldwide. Its visitors come mostly from the USA (39.3%), while other English-speaking countries (UK 5.6%, Canada 4.3%, Australia 2.9%) are also among the top five visitor providers. Germany is the only non-anglophone country in the top five, with 3.4% of all visitors. With 72.6%, a very high percentage of

7 Regina N. Bradley, "Getting Off at the 13th Floor: Rap Genius and Archiving 21st Century Black Cultural Memory," *Journal of Ethnic American Literature*, no. 4 (2014): 90.

8 "Web 1.0" is the base of the world wide web. "Web 2.0" adds social interaction to it and thus also provides additional layers of interconnection. "Web 3.0" is the machine-interpretable semantic web.

9 Mathieu O'Neil, "Cyberchiefs. Autonomy and Authority in Online Tribes," 2009, 22.

10 Matt Hickey, "Alexa Overhauls Ranking System," *TechCrunch* (blog), April 16, 2008, http://social.techcrunch.com/2008/04/16/alexa-overhauls-ranking-system/.

11 All data were collected on 2017-08-08. "Genius.Com Traffic, Demographics and Competitors - Alexa," Alexa, accessed August 8, 2017, http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/genius.com#.

users come from a search engine,[12] and 70.3% leave the platform immediately after consulting one page. Visitors spend about 3:37 minutes per day on the platform and visit 2.08 pages on average. When coming from a search engine, the most used keywords are popular song titles along with the platform's title.[13] Compared to all web users, male users are over-represented at Genius. Users with a graduate school degree or no college education are under-represented. The degree of Genius users with some college education is similar to the web average, and users with a college degree are over-represented on Genius. Other comparable websites providing song lyrics have significantly lower popularity ranks.[14] When zooming in on language use within the platform's Arabic speaking community, it should be kept in mind that a high percentage of the platform's users are anglophone and that Arabic is a minority language on the platform.

Adding content to the platform and thus *dropping knowledge* can be rewarding in itself. However, the platform also motivates its users by giving them so-called "IQ" points. Thus, on Genius, a high conventional "intelligent quotient" might not be as important as your "rap IQ." "IQ" points are rewarded for actions like adding new lyrics, annotating a verse, correcting other users' work, commenting, asking, and answering questions.[15] The total amount of collected "IQ" as well as a "newsfeed" showing the most recent activities are displayed on the user's profile. Collecting "IQ" is also important for being "promoted" to a higher user rank. Users have different roles on Genius and are granted different privileges.

[12] 1. google.com 26.8% | 2. google.ru 12.6% | 3. youtube.com 4.7% | 4. google.ca 3.0% | 5. google.com.ua 2.5%.

[13] 1. despacito lyrics 0.56% | 2. genius 0.30% | 3. humble lyrics 0.29% | 4. congratulations 0.28% | 5. shape of you lyrics 0.27%.

[14] **genius.com** (global popularity rank: 314 / USA: 151) | Examples of other lyrics websites: **azlyrics.com** (541 / 484) | **metrolyrics.com** (2,440 / 1,913, provides resembling possibility for annotations) | **musixmatch.com** (2,888 / 3,449; this platform provides lyrics and translations of lyrics in many languages) | **lyricsfreak.com** (9,430 / 6,611) | **ohhla.com** (458,461 / 189,695).

[15] "المزيد حول النقاط," Genius, accessed August 30, 2018, https://genius.com/11527974/Genius-arabia-arabic-version/.

According to their role, they can perform different actions on the site. The following roles can be differentiated:[16]

- **White hats** are new users with an "IQ" of less than 300.
- **Contributors** are standard users with an "IQ" of more than 300.
- **Editors** are users that have been granted the editor role by a moderator. No fixed amount of "IQ" is needed for this role. They are expected to write high quality annotations and to coach contributors.
- **Moderators** are users who can grant the editor role to contributors. No fixed amount of "IQ" is needed for this role.

Not relevant for the scope of this article are the roles of **staff** (working at Genius), **mediators** (forum leaders), and **verified artists** (who have special privileges when annotating their own work).

2 Methodology

My choice for the Arab(ic) rap fan community on Genius as an object for this research project has the following reasons: As my doctoral research project examines Arab(ic) hip hop communities in different countries and regions and their interconnections, I put my focus on online groups that span over more than one country. Genius is used all around the globe and in many different languages. Moreover, I wanted to work with openly accessible data that would not compromise anyone's privacy. Therefore, closed environments like other social media platforms are off limits for this research. On Genius however, the users' data – besides personal messages – can be seen by everyone and even by people who are not logged in. In addition to that, Genius has never been analyzed with regard to rap in Arabic.

The community of users working on Arabic rap lyrics calls itself "RG Arabia" ["Rap Genius Arabia"]. This community will be analyzed using a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods, with observational and participatory approaches: I interpret statistics, use a "netnographic" approach, based on my own experience as a user of Genius, and draw

[16] A good overview over user roles and their privileges can be found here: bfred, "More on Editors & Advanced Roles," Genius, 2016, https://genius.com/8846444/Genius-how-genius-works/More-on-editors-and-advanced-roles.

from an asynchronous online focus group discussion (OFGD). The next paragraphs shortly explain the basics of "netnography" and of an OFGD, as well as the reasons for my choice of methodology.

2.1 Netnography

The "netnographic" approach was first described by marketing researcher Robert V. Kozinets:

> 'Netnography,' or ethnography on the Internet, is a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications.[17]

I chose such a netnographic approach here because the community on Genius comes together on an online platform. Some members might know each other offline as well but this is the exception, not the rule. This article's approach, therefore, should not be seen as an example of "remote ethnography,"[18] where a community's offline practices are studied in online media. In this case, netnography is an approach that goes directly to the community that is researched and gets as close to it as possible.

In comparison with conventional offline ethnographic approaches, and when handled carefully, a netnographic approach promises the possibility of faster, cheaper, and less obtrusive data collection.[19] According to Kozinets:

> Netnography follows six overlapping steps: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation.[20]

Kozinets recommends ethical virtues for (marketing) researchers using netnography.[21] Paraphrasing these virtues and applying them to this

[17] Robert V. Kozinets, "The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities," *Journal of Marketing Research* 39, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 62, https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935.

[18] John Postill, "Remote Ethnography. Studying Culture from Afar," in *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, edited by Larissa Hjorth et al., 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2016), 61–69.

[19] Michael Bartl, Vijai Kumar Kannan, and Hanna Stockinger, "A Review and Analysis of Literature on Netnography Research," *International Journal of Technology Marketing* 11, no. 2 (January 1, 2016): 168, https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTMKT.2016.075687.

[20] Robert V. Kozinets, "Netnography: The Marketer's Secret Weapon. How Social Media Understanding Drives Innovation," *NetBase White Paper*, 2010, 11.

[21] Kozinets, "The Field Behind the Screen," 65.

project, the following lines outline the ethical framework in which the project was conducted:

Honesty, transparency: In 2013, I came across the platform Genius during the research for my Master's thesis on "Code-Switching in Algerian and Tunisian Rap"[22]. At that time, I was looking for transcribed lyrics of two albums by Maghrebi rappers. I found only a few and registered as a user in order to add the missing song transcriptions to the platform. My objective was to make the lyrics publicly consultable and to get the help of other users. Soon after, I was contacted by a user with the handle Momo_RGAr, who taught me how to transcribe lyrics on the platform and how to annotate them. When he learned that I was using the platform primarily for university research, the academic reasons for my participation were of no noticeable concern to him. To add transparency with regard to my research-related interest for the page, I also added hyperlinks to personal academic projects on my profile page.

Confidentiality, anonymity, privacy: Since that time, I have been an active contributor to Arabic rap lyrics on Genius. In addition to contributing transcriptions and explanations / interpretations, I have communicated via personal messages with members of the community both on Genius and on Facebook. However, all the quotations I am using in this article are taken from pages that can be consulted publicly. No private messages or posts are included. Furthermore, instead of using the members' real names, I opted for their user names. The users themselves made these names available to the public and they can be used to search for their profiles, for linked comments and annotations. This ensures on the one hand, the reproducibility of my research and on the other hand, the members' privacy.

Feedback: In order to broaden the perspective, I aimed at creating room for feedback and community participation. Therefore, I let the users themselves talk by starting an asynchronous online focus group discussion, which will be explained in the next paragraphs.

[22] Felix Wiedemann, *Code-Switching im algerischen und tunesischen Rap. Eine vergleichende Analyse von Lotfi Double Kanons „Klemi" und Baltis „L'album avant l'albombe,"* Bamberger Orientstudien 6 (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015), http://nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-267222.

2.2 Asynchronous Online Focus Group Discussion

This article's focus is on the community of people using RG Arabia. The latter interacts in a variety of ways, one of which are discussion boards in the public forum "Genius Arabia," which is followed by 240 people.[23] So what better way could there be to interact than using such a board for an asynchronous online focus group discussion (OFGD)?[24] In an OFGD, participants can take their time to understand the questions and can themselves decide when to reply. This often results in more detailed answers.[25] This approach also means that by using an environment members are already comfortable with, both on the content-side and on the technological side, it renders explanations concerning functionality obsolete. In other words, the process of recruiting people relevant to the research question becomes relatively easy. Thus, no potential participants will be lost due to usage difficulties. In addition to that, the discussion and the research built on it become traceable, as the forum is public and can be read even by non-registered users. Furthermore, participants in the discussion keep the same level of anonymity they have in their regular use of the platform. That means that only their username and profile (and everything they wrote on it) can be seen, but no additional information on the participants is revealed. A focus group discussion is also a good way to at least partially withdraw my own voice from this article and let fellow members in RG Arabia speak their mind and contribute.

However, as with all ethnographic methods, the intrusiveness of the method is to be kept in mind. Using a board on Genius for a focus group discussion on the language / script use in RG Arabia could also influence and possibly alter language / script use itself. When asking questions on language / script use, the field might become aware of some of its proper habits and conventions, question these, and consider changing them. This means that it is better to use an OFGD in a later stage of a research

[23] 240 people as of 2017-08-15. "Followers" are notified of new forum posts when they log into genius.com.

[24] This method is also called "bulletin board focus groups" (BBFGs) sometimes. David W. Stewart and Prem Shamdasani, "Online Focus Groups," *Journal of Advertising* 46, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 51, https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1252288.

[25] Stewart and Shamdasani, 51.

project if other methods are also applied. That way, the OFGD cannot influence the outcome of other methods.

3 Languages and Scripts in the Maghreb and Online

The following pages give introductory remarks on language and script use in the Maghreb in general, in Arab(ic) rap in the Maghreb, and in computer-mediated communication. On Genius, people devise rules for working with texts. One convention observed by most users is to write annotations to a text in the language the main artist is using:

> Users always need to write on [sic] the language that the artist [is] using in their [sic] verses. That's what French users do, that's what German users do, and that's what Polish users do. So we need to keep pushing that mindset to all languages. If a featured artist is using another language instead of the main one, then write in the language that the featured artist used first and write in the language that the main artist used afterwards. Why? Because that way you write in [the] language that the artist is using while letting the people that came for the main artist know what they said.[26]

This approach might be helpful for all occasional cases of multilingual texts whose parts can each easily be assigned to one language. However, rap songs of Arab rappers more often than not feature more than one language or language variety within a single verse. This is due to both multilingualism and diglossia, which are prevalent in many countries in the MENA region, and which will be explained in the following pages.

3.1 Language-Particularities of Language Use in the Maghreb – Diglossia and Code-Switching

3.1.1 Diglossia

In the Maghreb, Arabic dialects, Classical and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), varieties of Amazigh, French, and English are used among other less wide-spread languages. Arabic and Amazigh dialects are spoken in everyday situations, French and MSA are the dominant languages in higher education, French and rarely English are used in some business situations, and Classical Arabic is the language of Islamic prayers. Summed up and simplified, this means that each language (variety) has

[26] Genius moderator Roy068 on "Tate Talk™ #6: Annotating Songs That Have More Than One Language," Genius, August 2016, https://genius.com/discussions/248775-Tate-talktm-6-annotating-songs-that-have-more-than-one-language.

its own language use domain. This functional separation of languages according to language use domains is described by Charles A. Ferguson as "diglossia"[27] – a concept which has both been criticized and amended by other researchers.[28] In a diglossic situation, each domain also has a certain prestige, a fact that divides languages in High (H) and Low prestige languages (L). Of course, the assignment of prestige to languages is subjective and can also be interpreted as a symptom of a struggle in a linguistic field. Advocates of the use of L often focus on the "realness" of the language, its "closeness to the people," and its "communicative effectiveness and ease." On the other hand, advocates of the use of H might refer to the history of the language, its connection to a global community of speakers, its unifying border-crossing potential, and to some sort of "beauty" or "religious value."[29] As the following shows (illustration 1), there might be some sort of diglossic separation into language use domains in rap lyrics. In this example, the lyrics are rapped in Algerian Arabic, while the explanation is in French.

This would conform to traditional diglossia in many Arab countries, which would expect music and oral literature to be performed in L, in a variety of "dialectal" Arabic.[30] It would also expect written text to be in some kind of H, which can be "Standard" Arabic, but also – as is the case here – French. However, on Genius, this systematic separation of oral and written literature and its assignment to "dialectal" and "standard" variants is put into question, as will be seen later.

[27] Charles Albert Ferguson, "Diglossia (1959)," in *Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics (New York [et al.]: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 25–39; Joshua A. Fishman, "Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism," *Journal of Social Issues* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 1967): 29–38, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1967.tb00573.x.

[28] The H / L separation is not always strictly binary, as more than two languages / varieties / dialects etc. can be involved and as H and L cannot always be separated from each other clearly. See for example: Joseph Dichy, "La Pluriglossie de l'arabe," Bulletin d'études Orientales 46 (1994): 19–42; Mahmoud Al-Batal, ed., Arabic as One Language: Integrating Dialect in the Arabic Language Curriculum, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017).

[29] Ferguson, "Diglossia (1959)," 338–39.

[30] Ferguson, "Diglossia (1959)."

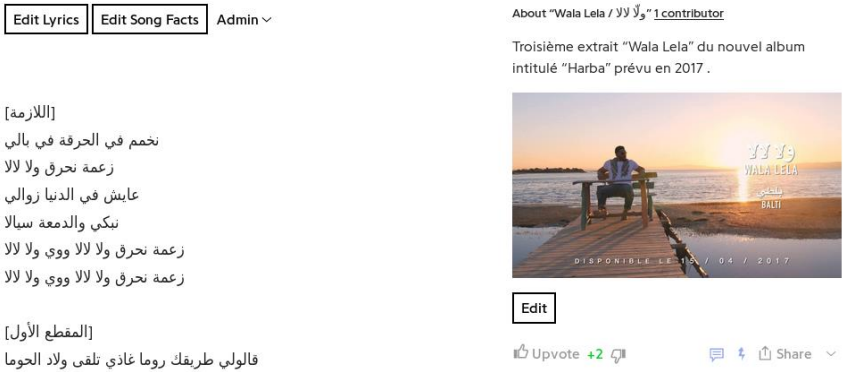

Illustration 1: Lyrics page to "Wala Lela" by Balti. https://genius.com/Balti-wala-lela-lyrics (consulted 2018-07-06).

3.1.2 Code-Switching

Many lyrics do not only contain one particular form of an H or L language, but also passages of code-switching, whereby code-switching in rap lyrics is understood as "the use of material from two (or more) languages"[31] by one or more artists within a song.[32] Code-switching in rap still conforms to many linguistic conventions seen in everyday conversations,[33] but it is also sometimes used as an artistic means, for example, to structure songs or emphasize rhymes.[34] Switches from dialectal Arabic to Standard Arabic can be noticed as well as switches from dialectal Arabic to French or English, or other languages. One very frequent shape of code-switching is depicted below (Arabic in DMG transliteration[35]):

[31] Sarah G. Thomason, *Language Contact*, Repr. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2005), 132.

[32] This definition is taken from Wiedemann, *Code-Switching im algerischen und tunesischen Rap. Eine vergleichende Analyse von Lotfi Double Kanons „Klemi" und Baltis „L'album avant l'albombe,"* 21; which is an adaptation of a definition for CS in conversations in Thomason, *Language Contact*, 132.

[33] Samuel McLain-Jespersen, "'Had Sh'er Haute Gamme, High Technology': An Application of the MLF and 4-M Models to French-Arabic Codeswitching in Algerian Hip Hop," *Dissertations and Theses*, February 26, 2014, http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/1631.

[34] Felix Wiedemann, "L'alternance codique dans le rap algérien et tunisien," *L'Année du Maghreb*, no. 14 (June 28, 2016): 57–67, https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.2651.

[35] To focus on the language aspect of switching – and in order not to draw too much premature attention to the script aspect – I chose the conventionally used DMG transcription

L'histoire tā'ī *bizarre* lā bġīt ta'rif llī ṣār.[36]

Here, Algerian rapper Azpak uses the French "l'histoire" and "bizarre" within an Algerian Arabic matrix phrase. Very often, rappers embed article-noun-combinations or single adjectives of one language in a frame of another matrix language. However, when listening to the song, the switch in languages is not necessarily always obvious. It becomes more apparent when transcribing and writing down the lyrics (at least in simplified transcriptions not building on the international phonetic alphabet). This leads to the next chapter, which deals with specifics of script use in the Maghreb, which are caused by the linguistic situation.

3.2 Script: Specifics of Transcribing Arabic / Latin, 3arabizi, 3aransiya

While rap music is a form of oral poetry, this article's primary sources consist of written texts, i. e. the lyrics, which are transcriptions of oral texts and the users' explanations to them. Therefore, it is important to not only concentrate on the notion of language choice, but also on script choice.

Illustration 2: Annotation to "SKR" by Lbenj. https://genius.com/Lbenj-skr-lyrics (consulted 2018-07-06).

standard. In the rest of the article, languages are written as they are written by users on Genius. For more on the DMG standard, see Carl Brockelmann et al., *Die Transliteration der arabischen Schrift in ihrer Anwendung auf die Hauptliteratursprachen der islamischen Welt* (Wiesbaden: Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner, 1969), http://www.dmg-web.de/page/pubinfo_de/Denkschrift.pdf.

36 Azpak - "El Mara" (released 2016). Translation [my own]: "My story is strange. You don't want to know what happened." Source: https://genius.com/Azpak-el-mara-lyrics, (consulted 2019-05-05).

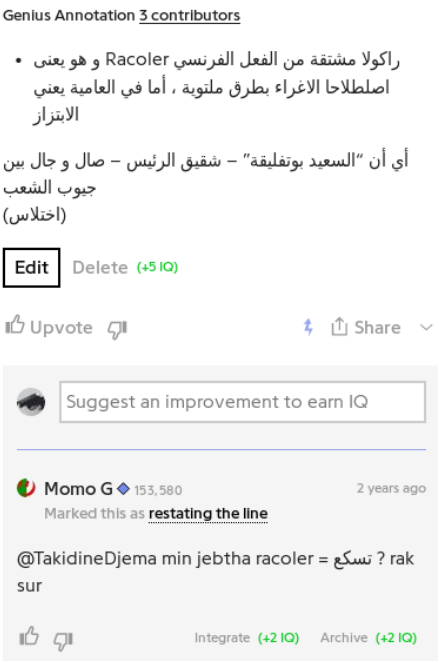

Illustration 3: Annotation to "Talfoli La7ssabat" by TFK [BT] and comment on this annotation. https://genius.com/10115897 (consulted 2018-07-06).

Illustrations 2 and 3 show how different languages and scripts interact on Genius. They show that English is the language of the platform itself, which provides a framework for all interactions. The remaining text snippets are written by the platform's users in a variety of languages and scripts. On many occasions, only one language and one script are used. In these examples however, you also notice situations of language and script contact. In illustration 2, an annotation on a whole song is written in French, except for the phrase "Kssiri t'3ich, freiné t'moute"[37], which is written in a form of Arabic transcription and not explained any further. Illustration 3 shows an annotation written in Arabic language[38] and Arabic script, in which a French source ("racoler") of a word written in Arabic script ("راكولا") is explained. This French source word is written in Latin script. Underneath the annotation, we find another user's comment

[37] From "accélérer ta'īš, freiner tamūt" ["accelerate and live, brake and die"].
[38] Not in MSA but in a register somewhere between "pure" dialect and "pure" MSA.

asking if the writer of the annotation is sure about his explanation. Within the very short comment in Algerian dialect, we notice French and MSA parts. Here, French is written in Latin letters, Algerian dialect in the same form of Arabic transcription noted above, and MSA in Arabic script.

These two cases show that when Arabic is written on Genius, it is either written in Arabic letters or it is transcribed in a particular way, which will be explained later. They also illustrate the exchange of different languages and scripts on the platform.

3.2.1 Digraphia and 3aransiya

Not much has been written on the particularities of the Arabic language and its graphical representation on the web. Whereas some research exists on code-switching in chats, it does not focus on the fact that Arabic is written in different scripts.[39] Arabic texts of different language registers can be written in either Arabic script or by using different forms of transcription. Such a coexistence of scripts in the same language is called digraphia. I follow Grivelet's definition of this term, who writes that:

> la digraphie peut être définie comme étant l'usage au sein d'une societé donnée et pour une même langue de deux (ou plus de deux) systèmes d'écriture à la même période de temps ou dans des périodes de temps consécutives. La digraphie *concurrente* est l'usage simultané au sein d'une société donnée et pour une même langue de deux (ou plus de deux) systèmes d'écriture. La digraphie successive est l'usage consécutif au sein d'une société donnée et pour une même langue de deux ou plus de deux systèmes d'écritures[40] [highlighting by FW]

Stéphane Grivelet argues that "the social and political importance of writing systems is shown, especially [...] when more than one writing system is used at the same time for the same language."[41] In other words, if more than one writing system is used at the same time for the same language, there has to be a very good reason for it – most often a sociopolitical one. Grivelet draws from an earlier definition of digraphia by Ian R. H. Dale: He speaks of "synchronic digraphia" when different factors – namely "the

[39] See: Andreas Ackermann, "Code-Switching in marokkanischen Chats," *EDNA, Estudios de dialectología norteafricana y andalusí* 11 (March 5, 2007): 121–61.

[40] Stéphane Grivelet, "Introduction," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2001, no. 150 (January 10, 2001): 6, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2001.033; Stéphane Grivelet, "La digraphie: changements et coexistences d'écritures" (Unpublished thèse de doctorat, UniversiteÂ Montpellier III, 1999), 201.

[41] Grivelet, "Introduction," 1.

prevailing cultural influence (often a religion) and the prevailing political influence"[42] – affect the writer's script choice. Previous researchers like Paul Wexler had already brought up the term "orthographic diglossia,"[43] which led Grivelet to discuss in how far Ferguson's concept of diglossia[44] could be applied for digraphia as well. She concludes that a (diglossic) functional separation of usage domains and a split between high and low prestige varieties is very widespread but not necessarily an inherent characteristic of all cases of digraphia.[45] Because of this, it makes sense to check if a type of digraphia follows a functional separation of usage domains or not.

In the case of Arabic in computer-mediated communication (CMC), two competing scripts are used at the same time: The Arabic language is written either in Arabic script or using a combination of Latin script and arithmographemes. The latter are numbers representing Arabic letters that cannot be adequately represented using Latin script or for which no conventionalized transcription exists. Such writings can be seen in chats, SMS, and social networks. When used for Arabic, these writing styles adopt an ASCII[46]-based script. This script follows the mapping from phoneme(s) to grapheme(s) as it is described by another language; for example, French. To this mapping, arithmographemes are added for those Arabic phonemes for which the other language lacks graphemes. The following table illustrates this process:

Arabic phoneme in IPA notation	Correspondent grapheme in Arabic script	Correspondent grapheme / multigraph in script based on ASCII and English	Correspondent grapheme / multigraph in script based on ASCII and French	Arithmographeme
k	ك	k	k	[not needed]
ʃ	ش	sh	ch	[not needed]

[42] Ian R. H. Dale, "Digraphia," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 1980, no. 26 (1980): 12, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.1980.26.5.

[43] Paul Wexler, "Diglossia, Language Standardization and Purism," *Lingua* 27 (January 1, 1971): 340, https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-3841(71)90097-0.

[44] Ferguson, "Diglossia (1959)."

[45] Grivelet, "Introduction," 4–5.

[46] American Standard Code for Information Interchange. Character-encoding standard which provides encoding for 128 characters.

ʕ	ع	[not existing]	[not existing]	3
ħ	ح	[not existing, sometimes written "h"]	[not existing, sometimes written "h"]	7

This writing style is used consciously on the platform. There is even at least one instance (illustration 4) where users explain it to other (French) users.

Genius Annotation 1 contributor

❝ = C'est vrai !

Remarque :

le chiffre 7 remplace la lettre ح qui est un **h expiré**, c'est une lettre imprononçable en français, il y en a d'autres :

• ع : remplacé par A ou 3. Exemple : le prénom **A**li (3li)
• خ : remplacé par KH ou 5.Exemple : l'écrivain Yasmina **Kh**adra (5adra)
• ق : remplacé par K, Q ou 9. Exemple : la ville de Kandahar ou **Q**andahār (9andahar)

Edit Delete (+5 IQ)

Illustration 4: Explanation of 3aransiya writing style. https://genius.com/2138093; accessed last on 2018-09-04.

For Eastern Arabic dialects, these scripts have been called "3arabizi," "Arabizi," or "Arabish," the word describing a mixture of Arabic and English, which includes arithmographemes. Calling it "3arabizi" seems to be most convincing as the term itself illustrates how the writing style works. Reasons for the use of 3arabizi are probably of a technical nature and can be traced back to the time when computer-mediated-communication had to be done using ASCII encoding. The latter did not support many non-Western languages. So writers of non-Western scripts who wanted to avoid ambiguity in writing invented writing systems like 3arabizi, Greeklish (Greek pendant), or SMSki (Russian pendant).[47] Although many

[47] Robert Michael Bianchi, "3arabizi, Greeklish, and SMSki: The Hybrid Making of Language in the Age of the Internet and Mobile Technology," *Tasmeem* 2015, no. 1 (April 1,

indications point to 3arabizi being an offspring of computer-mediated communication, it is, meanwhile, also used in handwritten form;[48] mainly "to avoid language policing because they [people using 3arabizi] had a feeling of insecurity while writing in normal Arabic script"[49]. Studies like Mona Farrag's (2012) even show that in an Egyptian context, over 94% of learners of Arabic as a foreign language think they need to learn 3arabizi for computer-mediated communication, and more than 78% think of 3arabizi as a new writing form of Arabic.[50] Robert M. Bianchi worked on 3arabizi and examined a Jordanian website and the scripts used in its forum posts. He found out that forums dedicated to poetry featured 70.6% Arabic and only 10.3% 3arabizi posts, whereas forums dedicated to hobbies featured only 8.7% Arabic and 44.7% 3arabizi posts. In local culture forums, Arabic posts made up for 39.5% of all posts, whereas 3arabizi posts were 25.6% of all posts. Variants of English and posts with mixed script were used in all forums to varying degree.[51] For the purpose of this article, the strong link between Arabic script and poetry seems important and could explain why even dialectal poetry is analyzed in MSA and Arabic script. In another study, Bianchi found a link between political affiliation and identity construction on one side and language as well as script choice on the other side.[52] Just like language in everyday communication, script use can create a feeling of shared belonging and can separate in- from out-groups. 3arabizi disrupts tradition by a combination of putting into writing Arabic dialect,[53] by using Latin script

2015): 1, https://doi.org/10.5339/tasmeem.2015.1.

48 Raghda El Essawi, "Arabic in Latin Script in Egypt: Who Uses It and Why?," in *Global English and Arabic: Issues of Language, Culture and Identity*, edited by Ahmad al-Issa and Laila Suleiman Dahan, Contemporary Studies in Descriptive Linguistics 31 (Oxford: Lang, 2011), 256.

49 Mona Farrag, "Arabizi: A Writing Variety Worth Learning? An Exploratory Study of the Views of Foreign Learners of Arabic on Arabizi." May 30, 2012, 14, http://dar.aucegypt.edu/handle/10526/3167.

50 Farrag, 22–23.

51 Robert Michael Bianchi, "3arabizi - When Local Arabic Meets Global English," *Acta Linguistica Asiatica* 2, no. 1 (May 22, 2012): 97, https://doi.org/10.4312/ala.2.1.89-100.

52 Robert Michael Bianchi, "Online Language Choice and Identity: The Case of 3arabizi, Salafi English, and Arabic," in *Proceedings of the 45th Annual Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics* (Multilingual Theory and Practice in Applied Linguistics, University of Southampton, 2012), 19–22.

53 In itself, putting dialect into writing would not be very novel as there has always been

for the Arabic language and by adding numbers functioning as letters. It is thus in stark contrast to tradition, which would prefer to only use Standard Arabic language and Arabic script for writing. This offers great potential for identity construction through demarcation by using 3arabizi instead of Standard Arabic in Arabic script. It has to be added that only very little research on 3arabizi exists. It could become even scarcer as some of the technical problems which lead to the use of 3arabizi and are described in the next chapter have been solved and the use of 3arabizi could already be in decline in certain areas.

As the term 3arabizi describes a mixture of Arabic and English, it is not the correct term to use for an arithmographemes-based mixture that is built upon a basis of Arabic and French. The terms "frarabe" or "ʿaransīya" describe a mixed language that results from bilingualism and is reserved for specific language use domains.[54] Both terms however only describe spoken language(s) and not a script based on mixed languages and arithmographemes. I therefore propose to alter the term ʿaransīya slightly and in accordance to 3arabizi, use **3aransiya** instead.

3.2.2 Script-Switching and the Problems of Encoding and Directionality

As seen before, rappers in the Maghreb code-switch. This leads to the question of how to transcribe lyrics containing languages that use different scripts. It would not be too difficult to always use the script that is most commonly associated with the respective language, if the scripts in use had the same writing direction. However, as Arabic script (right-to-left) and Latin script (left-to-right) have opposing writing directions, the users of Rap Genius Arabia have to decide how to solve this issue.

Similar linguistic situations have already been described before, for example, by Nicholas John, who focuses on Hebrew in his article "The Construction of the Multilingual Internet." He identifies two major problems

written dialectal expression. Its scope has however extended in the 21st century.

54 See: Roland Kühnel, "Frarabe/ʿaransīya als typische Form des Bilinguismus Arabisch-Französisch bei algerischen Studenten," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 85 (1995): 147–55; Fishman, "Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism."

that Hebrew-speakers had to deal with, especially in the early ages of the Web: encoding and directionality.[55]

Encoding: In those days, the predominant 7bit ASCII-encoding only permitted the correct writing and display of 128 characters, so basically only English text. Later, language-specific "add-ons" to ASCII enhanced the spectrum to 8-bit of storage capacity (256 characters) and made, for example, the representation of German ⟨ä, ö, ü⟩ possible.[56] However, only one of these "add-ons" could be chosen for one text, so you could not find a French ⟨ç⟩ in the same text you would find a Turkish ⟨ı⟩ in. Since storage capacity for character encoding is no longer an issue nowadays, the default encoding has changed from ASCII to UTF-8, which requires up to 4 bytes per character. UTF-8 can represent over one million different characters. This is also the encoding standard used for Genius. The display of both Latin and Arabic characters – when separated from each other – does therefore not cause technical problems anymore.

Directionality:[57] Just like the problem of encoding, the problem of directionality comes from the Web's early days. As it was back then dominated by English speakers, the only writing direction available was from left to right (LTR). Therefore, not enough people felt the need for a possibility in browsers to display languages with other writing directions. The first approaches to solve this issue included "visual Hebrew," in which the writer had to write the text, then the text had to be inverted as well as put online and thereafter the browser inverted it again for display.[58] Fortunately, procedures changed when the Web became globally used. Nowadays, it is no problem to write text in webpages in right-to-left (RTL) languages like Hebrew using "logical Hebrew," i.e. one writes from right to left and the browser correctly displays this text.

[55] Nicholas A. John, "The Construction of the Multilingual Internet: Unicode, Hebrew, and Globalization," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 18, no. 3 (April 1, 2013): 323, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12015.

[56] John, 324.

[57] By "directionality," only the technicalities of the writing direction are meant, not the linguistic concept.

[58] John, 325.

Illustration 5 shows the same short line mentioned earlier (chapter 3.1.2). This time, however, it shows how the words are transcribed and written by the users of RG Arabia:

Illustration 5: Code- and script-switching in rap lyrics to Azpak - "El Mara" (released 2016). Translation [my own]: "My story is strange. You don't want to know what happened." https://genius.com/Azpak-el-mara-lyrics, (consulted 2019-05-05).

As mentioned, the use of Unicode (UTF-8) on Genius solved the problem of encoding. Both Arabic and Latin letters can coexist in the same line, the text-encoding for the whole html document being UTF-8. The problem of text-alignment, however, persists. Due to lacking implementation of right-to-left (RTL) text alignment, users face difficulties when adding texts in Arabic (as well as Persian, Hebrew...). Besides the simple visual weirdness of having an Arabic text left-aligned, punctuation marks cannot be placed at the end of sentences or paragraphs and Roman characters break the text. In addition to that, the process of formatting text through, for example, tags for hyperlinks is very counter-intuitive. In this case, the writing direction switches from RTL for all text and the tags' content to LTR for the tags themselves.[59]

3.3 Summary

The following list summarizes combinations of languages and scripts in the Arab(ic) community on Genius:

1 Arabic language (dialect) in 3aransiya
2 French / English / other language in Latin script
3 Case (1) with code-switching, all in Arabic script
4 Case (1) with code-switching (Arabic / French / ...) and script-switching (Arabic / Latin script)
5 Case (2) with code-switching (Arabic / French / ...) and script switching (3aransiya / Latin script).
6 Arabic language (MSA / dialect) in Arabic script

[59] "Issues with Languages Starting from Right to Left," Genius, May 2017, https://genius.com/discussions/284996-Issues-with-languages-starting-from-right-to-left.

How often and in which sections of the page these combinations occur, as well as if there are regional differences, will be analyzed in the next chapters.

4 The Field

4.1 The "Field" in Online Communities

To understand relations and interactions between people, a variety of theories can be used. I find Pierre Bourdieu's field theory very helpful for this project because of its focus on power structures. It provides useful tools to analyze communities, as well as relations and standings of people within them.[60] At its basis is the idea that the social room can be divided up into different *fields*. People can be part of different fields. If a person is part of a field and which position the person has in relation to other people depends on the person's *capital* in the field. In each field, different sorts of capital exist. Bourdieu differentiated between three different sorts of capital: *economic*, *social,* and *cultural capital*.[61] These forms of capital can be understood as existing parallel currencies: In different fields, different forms of capital can exist and the exchange rates between them can vary according to the field.[62] Each specific field, or rather the people in it, create field-internal rules or conventions (which Bourdieu called "doxa"). These rules then have to be followed by the agents in a field in order to maintain or better their position in the field.

Later researchers have identified other sorts of capital that are relevant for understanding individual fields. These include, for example, erotic capital[63] and intercultural capital.[64] Some would subsume them under

[60] See for example: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Richardson, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Greenwood, 1983), 241–58.

[61] Pierre Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital, Kulturelles Kapital, Soziales Kapital," trans. Reinhard Kreckel, *Soziale Welt*, no. Sonderband 2. "Soziale Ungleichheiten" (1983): 183–98.

[62] In the field of dating and mating, "erotic capital" helps understanding human behavior. Catherine Hakim, "Erotic Capital," *European Sociological Review* 26, no. 5 (October 1, 2010): 499–518, https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq014.

[63] Catherine Hakim, *Honey Money*, 2011.

[64] Andreas Pöllmann, "Intercultural Capital: Toward the Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Empirical Investigation of a Rising Marker of Sociocultural Distinction," *SAGE Open*, 2013, 7, https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013486117.

cultural capital, but for understanding power dynamics in specific fields, it makes sense to regard them as distinct forms of capital.

Online communities often display similar characteristics. However, many Web 2.0 services, which promote interaction between users and reward those who positively interact with others, provide new variations of Bourdieu's capital. For example, early hackers broke with established capital – like college degrees – and "recognised the judgment only of their peers."[65] Think also of social media platforms where traditional social capital – e.g. relations to powerful people – is not important, but users see how many people are "friends" with a user and how many *likes*, *shares,* or comments a post receives. The platforms' algorithms use its collected data to decide which content to display on which user's *timeline* and reward those with many positively peer-reviewed contributions with more visibility. The interaction of users in online communities is thus not only a rewarding experience like any social interactions between humans; its rewarding character can be enhanced by the platform itself, which measures either quality or quantity of the interaction, or both.

Besides Bourdieu's "field," I find Mathieu O'Neil's remarks on online communities very helpful. He writes that virtual communities emerge around a shared personal interest, with communication as their core activity and membership being voluntary and easily revocable.[66] He then uses the term "neo-tribe" to describe a fluid form of sociality, where members of one tribe also belong to many others.[67] He defines:

> online tribes [as] first and foremost social formations which seek to bypass hierarchical domination. Tribes favour direct forms of democracy and the pleasurable provision of free gifts, in the context of a shared epistemic project. [...]. Since all members are contributors, interpersonal agreement is essential for social cohesion. [...]. On the Internet, autonomous projects become autonomous tribes when common purpose and common work lead to autonomous institutions which members use to regulate their work.[68]

Summed up, online communities work together on a shared goal, experience gratification through this common project, and they create

[65] O'Neil, "Cyberchiefs. Autonomy and Authority in Online Tribes," 2.
[66] O'Neil, 25.
[67] O'Neil, 26.
[68] O'Neil, 28.

alternative independent authorities and hierarchies to regulate themselves. When organizing their actions, communities create authority and conventions. The creation of conventions can work through external forces regulating the group and through self-organization.

Authority is often attributed to those who have been active on a particular platform for a longer period of time. These people could gather more "friends," could "tweet" more often, are "followed" by more people. Here, it is crucial to notice that the structure of the internet favors a "winner takes it all" / "Matthew effect" logic:[69] The number of connections to other participants is at least one form of capital in an online community. This leads to early entrants being privileged, because later entrants attach with a greater likelihood to those who are already well-connected to others.[70]

4.2 Actors in the Field of RG Arabia

One of the early entrants in the field of RG Arabia is known in the community under his handle Momo_RGAr. According to Momo_RGAr, he himself started RG Arabia in 2014:

> I started first in 2013 with the French community as an editor, then I built the Arabian one in 2014 and I'm actually still working to make it better! Why *Genius Arabia*? I chose *Arabia* because I thought it was a good idea to unify all countries speaking Arabic under the same flag, and technically it is easier to have one big community instead of ten young ones! Genius Arabia is mainly dedicated to crowd-sourced annotation of *Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Egyptian* and *Palestinian* rap lyrics![71]

At the starting moment of conducting the netnography, RG Arabia consisted of one moderator (Algerian), 19 editors (10 Algerians, three Moroccans, one Egyptian, one Libyan, one German [me] and two others), and at least nine contributors (four Algerians, one Moroccan, one Tunisian, one Egyptian, one other), according to a list written by members of the community.[72] To put this into perspective, the German list "Deutsche

[69] Albert-László Barabási, *Linked*, 1. Plume printing, authorized repr. of a hardcover ed. publ. by Perseus Publ. (New York, NY [et al.]: Plume, 2003), 93–108.

[70] O'Neil, "Cyberchiefs. Autonomy and Authority in Online Tribes," 3.

[71] "Genius – Moderator and Staffer Contact Listing," Genius, accessed June 4, 2017, https://genius.com/Genius-moderator-and-staffer-contact-listing-annotated.

[72] The current composition of the user group can be seen on this page: *Genius Arabia – Arabia's Users* / فريق عمل جينيوس عربي, accessed May 16, 2017, https://genius.com/Genius-arabia-arabias-users-lyrics.

Editoren, Mediatoren und Moderatoren" included four moderators, one mediator, and 74 editors.[73] Besides the community's size relative to other language communities, the numbers show that the RG Arabia community was centered in North Africa, especially in the Maghreb and mostly in Algeria. There are other users contributing to annotations on Arabic rap lyrics on Genius, but they were not (yet) part of this list.

4.3 Excursion: Related Fields and Actors

Users in RG Arabia are not in a closed-off environment but are rather part of an umbrella community enclosing a variety of sub-communities within Genius. These sub-communities are often language-based[74] and interact with each other. If, for example, more than one language is used in the lyrics of one song, the expertise of various members is needed. In these cases, members of different (language) communities can help with the competent explanation of all the lyrics. Users created, for example, a page in the public Genius Arabia forum dedicated to "Arabic words in German rap." On this page, users can ask for help if they find Arabic words within an otherwise German rap song. German moderator Crackar explains how he started the page:

> Hey y'all, @Momo_RGAr asked me to create this discussion since in the past months I often asked him for corrections on German songs which include Arabic parts. In German rap it's more and more often occuring [sic] that rappers with Arabic [sic] descent use Arabic words [...] This thread is [...] to ask you for help on this [sic] songs.[75]

On the discussion board, users mostly discuss in English, which serves as a bridge between different language communities. Arabic is used by Arabic-speaking users to clarify ambiguities in meaning or difficulties in listening comprehension as well as transcription. Thus, the German and the Arabic communities are linked by this page.

[73] "Genius Deutschland (Ft. Genius Editors) – Deutsche Editoren, Mediatoren und Moderatoren," Genius, accessed May 16, 2017, https://genius.com/Genius-deutschland-deutsche-editoren-mediatoren-und-moderatoren-annotated.

[74] See the following page for an overview over these communities: "Genius International Communities," Genius, accessed August 30, 2018, https://genius.com/Genius-genius-international-communities-annotated.

[75] "Arabic Words in German Rap - Arabische Wörter in Deutschem Rap (مساعدة كلمات بالعربية)," Genius, accessed August 4, 2017, https://genius.com/discussions/280127-Arabic-words-in-german-rap-arabische-worter-in-deutschem-rap.

Another possibility for links between different language communities are users who are active in more than one language community.[76] There are quite a few cases of users working on both Arabic and French rap lyrics. Momo_RGAr, for example, "started first in 2013 with the French community as an editor"[77] before founding RG Arabia. I myself work on Arabic, English, French, and German rap lyrics. From experience, I can say that working on songs in different languages leads to a more difficult "initiation process." When becoming an editor, all one's annotations have to become accepted first. If people work on lyrics in more than one language, it gets more difficult to find at least one editor per language who can "teach" them and accept their annotations. Editors in the respective languages have to coordinate their teaching process before one editor finally decides to promote the user to the editor role.

We can sum up that at the borders of language communities, users resort to different languages, either to the primary ones of the language communities or to shared languages like English. By doing so, they create a community surpassing language boundaries. However, there are also inverse mechanisms creating and strengthening language-based communities. One of these mechanisms for community-building is establishing conventions.

4.4 Linguistic Conventions

RG Arabia has, like other language-based communities, over time formed linguistic conventions to facilitate cooperation. These conventions in language and script use can be observed on different levels: Some can be deduced implicitly when scanning through a bigger number of pages. Some are voiced in conflict situations when users argue about language and script use, and some are even written down on policy pages.

4.4.1 Corrections / Conflict Situations

There are cases in which users clearly formulate why they think a certain language or script is more appropriate than another. These are often

[76] For an overview over active users' language skills see the following page: "Genius Users – Users' Languages," Genius, accessed August 30, 2018, https://genius.com/Genius-users-users-languages-annotated.

[77] "Genius – Moderator and Staffer Contact Listing."

moments of conflict in which users tell each other their opinions. The following table shows conflict situations out of which conventions can be deduced:

n°	content[78]	translation (my own)	source
1	ما معنى كلمة "وخى"؟ يجب شرح الكلمات المغربية فلا تنسى أن كل من هو عربي من الخليج إلى المحيط يمكن أن يطلع على هده الكلمات	What does "وخى"[79] mean? Moroccan words have to be explained. Don't forget that every Arab from the [Arabian] Gulf to the [Atlantic] Ocean can come across these lines.	comment to an annotation; https://genius.com/2483381; accessed last on August 30, 2018
2	ممكن تشرح بالعربية أو بالدارجة؟ لأن الشرح بالفرنسية غير مقبول	Could you explain in Arabic or in dārija [Moroccan Arabic]? Because explanation in French is not permitted	comment to an annotation; https://genius.com/11746401y; accessed last on August 30, 2018
3	ممكن اعادة كتابة الكلمات بالاحرف العربية؟	Could you rewrite the lyrics with Arabic letters?	comment below lyrics; https://genius.com/Kafon-mazatil-lyrics; accessed last on August 30, 2018
4	عندما تحتوي الاغنية على الكثير من الكلمات الفرنسية فمن الاحسن أكتبها بالاحرف اللاتينية	If the song contains a lot of French words, it is best to write it with Latin characters.	comment below lyrics; https://genius.com/flenn-alcatrrap-lyrics; accessed last on August 30, 2018
5	ممكن تكتب الكلمات بالعربية من أجل أخواتك بمصر - لقد اعدت كتابتها بالعربية :)	Could you write the lyrics in Arabic [script] for your brothers in Egypt? - I've just rewritten them in Arabic. :)	comment and reply below lyrics section; https://genius.com/Muslim-dmou3-l7awma-lyrics; accessed last on August 30, 2018

This leads to the following conventions:

- Dialectal or regional terms are to be explained so that Arabic speaking users from other regions can understand them (1, 5)
- Arabic script is to be used (and not 3aransiya!) (3, 5)

[78] All Arabic content is copied directly without any alterations from the page. Orthographic or grammatical "mistakes" are not "corrected."

[79] Moroccan Arabic, 'okay.'

- 3aransiya is only to be used if a song contains many non-Arabic words (4)
- Arabic language is to be used for explanations (2)

Discussions between users about which language and script is appropriate in which situation show that there actually are conventions regulating language and script use. These conventions, however, are established more explicitly in a written way. The community has created several guideline pages on which you can find, among many other rules, aspects regarding the use of languages and scripts.

4.4.2 Policy Pages

The RG Arabia's community pages concerning language include a so-called "Qamous Rap," as well as pages with contributor guidelines:

"Qamous Rap" / Arabization of rap terms: The members of RG Arabia wrote their own "Qamous rap," which is basically a list of expressions, which aims at a "translation and Arabization of the most important expressions for rap music, whose goal is to ease understanding and to bring these expressions closer to the listener."[80] These most important expressions are all taken from what is called "Hip Hop Nation Language" (HHNL).[81] The latter is the most commonly used language in hip hop culture and is rooted in African American English. It has an own cultural canon, specific vocabulary, and discursive features.[82] To a certain degree, HHNL is used by hip hop communities – the "Hip Hop Nation" – all over the globe to create a feeling of shared belonging.

Now, on the list of "Qamous Rap," there are 128 terms, which can be divided in HHNL terms written in Arabic script and in genuinely Arabic expressions. Approximately 73 Arabized versions of HHNL terms are listed and for 77 terms, a genuine term in Arabic is mentioned. For some

[80] في هذا الدليل، تجدون ترجمة وتعريب لأهم المصطلحات الخاصة بموسيقى الراب الهدف منه تبسيط المفاهيم تقريبها للمستمع خاصة وأن أغلب المصطلحات إنجليزية عامية، ولا توجد كلمات مقابلة لها في اللغة العامية *Genius Arabia – (Qamous Rap)* مصطلحات الراب العربي, accessed May 22, 2017, https://genius.com/Genius-arabia-qamous-rap-lyrics.

[81] H. Samy Alim, "Hip Hop Nation Language," in *Language in the USA*, edited by Edward Finegan and John R. Rickford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 387–409.

[82] Alim, 387.

terms, both an Arabic expression and an Arabized HHNL word exist. RG Arabia can thus be seen as a part of the Global Hip Hop Nation using its established vocabulary. On the other hand, by drafting an own glossary of Arabic language rap terminology, RG Arabia enables its users to stay within the Arabic script and within the Arabic language. This way, the community creates linguistic tools and an Arabic "voice" and enables its members to lead discussions on rap music in Arabic. Therefore, they do not have to resort to HHNL. Here, it differs from other language communities whose members adopt HHNL terms and explain them in their respective languages.[83]

Contributor Guidelines: Besides their "Qamous Rap," the community has written how-to-pages and contributor guidelines, including the following linguistic rules:

n°	content	translation (my own)	source
1	مثلا إذا احتوت الكلمات على مفردات كثيرة بالدارجة المغربية فيستحسن تقديم ترجمة ثم شرح موجوز لها، حتى يفهمها إخواننا في المشرق العربي، و نفس الشيء البنسبة للدارجة الفلسطينية أو المصرية.... نحن راب جينيوس عربي، من المفروض أن يفهمنا أي شخص يجيد لغة الضاد	For example, if the lyrics contain a lot of expressions in Moroccan dialect, it is better to present a translation and then an explanation of them, so that our brothers in the Mashreq can understand us. The same goes for Palestinian and Egyptian dialect. We are Rap Genius ʿArabī; it is absolutely necessary that everyone who masters Arabic [literally: "the language of the ḍāḍ"] can understand us.	https://genius.com/3169351; accessed last on January 20, 2017.
2	أحيانا الفنان يختصر النطق من أجل الضرورة الشعرية، اكتب الكلمات كما تسمعها	Sometimes, the artist shortens the pronunciation for artistic reasons. Write the words how you hear them.	Genius Arabia – كيف يعمل الموقع؟ (Arabic Version) - المزيد حول التدوين," Genius, accessed last on July 19, 2017, https://genius.com/11538045.

[83] See for example the German equivalent: *Genius Deutschland – Das Deutschrap Lexikon*, accessed August 30, 2018, https://genius.com/Genius-deutschland-das-deutschrap-lexikon-lyrics.

3	2. الكتابة المباشرة: [...] تجنب استخدام الكلمات المعقدة، واكتب كما لو كنت تتحدث عن الأغنية مع أحد أصدقاءك 3. انتبه لقواعد النحو و الإملاء: [...] كلما كان الشرح سليما كلما كان فهمه أفضل	2. Direct writing: [...] Refrain from the use of complicated words and write as if you were talking about the song with a friend. 3. Respect (grammar) rules, grammar and orthography: [...] The more correctly your explanation is written, the better it can be understood	"Genius Arabia – كيف يعمل الموقع؟ (Arabic Version) - المزيد حول الشرح," Genius, accessed last on July 19, 2017, https://genius.com/11528024.
4	اكتبوا بالعربية الفصحى و تجنبوا الأخطاء اللغوية [...] ملاحظة: لغة ال"آس.آم.آس" غير مرغوب فيها	Write in Standard Arabic and refrain from linguistic mistakes. Remark: SMS language is not welcome.	"Genius Arabia – Contributor Guidelines (Arabic) / دليل المبتدئين." https://genius.com/Genius-arabia-contributor-guidelines-arabic-annotated; accessed last on July 23, 2017.

The table shows that users are expected to translate and explain local dialectal expressions (1), to transcribe the rapping as it is heard without alternations, even if this deviates from standardized spelling (2), to explain lyrics in an easily understandable language, to use correct orthography and grammar (3, 4), and to refrain from using "SMS language" (4). Users are also told to use non-complicated words and everyday language (3). In addition to that, lyrics of songs are to be structured using the words

المقطع الثاني – اللازمة – المقطع الأول.[84]

The RG Arabia contributor guidelines instruct users to "translate and explain dialectal expressions."[85] Another annotation, which is now deleted, previously explained that providing translations and explanations lets "our brothers in the Mashriq understand us" (1) (The annotation was

[84] "Genius Arabia – Contributor Guidelines (Arabic) / دليل المبتدئين," Genius, accessed July 23, 2017, https://genius.com/3169542.

[85] "يستحسن ترجمة و شرح المفردات العامية," "Genius Arabia – Contributor Guidelines (Arabic) / دليل المبتدئين," Genius, accessed July 23, 2017, https://genius.com/Genius-arabia-contributor-guidelines-arabic-annotated.

apparently created by a Maghrebi user.). The annotation goes on asking for the same kind of translation and explanation for East Arabian dialects and concludes that everyone speaking the *luġat aḍ-ḍāḍ* should be able to understand "us." All of this indicates that Standard Arabic is apparently preferred over Arabic dialects because of its universal intelligibility and because it has the potential to build a border-crossing community based on a shared language.

4.5 Genius IQ as the Field's Capital

As mentioned above, users have different roles and associated therewith different privileges. The visualization of the page "Arabia's users"[86] and the users' "IQ," reveals the following graph:

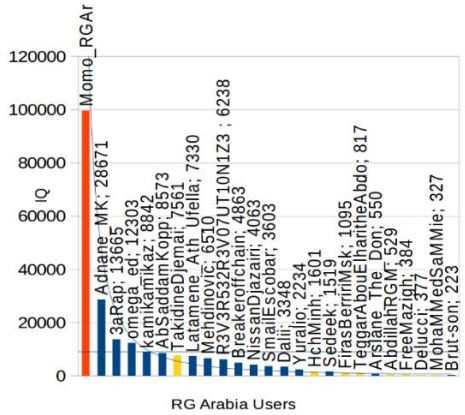

Illustration 6: RG Arabia Users and their "IQ" on 2017-05-16. Colors represent different user roles: red = moderator, blue = editor, yellow = contributor.

The graph very clearly shows an interrelation between user roles and "IQ." Standard users, i. e. contributors, make up the user group whose "IQ" is on average the lowest. The more active users are and the more of their contributions are upvoted by other users, the more "IQ" they get and the

[86] *Genius Arabia – Arabia's Users* / فريق عمل جينيوس عربي The overall number of contributors working on Arabic rap lyrics is probably higher than the one mentioned here. The list is incomplete since only contributors who have put in at least some work are respected enough to get enlisted. This explains why editors are more numerous on this list even if the total number of contributors is higher in reality.

more likely it is that they get promoted to the editor role. The user with the highest "IQ" within the "Arabia's users" group is also the only user who has obtained a moderator role. This skewed distribution of "IQ" and the scarcity of moderator positions leads to a community that is dominated by one person, Momo_RGAr, who could profit from his early entrant role. If you take a closer look at the aforementioned "Qamous Rap," to which 10 users added contributions, you see that both the initial transcription – in this case the list of technical terms – and its annotations are mostly done by Momo_RGAr.

4.6 A Quantitative Perspective

Before elaborating further on linguistic particularities, the following paragraphs provide statistics with regard to the use of languages and scripts within the RG Arabia user community. These statistics are based on an extensive list of lyrics pages. The pages were collected using a Python script,[87] which assembled a list of URLs of lyrics pages manually tagged "Arabic rap" by the users of the platform. In total, 993 lyrics pages were collected on August 21, 2017 and were all manually tagged with countries of the respective song's main artist.

Tagged country	No of lyrics
TOTAL	993
Algeria	**488**
Morocco	**371**
Tunisia	**76**
Egypt	22
Palestine	16
Lebanon	6
N/A	4
Iraq	3
USA	3
France	2

[87] Felix Wiedemann and jashanj0tsingh, *ScrapingGenius*, Python, 2018, https://github.com/FWeide/ScrapingGenius.

Tagged country	No of lyrics
Libya	1
Germany	1

As this sample contains only relatively few songs tagged with countries outside of the Maghreb region, the following analysis refers only to language and script use on pages tagged "Algeria," "Morocco," or "Tunisia." Then, I consulted the pages manually and noted language as well as script use. Hereby, I distinguished text written in Arabic script from text written in 3aransiya, French text written in Latin characters, English text written in Latin characters, and text containing intrasentential script switches. By these, I mean switches within the same verse (in the lyrics section) or the same sentence (in the other sections). When differentiating between languages, I followed a logic of focusing on matrix languages. This means that if I found a lyrics verse or a sentence in a comment or annotation that was written entirely in English / French, I would note "English" / "French." If a verse / sentence was written in Arabic matrix language and 3aransiya, I would only note "3aransiya," regardless of embedded English / French parts. If the verse / sentence was written in Arabic matrix language and Arabic script, I would note "Arabic" and would additionally add "intrasentential script switches" if there were English / French parts in it. As the different registers of Arabic language – from Modern Standard Arabic over dialects to Arabic hip hop lingo – are not always clearly distinguishable, I did not count them separately.

Nevertheless, I did differentiate between the various sections on the page, as visualized below in illustration 7 – the lyrics section (red), the annotations section (blue) and the comments section (green). Then, I went through all the pages tagged both "Arabic rap" and either "Algeria," "Morocco," or "Tunisia" and noted in which sections which languages and scripts are used. Thereafter, these numbers were broken down into percentages. A value of 57% 3aransiya in the annotations section means that 57% of all pages contain at least some 3aransiya words in any of the annotations of the respective pages.

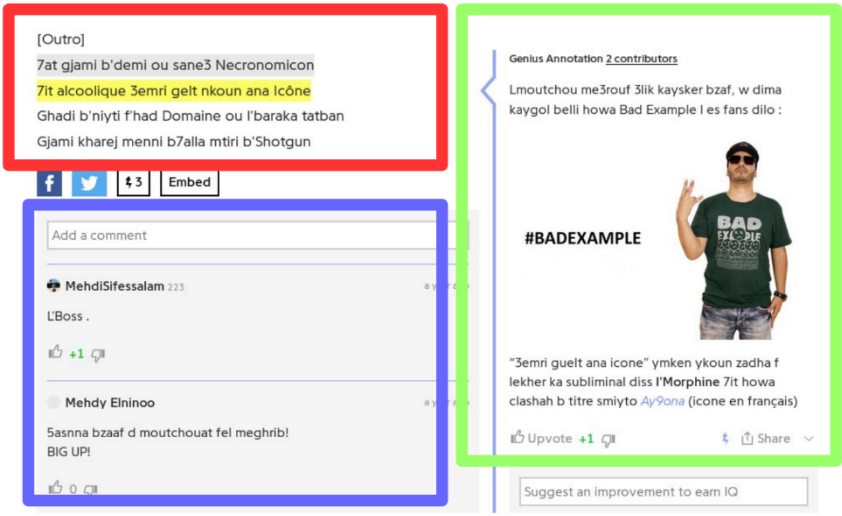

Illustration 7: Page sections: red = lyrics, green = annotations, blue = comments. Screenshot taken from https://genius.com/Lmoutchou-mobydick-rap-game-of-thrones-lyrics; accessed 21 September, 2017.

Comparing the script and language use, two aspects are remarkable: digraphia and regional differences in language / script use.

4.6.1 Digraphia

As noted above, not in all cases of digraphia does the choice of script follow a functional separation of usage domains. Here, however, you can clearly make out differences in language and script use from one section to another (illustration 8).

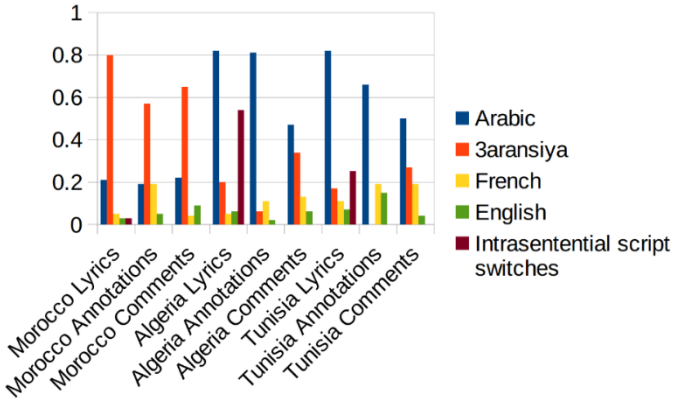

Illustration 8: Digraphia.

In Morocco, 3aransiya dominates all three sections to varying degrees. 80% of all lyrics sections contain 3aransiya, whereas only 57% of these pages contain 3aransiya in their annotations and 63% contain 3aransiya in their comments. French is used significantly more in annotations than in the other two sections, and English is used mostly in the comments section.

In Algeria, the use of intrasentential script switches strikes the eye: These switches from an Arabic matrix script to Latin script occur in 54% of all the pages' lyrics sections, but not at all in the other two sections. Both the lyrics (82%) and the annotations section (81%) almost always contain Arabic script. Comments on the other hand are not as often written in Arabic script (47%). 3aransiya is most often used in comments (34%), to a lesser degree in lyrics (20%), and almost never in annotations (6%).

In Tunisia, intrasentential script switches are only used in the lyrics section (25%), just like in Algeria. Arabic script is employed in decreasing rates from the lyrics section (82%) over the annotations section (66%) to the comments section (50%). 3aransiya is only used in the lyrics section (17%) and in the comments section (27%), yet not at all in the annotations section. In the latter, English is used more often (15%) than in the lyrics section (7%) and in the comments section (4%).

These observations can be summarized as follows: Diglossia and digraphia are both clearly visible. Both language and script use follow a functional separation into webpage sections. That is partly explainable by the sections' varying degrees of formalization: The comments section allows the use of more informal language / script registers. In the explanations section, however, more formal language/ script registers are preferred.

Besides the differences of language and script use between different sections, another linguistic element stands out: Why do intrasentential script switches occur only in the lyrics section? In this section, users are not free to express themselves as they like but they have to transcribe what they hear. Therefore, they always have to note the language they hear. An Arabic-script-first policy dictates the use of Arabic script for all Arabic words. Words in other languages based on Latin script – here, mostly French and to a lesser degree, English – are probably written in Latin script, as their transcription in Arabic script would not be as easily understandable. This is the case because the community has no standardized and unambiguous transcription of Latin-script based languages to Arabic script. So, intrasentential script switches from Arabic script to Latin script are used whenever they are necessary. However, as intrasentential script-switches are technically not well implemented and therefore time-consuming, they are avoided whenever possible. That leads to the absence of these switches in the annotations and comments sections.

4.6.2 Regional Differences

As noted, language and script use differ from section to section and follow a functional separation into language / script use domains. Furthermore, language / script use differs from country to country. Here, you have to keep in mind that information on the country on each lyrics page is taken from a country tag added by users. The tag represents the country the users place the artist in – which can be the country the artist lives in, is born in, is most actively followed in, etc. Information on users' location was not interpreted because it would have been, on many occasions, inaccurate. Users' location can be added by the users themselves on their profile but is not mandatory. IP addresses cannot be read out by other users.

Comparing language / script use in the different countries, the following patterns emerge (illustration 9).

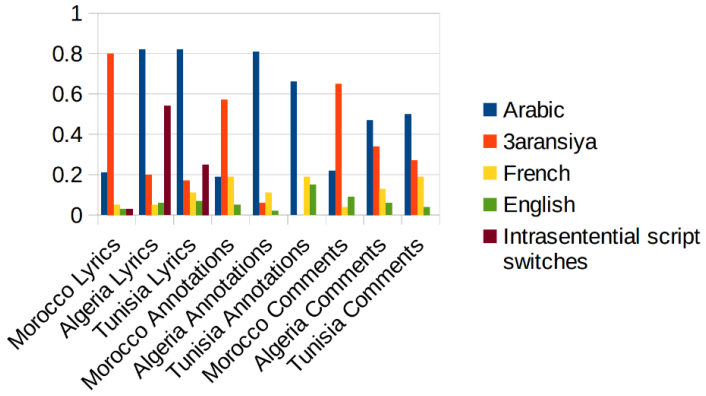

Illustration 9: Regional differences in script use.

3aransiya dominates on Moroccan pages (80% lyrics, 57% annotations, 65% comments), whereas Arabic script is more widely used on Algerian pages (82%, 81%, 47%) and on Tunisian pages (82%, 66%, 50%). Intrasentential script switches are especially used in Algerian lyrics (54%) and less in Tunisian lyrics (25%). They are almost absent in Moroccan lyrics (3%).

4.6.3 Changes over Time

Besides digraphia and regional differences in language and script use, which can be identified by interpreting the status quo at a given moment, you can also examine changes that take place over time (illustrations 10 and 11).

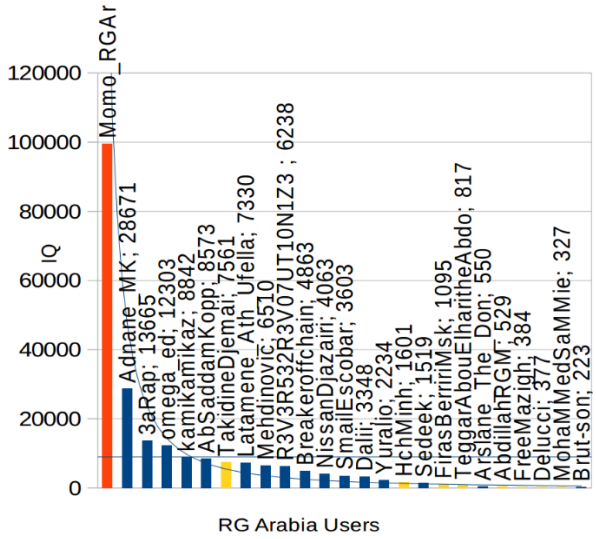

Illustration 10: RG Arabia Users and their “IQ” on 2017-05-16.

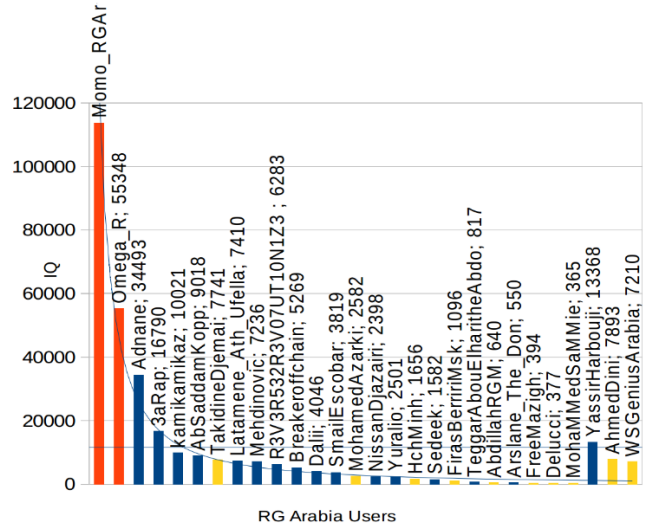

Illustration 11: RG Arabia Users and their “IQ” on 2017-09-15.

Between May 2017 and September 2017, some significant changes took place in the user pool of RG Arabia users: Looking at the visualization of "IQ" (illustration 10 and 11), you see that the user "Omega" has accumulated over 40.000 "IQ" and has gone from rank 4 to rank 2 in the list. He has also been promoted from the editor role to the moderator role. Three other users (to the right in the second image) have "popped up" and have each collected between ca. 7.000 and ca. 13.000 "IQ."

What strikes the eye is that all of these very active users in this period are Moroccan users. So, what motivated their ascent in this short period of time? As noted above in the section on linguistic conventions (4.4), the user community had an Arabic script and MSA first policy. This policy had the aim of leading to a better understanding and a unification of Arabic-speaking hip hop heads in different countries. It was set in place by the most active users with the highest user ranks and the most "IQ." At that time, these were Algerian users, of which Momo_RGAr stands out as by far the most active and powerful user.

As we have seen above, Algerian users write much more often in Arabic script than in 3aransiya. So it makes sense for them to establish this writing style as standard. On the other hand, Moroccan users prefer 3aransiya over Arabic script. In such a situation, Moroccan users were hindered from expressing themselves as they liked. They ran against linguistic barriers, favoring MSA and Arabic script. These barriers were certainly set up with the best intent to cross linguistic boundaries. However, they could also be perceived as hegemonic and apparently even kept some users from becoming more engaged on the platform.

Finally, the Arabic-first-policy was after many discussions abolished when – sometime between the two snapshots of May and September 2017 – its strongest proponents gave in to its opponents' arguments. This led to (especially) Moroccan users at last being able to write in a way they felt comfortable with. Therefore, as soon as the policy was loosened, they became much more active. That in turn led to new Moroccan users signing up, accumulating "IQ," and also being promoted to editor and moderator roles.

4.7 OFGD

So far, I have only presented the results of what I gathered through observation and statistics. By asking users themselves in an online focus group discussion which languages and scripts they use and why they do so, this picture of RG Arabia can become even more precise. Different aspects influencing language and script choice were mentioned on the board I created:[88]

The user OMEGA_R wrote that he transcribed lyrics in the language and script he expected users to find most useful. He would use Arabic language and Arabic script when he expected the artist to be listened to in different Arab countries. For this approach, he even took into consideration the countries of origin of the artist's followers on YouTube. On the other hand, he wrote that he preferred 3aransiya (in his words "لغة الرسالات الهاتفية القصيرة") when the lyrics contained many French words because their transcription in Arabic script would be difficult to read. He also preferred 3aransiya if he expected the song to be listened to, for example, by users in Spain of Moroccan descent, who would understand Arabic language but would not be able to read Arabic script. Furthermore, most of the discourse on Arabic rap lyrics on other platforms took place in 3aransiya (SMS بلغة), which made it more likely to also be used on Genius. Sometimes, song lyrics were also copied from other webpages, and in these cases, the script was normally not altered and most often it was 3aransiya. The latter was also the script many artists themselves use – a fact noticeable on album covers. He also added that technical limitations play a big role in the choice for 3aransiya, as especially intrasentential script switches were highly problematic to implement. For a few songs, the community would provide both an Arabic script version as well as a 3aransiya (العربية بالحروف اللاتينية) version and rarely even translations into, for example, English.

Momo_RGAr added that lyrics were written in Arabic script, if the songs were rapped in MSA. As this was most often not the case, the lyrics consisted of RTL languages (e.g. Arabic), LTR languages (e.g. French), and

[88] "نقاش حول اللغات والخطوط في ر.ج. عربية," Genius, accessed August 7, 2019, https://genius.com/discussions/293396-.

different alphabets (Arabic, Latin, Amazight), and many contained code-switches. This would lead to script-switches in transcription. As these were difficult to implement even for experienced users, he no longer advertised an Arabic-only-policy and also pointed to the ease of writing in 3aransiya (بالأحرف اللاتينية). He suggested using 3aransiya, especially for lyrics containing many code-switches. For the annotation section, he advised leaving the choice of language register and script (Arabic/3aransiya) to the user – as long as they did not use other languages like French or English. In general, in discourse on Arabic rap music, he said, you could find MSA, dialect and French. On Genius, English was mostly used to bridge linguistic borders to other language communities and Arab users frequently helped others with Arabic words. Interestingly, Arabic script would never be used to transcribe longer passages in, for example, French or English, whereas the use of 3aransiya for Arabic language would not cause any problems efficiency-wise for Momo_RGAr.

The user kamikamikaz pointed out that especially in the Maghreb, rappers used a lot of non-Arabic expressions, while artists in the Mashreq rapped only in Arabic dialect. This would also influence language / script choice on Genius.

5 Conclusions

Apparently, linguistic particularities in language and script use in the Maghrebi rap fan community on Genius mirror those of the offline language communities in the Maghreb to a large extent. Diglossia, as well as digraphia, are clearly noticeable, as are regional differences between Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Users from these and other Arab countries, as well as Arabic speakers from other countries, unite under the umbrella of RG Arabia, but due to persisting differences in language and script use, they do not necessarily form a homogeneous group. In addition to that, different power struggles influence language and script choice on Genius.

On the one hand, the platform's technical environment is entirely based on English and right-to-left-scripts are poorly supported. Especially text-alignment and script switches do not work or can only be implemented inefficiently. You could be led to argue that the subversive potential of "popular culture" can be seen here, as the Arab(ic) user community still

uses Arabic script and language and counters linguistic hegemonies, despite all difficulties and technical challenges. Users help themselves in their struggle against these linguistic hegemonies by establishing language and script use policies for their own community. These conventions strengthen the field and make cooperation possible.

However, they also lead to a marginalization and exclusion of users who do not belong to the hegemonic user group. As soon as a policy preferring Standard Arabic in Arabic script over other possible language / script – combinations was lifted, users who preferred to write in 3aransiya got much more actively engaged. Interestingly, Algerian users held up this policy which favored Standard Arabic, while Moroccan users seemed to favor 3aransiya, making the conflict also one of a rivalry between geographical neighbors.

There is yet another aspect which could possibly alter the whole interpretation of who is part of the "popular counter culture" and who is part of the "hegemonic culture": It is unclear, how big a part users who can speak but not write Arabic, have played in the lifting of the "Arabic script preferred" policy. If, for example, Moroccan migrants to Europe played a big role, one could also read the developments as a late triumph of European colonial hegemonies.

Whatever the case, you can see that the same power structures that popular culture is said to combat can be found within popular culture itself. Therefore, I argue that the term popular culture in its "counter culture sense," as it is too often used in hip hop scholarship, should not be used, as all forms of culture build up the same inherent power structures.

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Saudische YouTube-Influencer und globaler Konsens

Sabrina Zahren

Abstract

Den sozialen Medien im arabischsprachigen Raum wurde während, aber auch nach den Aufständen in Tunesien, Ägypten, Bahrain und anderen arabischen Ländern in den Jahren 2010 und 2011 zugeschrieben, dass sie demokratisierend wirken und Raum schaffen für Aktivismus, Widerstand und Gegenöffentlichkeit. Gleichzeitig hat sich jedoch seit 2013, vor allem in der Golf-Region, eine Youtuber*innen-Szene herausgebildet, die Teil einer globalen kommerziell orientierten Netzkultur und fest in regionale und transnationale Mediensysteme eingebunden ist. Die Youtuber*innen orientieren sich dabei an einem globalen inhaltlichen und stilistischen Konsens, der die Erwartungen des Publikums mit denen des Influencer-Marketings vereinbart. Dabei entstehen werbefreundliche und auf Spaß und Unterhaltung ausgerichtete Inhalte, die soziale, politische und religiöse Themen weitestgehend ausklammern. Der Artikel skizziert die saudische Youtuber*innen-Szene, ihren Aufbau und ihre Einbindung in professionelle Strukturen und untersucht, wie global zirkulierende YouTube-Formate die Kulturproduktion und Repräsentation der saudischen Youtuber*innen beeinflussen. Zudem wird diskutiert, wie „Authentizität" das Verhältnis zwischen Youtuber*in und dem (jungen) Publikum (*community*) beeinflusst und wie diese Bindung von der Werbebranche und den Zwischenhändlern (Multi-Channel-Networks) profitorientiert genutzt wird. Dem Aspekt der ökonomischen Durchdringung der sozialen Medien am Golf fügt der Artikel einen Ausblick auf das Handeln staatlicher Akteure hinzu: Die immense Reichweite der Influencer und deren Popularität beim jungen saudischen und arabischsprachigen Publikum weckt ihr Interesse und soll künftig für nationale Kulturpolitik in der Region und darüber hinaus gewinnbringend eingesetzt werden.

Keywords: Arabischsprachige Influencer, Influencer-Marketing, Konsens-Pool, Multi-Channel-Networks, Saudi-Arabien, globale Zirkulation von YouTube-Formaten.

1 Einleitung: YouTube, Influencer und Multi-Channel-Networks (MCNs)[1]

Seitens der Wissenschaft wurde den sozialen Medien im arabischsprachigen Raum eine demokratisierende Wirkung zugesprochen, vor allem während, aber auch nach den jüngsten Revolutionen in Tunesien, Ägypten, Bahrain und weiteren arabischen Ländern.[2] Seit 2013 hat sich jedoch parallel, vor allem in der Golf-Region, eine Youtuber*innen-Szene herausgebildet, die an eine globale, kommerziell orientierte, unpolitisch erscheinende Netzkultur angeschlossen und dabei fest in regionale und transregionale Mediensysteme eingebunden ist.

Youtuber*innen sind Menschen, die über das Videoportal YouTube (2005 gegründet und 2006 von Google gekauft) Videos hochladen, die sie selbst produzieren und/oder in denen sie vorkommen. YouTube ist eine soziale Plattform, in der der Austausch von Inhalten (Content) in Videoform an erster Stelle steht. Die Möglichkeit, Nachrichten zu verschicken, gibt es nicht. Interaktion ist lediglich möglich über Kommentarspalten unter den Videos oder über Bewertungen, sowie indirekt über das Erstellen von Playlists, das Abonnieren von Channels oder Video Re-Uploads.

Der Begriff Youtuber*in wird vor allem für Personen verwendet, die sich durch die Art und Weise, wie ihre Videos gemacht sind, eine Fangemeinde (Abonnent*innen) aufgebaut haben. Mit „Community" bzw. „Fans" bezeichnen Youtuber*innen daher Menschen, die ihre Videos ansehen, liken[3] und teilen, Kommentare schreiben, Merchandising kaufen oder über andere soziale Medien Kontakt aufnehmen.

Youtuber*innen werden ab einer Abonnent*innenzahl von mehr als 100.000 für Marketingzwecke relevant und somit zu sogenannten

[1] Ich möchte mich bei Andreas Kaplony für seine stete Unterstützung bedanken, die mir bei der Ausarbeitung dieses Artikels sehr geholfen hat. Bettina Gräf danke ich für ihre Expertise und wertvollen Kommentare.

[2] Siehe hierzu Salvatore 2011; Gonzales-Quijano 2012; Alsalem 2016; Wheeler 2017.

[3] Von engl. *to like* (mögen, gefallen). Bezeichnet den Ausdruck von Zustimmung und Bestätigung von User*innen für Inhalte in sozialen Netzwerken und manifestiert sich durch das Klicken auf dafür vorgesehene Schaltflächen auf der Benutzeroberfläche.

Influencern[4] (Influencer-Marketing).[5] Die meisten Youtuber*innen sind jedoch nicht nur auf YouTube aktiv, sondern auch auf weiteren sozialen Netzwerken wie Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram und Facebook. Man spricht hier allgemein von *social media influencer* (SMI).[6] Wenn hier in der Folge von „Influencern" gesprochen wird, impliziert das nur die Aktivitäten auf der Videoplattform YouTube.

Influencer bezeichnen sich selbst in der Regel als „Youtuber*in", da der Begriff „Influencer" marketingstrategische Intentionen transportiert und als Zuschreibung von außen gilt.[7] Trotzdem werde ich in diesem Aufsatz die Begriffe Youtuber*in und Influencer synonym verwenden.

Die seit ca. 2013 steigende Zahl an Influencern provoziert Debatten in den Leitmedien wie Fernsehshows und Tageszeitungen sowie innerhalb der Youtuber*innen-Szene selbst. Sie sind präsent in der arabischsprachigen medialen Öffentlichkeit, und die Themen der Debatten drehen sich um Produktplatzierungen, Schleichwerbung und das Inszenieren einer Scheinwelt, aber auch um den steigenden kommerziellen Erfolg der Youtuber*innen. Durch eine Art „künstliche Authentizität" verschwimmen die Grenzen zwischen Show und Wirklichkeit sowie zwischen Werbung und Kunst. Dieses Phänomen ist nicht auf die arabischsprachige Sphäre beschränkt, sondern lässt sich auch in anderen Sprachsphären gut nachvollziehen.[8]

Unterstützt und gefördert werden die Influencer in der Regel von Multi-Channel-Networks (MCNs), die in ihrem Portfolio ihren potenziellen Werbekunden ein großes Spektrum an Influencern anbieten. Dabei werden diese in Genres eingeteilt, die den Regeln des Zielgruppen-

[4] „Influencer" impliziert in der Folge männlich, weiblich sowie divers. Zu Beginn meiner Forschung Ende 2017/Anfang 2018 gab es noch keinen Konsens darüber, wie der Anglizismus *influencer* ins Deutsche übertragen und gegendert wird. Der Begriff Youtuber/Youtuberin/Youtuber*innen war jedoch bereits in der deutschsprachigen Öffentlichkeit etabliert. Stand Frühjahr 2021 spricht auch die Öffentlichkeit sowie die Fachliteratur von Influencer/Influencerin, bzw. Influencer*innen (vgl. Nymoen/Schmitt 2021).

[5] Mehr zum Konzept siehe Cialdini 2002.

[6] AMO 2016–2018, 195.

[7] Schons 2018.

[8] Dieses Phänomen und die dazugehörigen Debatten sowie deren Rezeption in den Mainstream-Medien habe ich beispielsweise in der deutschen, britischen, US-amerikanischen sowie der frankophonen YouTube-Sphäre beobachten können.

Marketings folgen, wie zum Beispiel Fashion & Beauty, Gaming, Lifestyle oder Sports & Fitness. MCNs wie UTURN Entertainment, Alfan Group oder Diwan Group kümmern sich um Vermarktung, Monetarisierung, Urheberrechte und Produktion von Inhalten des Kanals und werden an den Umsätzen beteiligt.[9]

MCNs, Medienkonzerne (wie z. B. der 1991 gegründete saudische Medienkonzern Middle East Broadcasting Center, MBC) und YouTube arbeiten deshalb eng zusammen. So wurde beispielsweise 2017 ein „YouTube-Space" in Dubai eröffnet, in dem Influencer ausgebildet werden.[10]

Die Youtuber*innen sind in einer Art Szene zusammengefasst, kennen und unterstützen sich gegenseitig und treten gemeinsam auf Events, Shows, Preisverleihungen und Kongressen auf, die meist von YouTube, MCNs oder (halb-)staatlichen Institutionen organisiert werden. Ein Beispiel ist das „YouTube FanFest", das in unterschiedlichen Städten weltweit Station macht. Dort treten Youtuber*innen live vor ihren Fans auf und haben die Möglichkeit, Kolleg*innen zu treffen sowie Videomaterial zu produzieren.

Sucht man im YouTube-Universum nach Kuriosem, Besonderem, Alternativem und Politischem, wird man vom Algorithmus[11] zunächst in eine Nische geführt. Ist jedoch eines der Nischenvideos ähnlich verschlagwortet wie ein Influencer-Video, wird man wieder in den Mainstream ‚zurückgespült': Die Youtuber*innen mit der höchsten Reichweite (Klickzahlen) und den meisten Abonnent*innen werden immer wieder angeboten, auch wenn die Videos inhaltlich mit dem ursprünglichen Suchthema nichts mehr zu tun haben. „Ähnliche Videos" ist eine Rubrik, die YouTube früh eingeführt hat, um einen Flow zu erzeugen.[12] Inspiriert vom Fernsehen, in dem das Programm nie endet, soll man nach dem Konsum eines Videos gleich das nächste ansehen und sich so von ähnlichen Inhalten treiben lassen. Dabei fällt auf, dass nicht nur die Videos der

9 Lobato 2016, 2.

10 DMC Press Release 2016.

11 Handlungsvorschrift innerhalb eines Computerprogramms zur Lösung bestimmter Probleme. In diesem Fall ist die Programmierung gemeint, die auswählt, welche Videos in der Spalte „ähnliche Videos" angezeigt werden, oder welche Videos auf das bereits gesehene Video folgen („nächstes Video"), sofern man keinen neuen Befehl eingibt.

12 Pietrobruno 2016, 2.

Youtuber*innen in fast allen relevanten Kategorien ähnlich sind, sondern dass auch die Akteur*innen selbst äußerliche Ähnlichkeiten aufweisen, die die individuellen Charaktermerkmale Einzelner zweitrangig machen und sich auf die Ausstrahlung vor der Kamera beschränken. In den Bereichen Ton, Bild, Bildsprache, Set, Kostüm, Mimik, Gestik, Kameraführung, *special effects*, Requisiten, Musik, Drehbuch, Dramaturgie und Format lassen sich enorme Überschneidungen feststellen. Dies führt mich zu der Annahme, dass es einen Pool an Codes und Merkmalen gibt, der die Teilnahme an einer globalen YouTube-(Jugend-)kultur und damit am Mainstream ermöglicht.

Der vorliegende Artikel stellt die arabische YouTube-Szene in ihren Grundzügen dar. Gleichzeitig möchte ich die Position der arabischen Youtuber*innen innerhalb des popkulturellen Mainstreams diskutieren und die ‚Währung' der Influencer auf den Prüfstand stellen: Authentizität. Je authentischer ein Influencer von seinem Publikum wahrgenommen wird, desto eher sind andere bereit, Kommentare zu verfassen, Inhalte zu teilen, *likes* zu verteilen, zu abonnieren oder Produkte zu kaufen.[13]

Blickt man auf die Sphäre arabischsprachiger Youtuber*innen, fällt auf, dass sich ihre Inhalte und Konzepte innerhalb des YouTube-Universums nicht oder kaum von anderen unterscheiden. Sie sind eingegliedert in eine globale YouTube-Netzkultur und bedienen sich aus einem Pool an Codes, ästhetischen Merkmalen, Styles, technischen Standards und inhaltlichen Konzepten. Ich schlage für dieses Phänomen den Begriff „Konsens-Pool" vor. Im Folgenden werde ich diesen Pool genau definieren und fragen, ob es die Künstler*innen, YouTube oder aber das Geflecht aus Werbeindustrie, Medienbetrieben und MCNs sind, die diesen Konsens definieren bzw. immer wieder aushandeln. Wie werden die inhaltlichen und stilistischen Codes und Symbole determiniert und welche Auswirkungen hat dies auf die Rezeption und Produktion von Jugendkultur?[14]

[13] Prüwer 2018, 32.

[14] Wenn in der Folge von „Jugendkultur" oder „Popkultur" die Rede ist, beziehe ich mich auf den oben beschriebenen Konsens-Pool. Ich betone die Zirkulation bestimmter dominanter Inhalte (Mode, Gestik, Mimik, Slang, Themen) auf unterschiedlichen Kanälen

Zur Beantwortung dieser Fragen werde ich im Hauptteil dieses Artikels anhand von drei Youtuber*innen aus Saudi-Arabien Bestandteile des Pools beschreiben. Darüber hinaus werde ich den durch die Influencer inflationär gebrauchten Begriff „Authentizität" diskutieren und seinen Stellenwert im YouTube-Universum reflektieren.

2 YouTube und Influencer in der akademischen Forschung

Ein wichtiger Aspekt zum Verständnis des Phänomens YouTube ist der politisch-ökonomische Kontext, in dem das Unternehmen seit 2006 global agiert.

Die Forschung zu YouTube vollzieht eine Wellenbewegung und reagiert auf die schnellen Veränderungen im YouTube-Universum zwischen 2006 und 2018. Zusammengefasst werden diese Bewegungen erstmals im *YouTube Reader* (Snickars/Vonderau 2009). Er beschreibt YouTube als kommerzielles Ökosystem, in dem nahezu jeder Bereich (z. B. Kommentarspalten, Videogestaltung) für Werbung freigegeben wird. Im 2011 erschienenen *Reading YouTube. The Critical Viewers Guide* fragt der Autor Anandam Kavoori aus medienwissenschaftlicher Sicht, wem YouTube nützt, und ergründet, wie die Qualität oder der Einfluss von YouTube-Videos durch kritisches Rezeptionsverhalten messbar gemacht werden könnte. Matthew Crick spannt in seinem Buch *Power, Surveillance, and Culture in YouTube™'s Digital Sphere* (2016) den Bogen zu Cultural Studies und Medientheorie. Crick sieht die wachsende Bedeutung YouTubes für die Werbebranche und die *digital industry* und beschreibt den Ausbau von Machtstrukturen, die darüber entscheiden, wer welche Inhalte zu welcher Zeit sieht. Einen wichtigen Denkanstoß für die Implementierung dieser Perspektive in die Forschung über arabische Medien- und Kulturproduktion geben Richter und Gräf (2015). Sie ordnen die Ideen zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie in die globale Medienforschung ein und unterstreichen, dass „eine kritische Untersuchung der politischen Ökonomie der Medien heute immer noch relevant ist".[15]

Das recht junge Phänomen „Influencer" wird wissenschaftlich in unterschiedlichen Disziplinen bearbeitet. Seitens der Sozialwissenschaften

innerhalb einer Kohorte, die u. U. den virtuellen Alltag von Jugendlichen prägen.

15 Richter/Gräf 2015, 25.

arbeiten Elke Wagner und Nicole Forytarczyk seit 2015 konkret zu einem Influencer-Format, dem *hauling*[16], und diskutieren die Beschaffenheit virtueller digitaler Gemeinschaften sowie das *peer-group*-Verhalten auf YouTube. Die Autorinnen kommen zu dem Fazit, dass YouTube-Auftritte emanzipatorisches Potential (vor allem für Frauen) bergen und zudem moralische Diskurse anstoßen können.

Seit 2013 arbeiten Sascha Langner, Nadine Hennings und Klaus-Peter Wiedmann vom Institut für Marketing und Management der Leibniz Universität Hannover zum Thema *social persuasion*, also dem bewussten Anvisieren sozialer Identität durch Influencer. Elmira Djafarova und Chloe Rushworth untersuchten in ihrer 2017 erschienenen Studie den Einfluss von Influencern auf das Kaufverhalten junger weiblicher Userinnen.

Die Forschung zu Social Media Influencers (SMI) legt demnach also entweder einen Fokus auf marketingtechnische Fragestellungen oder interessiert sich für psychologische Auswirkungen von „Youtubing" auf User*innen. In meinem Artikel möchte ich zu einem dritten Bereich vorstoßen, nämlich zum Verhältnis zwischen Influencern und Werbeindustrie. Ich frage, wie oben beschrieben, welche Folgen dieses Verhältnis auf die Kulturproduktion und Ästhetik von Influencern hat.

Es gibt unterschiedliche soziologische Theorien zur Vergemeinschaftung im Netz und dem Verhältnis zwischen Sprecher*in und dem Publikum. Rheingold (1994) spricht von *virtual community*,[17] bezieht sich aber auf das Web 1.0, Danah Boyd (2011) spricht von *networked publics*,[18] doch zur öffentlichkeitserzeugenden Wirkung von Youtuber*innen gibt es keinen Konsens. Shao (2008) und Leung (2009) sehen – dem Fernsehen ähnlich – Influencer eher im Bereich Unterhaltung und Information. Boram

[16] Format auf YouTube, in dem die handelnde Person Gegenstände oder Produkte zeigt, kommentiert und bewertet, die er/sie gerade gekauft hat oder bereits besitzt.

[17] Rheingold meint mit *virtual community* ein soziales Netzwerk, in dem sich Menschen mit ähnlichen Interessen oder Zielen (online) verbinden können, ungeachtet geographischer oder politischer Hindernisse.

[18] Gemeint ist mit *networked publics* „der durch vernetzende Technologien entstehende Raum und gleichzeitig eine imaginierte Gemeinschaft, die entsteht als Ergebnis der Schnittstelle von Menschen, Technologie und Handeln" (Boyd 2011, 39).

(2010) erkennt kein Bestreben, kritische Diskurse anzuregen und sieht im Verhalten von Youtuber*innen den Wunsch nach Selbstpräsentation.

Im Falle der professionellen arabischsprachigen Influencer kann aus oben genannten Gründen von einem Hybrid ausgegangen werden, der den Wunsch nach Selbstpräsentation mit den Erwartungen der MCNs und der Werbepartner verbindet.

Eine wichtige Bedeutung hat dabei die Forschung zu *digital intermediaries*, wobei hier die Arbeiten von Patrick Vonderau und Ramon Lobato zu nennen sind. Beide beschäftigen sich mit MCNs, die eine neue Art und Qualität des Zwischenhandels repräsentieren, der zwischen professionellen Youtuber*innen und der Marketing- und Werbeindustrie stattfindet.[19] Beide bewerten diese MCNs als neuartig innerhalb des YouTube-Ökosystems, verorten sie jedoch gleichzeitig innerhalb der kommerziellen Tradition der *screen production industries*.[20]

3 Bewertung von YouTube in der arabischen Medienwissenschaft

Überlegungen zu sozialen Medien und *policy making* sowie *e-governance* finden sich im *Arab Social Media Report* von Fadi Salem (2017) von der Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government in Dubai. Der Bericht arbeitet mit quantitativen Erhebungen und gibt eine statistische Übersicht über die Perspektiven von *citizen-government-interaction*.[21] Weitere wichtige Zahlen und Statistiken zum Thema „arabische Influencer" veröffentlichen die Branchenakteure selbst. Eine Referenz ist daher der von der Dubai Media City und dem Dubai Press Club herausgegebene *Arab Media Outlook 2016-2018*, der die ökonomische Perspektive von *digital content* auf dem arabischen Medienmarkt auslotet und Statistiken sowie Expertisen für einzelne arabische Länder ausgibt. Im Kapitel über die Zukunft der SMIs (Social Media Influencer) wird explizit deren politische Ebene angesprochen: „In a region dominated by foreign media, governments could integrate SMIs to promote their culture among youth audiences."[22] Ein weiteres Beispiel seitens der Marketing-Branche ist der *Arab Youth*

[19] Lobato 2016, 3.
[20] Ebd., 7.
[21] Salem 2017, 8.
[22] AMO 2016–2018, 198.

Survey der globalen PR-Firma ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, der Gewohnheiten, Perspektiven und Konsumverhalten arabischer Jugendlicher porträtiert:

> The aim [...] is to present evidence-based insights into the attitudes of Arab youth, providing public and private sector organizations with data and analysis to inform decision-making and policy formation.[23]

YouTube ist trotz der ökonomischen (und evtl. politischen) Bedeutung im Bereich der arabischen Medienwissenschaften keine oder eine nur kleine Entität im „Mikrosystem der Medien".[24] YouTube wird hier als Plattform betrachtet oder als Archiv, in dem sich Menschen neue Freiräume erschließen, Gegenöffentlichkeit herstellen und politisch agieren können. Es geht um einzelne Phänomene oder Akteure, und häufig steht deren Wirken auf Twitter und/oder Facebook im Fokus, den sogenannten *social networks,* in denen der kommunikative Austausch im Vordergrund steht.

Jüngere Veröffentlichungen, die sich mit sozialen Medien im arabischen Raum[25] oder sozialen Medien und Islam[26] beschäftigen, bleiben bei ihrer Bewertung alten Einschätzungen treu, soziale Medien in der arabischen Welt wirkten demokratisierend, schafften Gegenöffentlichkeit sowie politischen Spielraum und ermöglichten sowohl die politische Partizipation von Minderheiten und marginalisierten Bevölkerungsteilen als auch den alltäglichen Widerstand gegen Repressionen, Hilflosigkeit und Zensur.

Ein weiterer Bereich, der positiv eingeschätzt wird, ist derjenige der Kunst und der Musik in den sozialen Medien, vor allem die Möglichkeit, sie über soziale Netzwerke und Plattformen zu verbreiten und eigene Communities zu kreieren, die außerhalb der monopolisierten Plattenfirmen-Konglomerate (Rotana) agieren.[27] Auch subkulturelle Phänomene wie LGBTQ-Bewegungen oder Tierschutz-Aktivismus sowie in der arabischen Welt eher marginale Musikrichtungen wie Metal, Indie- oder Technomusik werden im Spiegel der arabischsprachigen sozialen Medien

[23] ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller 2017, 6.
[24] van Dijck 2013, 18.
[25] Siehe hierzu Alsalem 2016; Wheeler 2017.
[26] Siehe hierzu Al-Rawi 2017.
[27] Wiedemann 2015, 38f.

wahrgenommen und wissenschaftlich vermessen.[28] Hier wird also Subversives und Subkultur mit *social media* gleichgesetzt.

Man kann behaupten, dass innerhalb der Forschung zu arabischer Medien- und Kulturproduktion eine Neubewertung der sozialen Medien nötig ist, um auch dem Spektrum des „digitalen Umbruchs" gerecht zu werden, mit dem sich zum Beispiel die *Critical Media Industry Studies* beschäftigen.

4 Fallbeispiele: Drei Influencer aus Saudi-Arabien und der Konsens-Pool

Um die hohe Zahl an Youtuber*innen in Kategorien einzuteilen und sie trotz großer inhaltlicher und stilistischer Überschneidungen voneinander abzugrenzen, habe ich folgende Einteilung vorgenommen:

a) Saudi-Arabische Influencer (englisch-, arabischsprachig)

   Influencer (m/w) ab 100.000 Abonnent*innen, die in der Rubrik „Kanalinfo" auf ihrem YouTube-Kanal als Ort „Saudi-Arabien" angegeben haben, jedoch nicht zwingend (bzw. dauerhaft) in Saudi-Arabien leben und/oder arbeiten (d.h. Videos produzieren).

b) Reichweitenstarke Influencer (englisch-, arabischsprachig)

   Influencer (m/w) ab einer Million Abonnent*innen, die in der Rubrik „Kanalinfo" auf ihrem YouTube-Kanal als Ort ein Land aus der MENA-Region angegeben haben.

c) „Independent" Influencer (arabischsprachig)

   Influencer (m/w) ab 100.000 Abonnent*innen, die in der Rubrik „Kanalinfo" auf ihrem YouTube-Kanal als Ort ein Land aus der MENA-Region angegeben haben. Branding und Selbstdarstellung zielen darauf ab, als „Nischen-Youtuber*in" wahrgenommen zu werden. MCNs und Werbepartner nehmen eine dezentere Rolle ein, die technische Qualität der Videos ist höher, und es werden weniger Videos produziert.

Die Youtuber*innen, die sich in diesen drei Kategorien bewegen, reproduzieren ausnahmslos Codes und Artefakte aus dem Konsens-Pool.

[28] Siehe hierzu die Arbeit des Musikethnologen Thomas Burkhalter, z. B. Burkhalter 2017.

Manche Influencer, mit denen ich mich beschäftige, befinden sich nur in einer der drei Gruppen, manche in zwei, manche in allen dreien. Influencer in diesen Gruppen sind alle bei MCNs unter Vertrag.

Im Folgenden werde ich die Arbeiten der drei Influencer t1GGEEr, Its OZX und Dyler untersuchen. Sie gehören alle der ersten Kategorie „Saudi-Arabische Influencer" an (Stand 23.02.2020):

Influencer[29]	Abonnent*innen (in Mio.)	Views gesamt	Videos	Beigetreten am
تايقر | t1GGEEr	> 4.5	> 286.494.650	> 188	13.01.2013
Its OZX	> 4.6	> 398.533.444	> 184	28.03.2014
Dyler | دايلر	> 6.7	> 641.695.974	> 219	20.12.2016

Die drei Influencer sind beim MCN Diwan Group unter Vertrag, der laut eigenen Angaben „führenden Influencer & Content Agentur in der MENA Region"[30] mit „über 500 Influencern".[31] Sie sind außerdem alle drei männlich und laut „Kanalinfo" aus Saudi-Arabien. Zudem bewegen sich t1GGEEr und Its OZX bezüglich der obenstehenden Parameter in einer ähnlichen Größenordnung und sind dadurch gut vergleichbar. Dyler ist erst im Dezember 2016 YouTube beigetreten und gehört bereits zu den fünf reichweitenstärksten arabischsprachigen Youtuber*innen (Stand 23.02.2020).

In Saudi-Arabien ist eine hohe Dichte an kommerziell erfolgreichen Youtuber*innen zu beobachten, die einerseits für den regionalen (Golf-) Markt produzieren, andererseits aber auch von einem gesamtarabischen Publikum bzw. von einem globalen Publikum angesehen werden. Die absolute Monarchie Saudi-Arabien ist seit den 1990er Jahren bemüht, kulturellen, ökonomischen und politischen Einfluss in der Golf-Region und darüber hinaus auszuüben.[32] Innenpolitisch verbinden sich Konsume-

[29] Die Zahlen und Daten dieser Tabelle entsprechen dem Stand 23.03.2020.
[30] Diwan Group Website, aufgerufen am 17.01.2019, Orig. „MENA's leading content & influencers agency".
[31] Ebd., Orig. „Over 500 influencers".
[32] Hammond 2017, 169.

rismus und neoliberale Prinzipien mit wahhabitisch-traditionellen Normen und einem autoritären und restriktiven Klima in Bezug auf Unterhaltung, Selbstdarstellung und soziale Beziehungen.[33] Besondere Auswirkungen hat dies auf die Jugend und Jugendkultur des Landes, in dem 40% der Bevölkerung unter 25 Jahre alt sind.[34]

Diesen Markt versuchen sich unterschiedliche Akteure über Influencer wirtschaftlich zu erschließen. Relevant für Werbepartner, YouTube und die MCNs gleichermaßen sind hier vor allem die Abonnent*innen und die Gesamtreichweite sowie bei den einzelnen Videos die Klickzahl, die *likes* und die Anzahl der *shares*, die Auskunft darüber geben, wie oft das Video auf anderen Plattformen geteilt wurde. Diese Zahlen bestimmen die Position der einzelnen Youtuber*innen innerhalb des Algorithmus und beeinflussen deren Reichweite.

Auf der Website der Diwan Group gibt es beispielsweise einen *influencers catalogue*, in dem mehr als 500 Youtuber*innen vertreten sind. Auch Influencer mit sehr wenig Abonnent*innen (< 1.000) befinden sich bereits in dem Portfolio, was darauf schließen lässt, dass MCNs Influencer auch gezielt aufbauen und warten, ob sich eine Fangemeinde bildet.

> Diwan is the leading Multi-Platform Network (MPN) and Talent Management agency in MENA, managing top creators and working with leading brands helping grow talents and reach audiences.[35]

Bei den im Katalog vertretenen Youtuber*innen kann man wohl von einer Mischung aus Hobby-Filmer*innen, die zu Erfolg gekommen sind, und gezielt aufgebauten Personen ausgehen, ablesbar z. B. an dem Verhältnis zwischen dem „Alter" des Kanals (Beitrittsdatum) und den erreichten Zahlen (Abonnent*innen und Gesamt-Views, diese Hypothese müsste jedoch noch durch Befragung von Youtuber*innen und Funktionär*innen verifiziert werden). Das MCN bewirbt seine Strategie mit dem Ziel, „Marken an Kanäle zu binden"[36] und bewirbt die Win-Win-Situation für die *creators* und *brands*, die die Expertise des MCN in den Vordergrund stellt.

[33] Hammond 2017, 169.
[34] BMWi 2017, 7.
[35] Diwan Group Website (https://diwangroup.com/), aufgerufen am 17.01.2019.
[36] Ebd.

> Diwan Videos established strong ties between influencers and brands. We help our influencers boost their social media profiles while connecting them with the right brands.[37]

Seitens der MCNs wird kein Versuch unternommen, die auf kommerzielles Wachstum ausgerichtete Unternehmensstrategie und die Steuerung von Inhalten zu verheimlichen. Die Akzeptanz von *sponsored content* seitens der Zielgruppe ist im Gegensatz zu klassischen Formen der Werbung (Print, TV, Außenwerbung) hoch. *Sponsored content* bezeichnet die finanzielle Unterstützung einer dritten Partei im Austausch gegen *product placement* in Videos der Youtuber*innen.[38] Dieses Vorgehen wird als Influencer-Marketing bezeichnet. Zudem sind die Anerkennung von konsumorientiertem Verhalten sowie das Zeigen von materiellem Reichtum laut der Soziologin Amélie Le Renard eng mit der saudischen Identität verbunden und gesellschaftlich akzeptiert und anerkannt.[39] Es bedarf daher seitens der MCNs und Werbepartner keiner subtiler Strategien.

Im Folgenden werde ich das *product placement* der drei von mir vorgestellten Youtuber*innen im Rahmen von *sponsored content* in Form von Screenshots veranschaulichen. Die einzelnen Abschnitte „Aufbau der Videos", „Sidekicks" und „Formate" (z. B. *pranks* oder *challenges*)[40] entsprechen dabei den Elementen des Konsens-Pools.

Aufbau der Videos

Die Videos von Influencern, die in regelmäßigem Abstand Videos auf ihre Kanäle (*channels*) hochladen (von täglich bis mindestens einmal pro Woche) folgen alle einem ähnlichen Aufbau.

Bevor man das Video anklickt, sieht man im Menü sogenannte *thumbnails* (Vorschaubilder), die als Teaser für das Video fungieren. Dabei werden die Standbilder durch Fotobearbeitung mit Emojis (Bildschrift-

[37] Diwan Group Website (https://diwangroup.com/), aufgerufen am 17.01.2019.
[38] Chaffey/ Chadwick 2012, 163.
[39] Le Renard 2014, 131ff.
[40] *Prank* (Streich) bezeichnet ein Videoformat in dem Youtuber*innen fremden Menschen oder *sidekicks* Streiche spielen oder in denen Youtuber*innen Opfer von Streichen werden. *Challenge* (Herausforderung) bezeichnet Formate, in denen die Protagonist*innen des Videos Herausforderungen oder Aufgaben bestehen müssen, die sie sich selbst stellen oder die ihnen von *sidekicks* o. ä. gestellt werden.

zeichen), Textfragmenten oder *keywords* verziert. Diese Art der Standbilder ist Standard, genauso wie der Titel und die Beschreibung des Videos, die reißerisch sind und/oder den tatsächlichen Inhalt des Videos überspitzt und dramatisierend ankündigen. Diese Praxis ist als *clickbaiting* bekannt, und dient dem Ködern der Zuschauer*innen, um höhere Klickzahlen und damit höhere Werbeeinnahmen zu generieren.

Unten abgebildet ist das Design der YouTube-Kanäle der oben eingeführten Influencer Dyler, t1GGEEr und Its OZX in der Rubrik „Videos“. Geordnet sind die Videos hier nach „Beliebtheit“, also nach der höchsten Zahl an Aufrufen. Der Screenshot erfasst die ersten zehn *thumbnails* mit Titel, Zahl der Aufrufe und Zeitpunkt des Uploads. Ich beginne mit dem Kanal von Dyler.[41]

Dyler

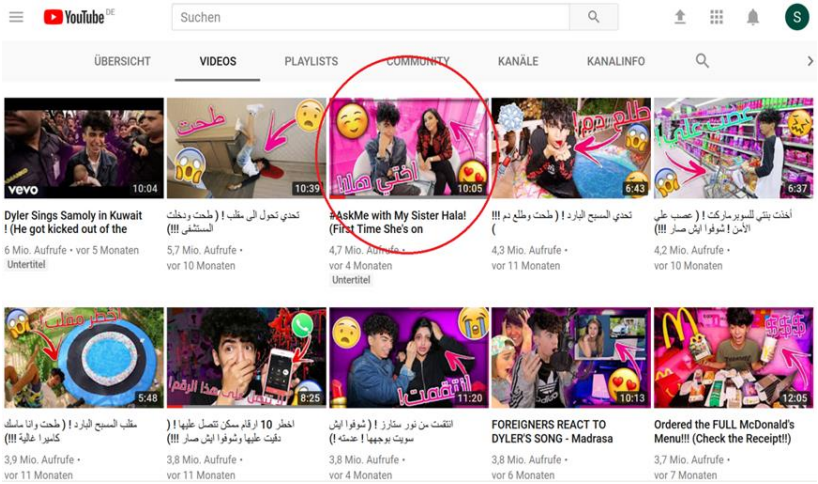

Abbildung 1

Dylers und t1GGEErs Videodesigns weisen starke Ähnlichkeiten in der Verwendung von Emojis, der Bildbearbeitung sowie in Mimik und Gestik auf. Beide nutzen reißerische Titel auf Arabisch oder Englisch, die den/die Zuschauer*in neugierig machen sollen. Its OZX benutzt weniger

[41] Die rot eingekreisten *thumbnails* und Unterstreichungen weisen auf Videos hin, in denen Familienangehörige als *sidekicks* mitwirken.

Emojis, dafür stehen bei ihm Bildbearbeitung und Spezialeffekte im Vordergrund. Bereits die *thumbnails* lassen auf einen einheitlichen Stil der Influencer schließen: Alter, Frisur und Kleidungsstil unterscheiden sich nur geringfügig.

t1GGEEr

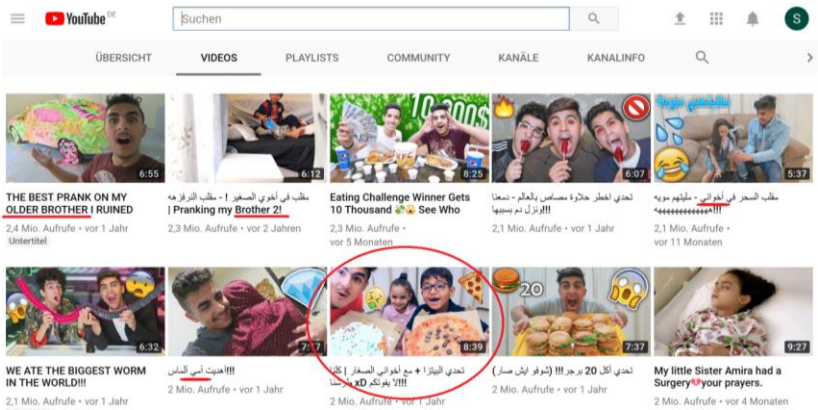

Abbildung 2

Its OZX

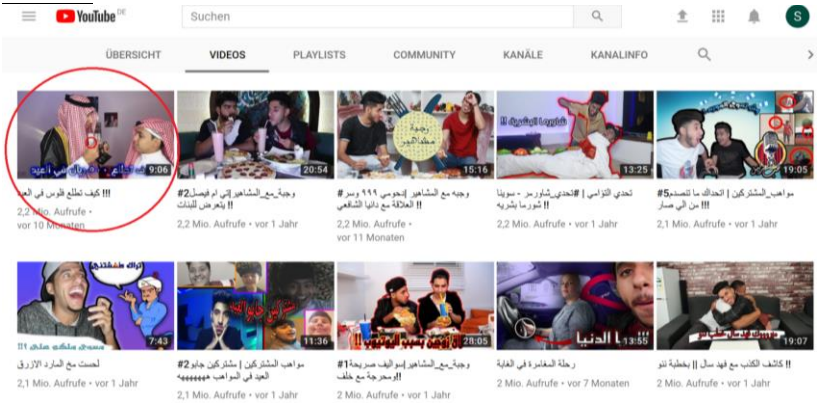

Abbildung 3

Das Video eines Influencers beginnt in der Regel mit einer kurzen Vorschau (Teaser), entweder in Form des Logos des Influencers und/oder

einer Textsequenz, um Thema und Setting des Videos vorzustellen. Es folgt ein Intro, meist ein Jingle, in dem bereits die Bitte an die Zuschauer*innen formuliert wird, das Video zu kommentieren, zu liken und den Kanal zu abonnieren. Jeder Influencer hat einen *catchphrase*, den er/sie zu Beginn des Videos, meist nach dem Intro, sagt. Das darauffolgende Format dient vordergründig der Unterhaltung des Zuschauers/der Zuschauerin, hat aber vor allem den Zweck, ein Konsumprodukt zu platzieren (*product placement*) und es in das Video einzubetten. Am Ende des Videos wird der/die Zuschauende noch einmal gebeten, das Video zu bewerten und zu teilen (*like, share and subscribe*). Häufig werden die Zuschauer*innen miteinbezogen, indem Herausforderungen ausgegeben werden, wie z. B. „Leute, schaffen wir 1.000 *likes* an einem Tag?“[42] Nach dem Hauptteil folgt die Verabschiedung mit Eigenwerbung sowie Werbung für einen *sidekick* (s. u.), wenn vorhanden. Zum Schluss sieht man das Outro, in dem weitere Videos des Influencers oder ähnliche Videos angezeigt werden neben dem Verweis auf die Profile auf anderen sozialen Plattformen (Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter).

Sidekicks

Die gezeigten Screenshots verdeutlichen, dass *sidekicks*, also Nebendarsteller*innen, eine große Rolle spielen. In fast allen Videos sind zwei oder mehr Personen zu sehen. T1GGEEr legt viel Wert darauf, seine Geschwister einzubeziehen, während Its OZX und Dyler eher Freunde (die meist auch einen Instagram- oder YouTube-Auftritt haben) oder andere Influencer in den Videos auftreten lassen.

Sidekicks werden in Romanen, Theaterstücken und Filmen eingesetzt, um dem/der Protagonist*in eine(n) (meist unterlegene(n)) Gehilfen*in, Begleiter*in, Kumpan*in zur Seite zu Stellen. Oft erfüllen *sidekicks* auch dramaturgische Zwecke. In Fernsehshows sind *sidekicks* oft Stichwortgeber*innen und Anspielpartner*in für den/die Moderator*in und sollen den Zusehenden Identifikationsmöglichkeiten bieten.[43]

Im Falle der Influencer ermöglichen *sidekicks* (vor allem Familienmitglieder) vermutlich, eine weitere Zielgruppe, je nach Alter des Familien-

[42] Orig. „Guys, can we reach 1000 likes in one day?“
[43] Timberg 2002, 7.

mitglieds, anzusprechen. Freunde oder weitere Influencer in den Videos mitspielen zu lassen, generiert höhere Klickzahlen und erschließt die Fangemeinde des jeweils anderen. Diese Cross-Promotion dient zusätzlich dazu, die Abonnent*innen und Klickzahlen der jeweiligen Kanäle zu fusionieren und einem Video und dem zu bewerbenden Produkt auf einen Schlag mehr Reichweite zu ermöglichen. Zudem verändern sich Dynamik und Statik des Videos. Dabei ist es wichtig, schnelle und unsaubere Schnitte (*jumpcuts*) und ein hohes Handlungstempo aufrechtzuerhalten. Diese Elemente betrachte ich als zentrale Bestandteile des Konsens-Pools. Das Phänomen der *influencer gang*, also einer Gruppe, die im Video gemeinsam auftritt, findet sich bei männlichen Influencern deutlich häufiger als bei weiblichen.

Da die meisten Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen in Saudi-Arabien bis zu ihrer Hochzeit im Kreise der Familie leben[44] und die Familie Teil des Alltags ist, ist die Einbeziehung der Familie als *sidekick* ein technischer Kniff, um weitere Identifikationsfiguren zu etablieren. Die Zuschauer*innen identifizieren sich mit den Personen innerhalb des gespielten Alltags der Influencer, gleichzeitig dienen sie ihnen als Dialog- und Spielpartner*in oder als Opfer bei *pranks*. Viele dieser *sidekicks* haben eigene Kanäle und steigen im Licht der Geschwister/Freunde/Familienmitglieder zu eigenständigen Influencern auf. Dieses Phänomen ist u. a. bekannt aus der Rap- und Hip-Hop-Szene, in denen bereits erfolgreiche Mitglieder einer Gruppe durch sogenannte *featurings*, also musikalische Zusammenarbeit bei einem Song/Album, ihren Freunden zu mehr Bekanntheit verhelfen.[45]

Formate

Pranks, *challenges*, *Q&As* („Frage & Antwort") und *follow me arounds* sind beliebte YouTube-Formate. Die Neugierde des Publikums und der Wunsch nach schneller Unterhaltung lassen sich in diesen Formaten gut mit Produktplatzierung oder Cross-Promotion vereinbaren. Im Schnitt sind Videos von Influencern 10–20 Minuten lang, sehr häufig werden Inhalte in zwei Teile aufgeteilt, die an unterschiedlichen Tagen erscheinen,

[44] Le Renard 2014, 51f.
[45] Ich danke Felix Wiedemann für den Hinweis.

dadurch entsteht am Ende des ersten Videos ein sogenannter *cliffhanger*. *Pranks* sind in der Regel harmlose Streiche, in denen das Opfer (eingeweiht oder nicht eingeweiht) mithilfe von Artefakten wie z. B. Kunstschleim, Torten und Masken in die Falle gelockt wird. Die Artefakte werden auf diese Weise im Video platziert und dadurch beworben. Der/die Zuschauende ist von Anfang an eingeweiht und begleitet den Influencer bei seinem Streich. *Pranks* auf YouTube unterliegen keinen inhaltlichen Vorgaben oder Abgrenzungen und lassen sich daher gut mit Produkten in Verbindung bringen.

Pranks

Folgendes Beispiel beschreibt ein Video von t1GGEEr zur Bewerbung des eigenen Kanals. Der *thumbnail* verrät bereits das Ergebnis: Das Video heißt *The best Prank on my Older brother I ruined his Car!! He beat me =(.* Es wurde am 10.02.2017 veröffentlicht und hatte im Mai 2018 mehr als 2,4 Millionen Views. Im Hintergrund sieht man das beklebte Auto des Bruders.

Abbildung 4

Zu Beginn des Videos erklärt t1GGEEr den Inhalt des *prank*s. Er wird das Auto seines Bruders mit Plastikbällen befüllen und von außen mit bunten Zetteln bekleben. Als Gegenleistung für seinen „Aufwand" bittet er darum, die Community zu mobilisieren, um die Eine-Million-Follower Marke zu erreichen (z. B. durch Teilen des Videos auf Twitter oder Facebook, um noch mehr Menschen zu erreichen). In der Videobeschreibung fragt er: *Could we reach 50k (=50.000) likes?* Am Ende des Videos, das nur

mit einer Handykamera gefilmt ist und nur an einem Ort spielt (in der Garage seines Wohnhauses), bittet er erneut darum, durch Verbreitung des Videos mehr Abonnent*innen zu mobilisieren. Er verfolgt diese Strategie, um das Gefühl einer digitalen Gemeinschaft zu erzeugen, ohne die der/die Youtuber*in nicht existieren kann. Das Aufrechterhalten eines „Wir" (Influencer und Fans), das gemeinsam den Kanal bekannter macht, betrachte ich als eine zentrale emotionale Strategie innerhalb des Konsens-Pools.

Product placement

Ein Beispiel für *product placement* im Rahmen eines *pranks* sieht man bei Its OZX und anderen Influencern in großer Häufigkeit. Das Video تجربة مقلب اللمبرقيني و الانسر في دبي | اجتماعية -*!!LAMBORGHINI GOLD DIGGER PRANK in Dubai* vom 13.02.2017 hat über 4,1 Millionen Aufrufen (Stand 31.03.2021).[46] Zusammen mit einem *sidekick* versucht OZX zunächst, Leute auf der Straße in Dubai dazu zu bewegen, in ihr Auto zu steigen

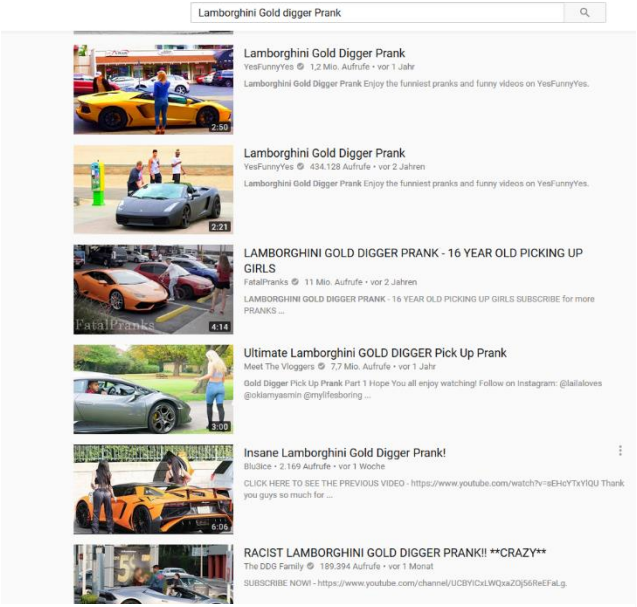

Abbildung 5

[46] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AH1StYbdP9k, aufgerufen am 31.03.2021.

(grauer Mitsubishi), was misslingt. Danach testen sie erneut, diesmal in einem Lamborghini, um zu sehen, wie viele Menschen nun einsteigen. Die Menschen werden mit versteckter Kamera gefilmt und der *prank* liegt im Aufdecken des opportunen Verhaltens der „Ge*prank*ten". Der Titel *gold digger* bezieht sich daher auf Menschen (meist Frauen) die nur aufgrund des luxuriösen Autos und der zu erwartenden finanziellen Kaufkraft zum (männlichen) Fahrer in das Auto steigen. Um die globale Zirkulation und Einheitlichkeit des Konsens-Pools zu versinnbildlichen, sind in Abbildung 5 sechs von 108.000 Suchergebnissen aufgeführt, die YouTube ausgibt, wenn man „Lamborghini Gold digger prank" eingibt.[47]

Challenges

Ein weiteres beliebtes Format sind die *challenges,* in denen sich der Influencer eine Aufgabe stellt, die er/sie meistens mit Geschwistern, Verwandten oder Freunden lösen muss. Dabei können die Aufgaben schmerzhaft, eklig, gruselig oder lustig sein, je nach Produkt, das es zu bewerben gilt. *Challenges* entsprechen am ehesten dem Konzept von Teleshopping-Sendungen, bei denen Testimonials oder Expert*innen durch die Anwendung eines Produktes Vertrauen und gleichzeitig Neugier beim Publikum wecken sollen. Untenstehend ist eine Zusammenstellung von *thumbnails* unterschiedlicher Videos zu sehen, in denen t1GGEEr die gezeigten Produkte anwendet und/oder konsumiert.[48]

[47] https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Lamborghini+Gold+digger+prank%E2%80%9C, aufgerufen am 09.05.2018.

[48] Kanal von t1GGEEr: https://www.youtube.com/user/t1GGEEr/videos, aufgerufen am 08.05.2018.

Abbildung 6

Q&A

Ich möchte den Influencer Dyler als Beispiel für ein Q&A anführen. Dieses Format befindet sich zusammen mit dem *follow me around* im Repertoire fast eines jeden Influencers. Bei Q&As werden vor der Kamera Fragen der Nutzer*innen von einem *sidekick* oder einem anderen Influencer vorgelesen. Der/die Befragte hat die Möglichkeit zu antworten. Welche Fragen ausgewählt werden, wie und ob sie/er sie beantwortet, entscheidet der Influencer. Ehrliche Auskunft oder tiefere Einsichten in das (Privat)Leben des/der Youtuber*in werden dem Publikum zwar zu Beginn suggeriert, müssen aber nicht eintreffen. Das oben bereits rot eingekreiste Video von Dyler wird hier aufgegriffen, der Titel lautet *#AskMe with My Sister Hala! (First Time She's on YouTube!!)*. Es wurde am 25.12.2017 hochgeladen und erreichte über 6,7 Millionen Aufrufe.[49] #AskMe bezeichnet hier einen Sammelhashtag, unter dem User*innen auf Twitter oder Instagram Fragen einreichen können.

[49] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qZMZuI2KYQ&t=534s, aufgerufen am 31.03.2021. Der Titel des Videos wurde mittlerweile (Stand 31.03.2021) geändert.

Abbildung 7

Das Video beginnt mit dem Vorspann, in dem bereits Merchandising von Dyler vorgestellt wird. Sein erster Satz wird in englischen Untertiteln eingeblendet. Hier sehen wir verschriftlicht Dylers *catchphrase* und den indirekten Hinweis an die Community, 200k (=200.000) *likes* schaffen zu wollen.

Dyler nutzt dieses Q&A als Werbung für seine Schwester Hala, die auch einen YouTube-Kanal hat,[50] und um seine Produkte zu bewerben. Hierbei handelt es sich um einen *clickbait*, denn im Titel wird behauptet, Hala sei zum ersten Mal auf YouTube zu sehen. Er bittet seine Abonnent*innen, auf Twitter Fragen einzuschicken. Damit ist die Community scheinbar in die Gestaltung des Inhalts eingebunden. Es werden von der ersten bis zur neunten Minute Fragen gestellt, die Dyler entweder nicht beantwortet, scherzhaft beantwortet oder über die er sich lustig macht. Die Qualität hinsichtlich des Informationsgehaltes und des Unterhaltungswertes der Q&A-Videos variiert von Influencer zu Influencer.

Follow me arounds

Follow me arounds (FMAs) sind Videos, in denen der/die Youtuber*in die Kamera (und somit das Publikum) mit in eine Alltagssituation nimmt, die sich außerhalb des Zimmers abspielt (z. B. im Haus, auf der Straße,

[50] Der Teil „First Time She's on YouTube!!" im Titel des Videos wurde mittlerweile (Stand 31.03.2021) geändert.

auf dem Weg zu einem Event oder beim Einkaufen) und sich dabei selbst filmt. Wichtig ist, dass der (vermeintliche) Alltag des Influencers abgebildet wird, in den trotzdem immer ein dramaturgischer Höhepunkt eingebaut wird. Wenn es keinen *sidekick* gibt, arbeiten die Influencer oft mit szenischen Dialogen, die zusammengeschnitten sind, um das „Abenteuer" anzumoderieren oder lustiger zu gestalten. Dazu werden häufig Ausschnitte aus Filmen, Memes (virale Phänomene in Form einer Video-, Ton- oder Bilddatei) oder Bilder in das Video montiert, was den Fluss des Videos unterbricht und oft humoristisch motiviert ist. FMAs können auch *challenges* oder *pranks* beinhalten, oft verbunden mit Kamerabewegung und Ortswechseln. Produktplatzierungen in FMAs beinhalten das Präsentieren von Hotels, Einkaufszentren, Restaurants oder Adventure-Parks. Travel-Youtuber*innen machen dies zu ihrer Einnahmequelle, indem sie Urlaubsorte und die touristische Infrastruktur durch die Videos bewerben. Dabei wird die Kamera entweder von den Protagonist*innen selbst geführt (GoPro, Handykamera und/oder Selfiestick) oder von einer zweiten Person hinter der Kamera, mit dem der/die Protagonist*in auch in Dialog tritt.

Folgendes Beispiel des Influencers Its OZX mit dem Titel *اوزي بيترك ليوتيوب.... اذا!؟ (Ozy verlässt YouTube?!)*[51] zeigt ein *follow me around*. Der Titel nebst der Ankündigung, mit dem Youtuber-Dasein aufhören zu wollen, ist ein *clickbait*, der von vielen Influencern genutzt wird, um die Fangemeinde zu erschrecken und ihre Neugierde zu wecken. Das Video wurde am 14.04.2018 hochgeladen und hat über 1,5 Mio. Aufrufe.[52] Es soll ein Burger-Restaurant in Riad bewerben. Sechs Standbilder veranschaulichen dies im Folgenden.

[51] Kanal von Its OZX: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0PjrlmwGPw, aufgerufen am 08.05.2018.

[52] Stand 31.03.2021.

Abbildung 8

Ozy im Dialog mit seinem „Bruder“. Er möchte seine YouTube-Aktivitäten beenden, Videos machen sei zu anstrengend.

Abbildung 9

Im Gegenschnitt: Sein Bruder will ihn daran hindern und ist damit einverstanden, für einen Tag Ozys Rolle zu übernehmen.

Abbildung 10

Auf dem Weg zum Restaurant. Der Zuschauer folgt Ozys Bruder, der sich selbst filmt.

Abbildung 11

Ankunft im Restaurant. Erstes *product placement*.

Abbildung 12

Verzehr des Burgers. Zuvor hatte Its OZX die Zubereitung der Burger gefilmt.

Abbildung 13

Werbung mit Namen, Adresse und *social media* Auftritt wird eingeblendet.

Während der restlichen sechs Minuten wird die Geschichte weitererzählt. Ozy macht den Haushalt, geht ins Fitnessstudio, trifft seine Freunde, während die Kamera ihm dabei folgt. Eine Minute entspricht jeweils einer Aktivität im Video. Am Ende wird aufgelöst, dass Ozy, sollte das Video

1.000 *likes* bekommen, YouTube nicht verließe. Das *product placement* findet am Anfang statt, während der Rest der Geschichte mit humoristischen Inhalten zu Ende erzählt wird.

Der Konsens-Pool

Um zusammenfassend darzulegen, dass die Elemente des Konsens-Pools universell von diversen arabischsprachigen Influencern genutzt werden, werde ich *thumbnails* zeigen, in denen Youtuber*innen sich nahezu identischer Stilmittel bedienen. Zu sehen ist die Interpretation des *sponsorings* einer Nudelfirma, die ihre Instantnudeln mit Chilipulver oder Chilipaste verkauft, sodass selbst dosiert werden kann. Hierbei wird vor allem das Format *challenge* eingesetzt.

Abbildung 14: Mjrm Games & t1GGEEr, > 6,1 Mio. Aufrufe, hochgeladen am 17.03.2017.

Abbildung 15: Moha, > 0,6 Mio. Aufrufe, hochgeladen am 16.01 2018.

Abbildung 16: Joe HaTTab, > 6,1 Mio. Aufrufe, hochgeladen am 06.04.2017.

Abbildung 17: Noor Stars, > 6,5 Mio. Aufrufe, hochgeladen am 12.10.2017.

Abbildung 18: t1GGEEr, > 3,8 Mio. Aufrufe, hochgeladen am 06.04.2017.

Betrachtet man das Upload-Datum, fällt auf, dass Videos im Zeitraum März und April 2017 eine sehr hohe Zahl an Aufrufen erhalten. Hier erreichte der Trend, zumindest in der arabischsprachigen Sphäre, seinen Höhepunkt. Alle hier aufgeführten Influencer haben ein zweites oder drittes *spicy noodles* Video veröffentlicht, teilweise auch zusammen mit anderen Influencern (z. B. t1GGEEr). Joe HaTTabs *spicy noodles* Video ist mit Abstand das meistgesehene auf seinem Kanal, obwohl er eigentlich ein Travel-Youtuber ist (Stand 24.01.2019). Diese Neuauflage funktionierender Inhalte wird von Influencern genutzt, um die Gesamt-Views zu erhöhen und stellt für Unternehmen eine sehr gute Strategie dar, ihre Produkte mit einer hohen Reichweite zu bewerben. Eine Google-Suche nach *spicy noodles challenge* ergibt in der Sparte „Videos" 760.000 Ergebnisse mit Videos in vielen verschiedenen Sprachen der Welt, auch neueren Datums (Stand 31.03.2021). Dies spricht meines Erachtens für eine globale Zirkulation von Formaten und Inhalten und damit für das Konzept des Konsens-Pools, der durch kulturindustrielle Interessen determiniert ist.

5 Partizipation versus „Entermercial"

Den sozialen Medien wurde Ende der Nullerjahre durch ihren potentiell partizipatorischen Charakter ein subversives politisches Image zugeschrieben (u. a. durch die „Twitter-Revolution" im Iran 2009 und die sogenannte „Facebook-Revolution" in Ägypten 2011).[53]

Anhand der aufgeführten Beispiele saudischer Influencer möchte ich diese Zuschreibung in Frage stellen und zeigen, dass es *social media* Aktivitäten gibt, die weder partizipatorisch sind, noch klar dem „Entertainment" zugeordnet werden können.

Allein der Aufbau der Videos lässt bereits erste Hinweise darauf zu, dass die Inhalte zum Zwecke einer hohen Reichweite und der Steigerung des Marktwertes produziert werden: Die *thumbnails* der Videos von Dyler, t1GGEEr und Its OZX weisen starke Ähnlichkeiten auf, sowohl in der Bildgestaltung als auch in äußerlichen Merkmalen wie Frisur, Kleidungsstil, Gestik und Mimik. Sie operieren mit reißerischen Titeln und

[53] Hofheinz 2011, 1419f.

Designs, die i. d. R. nicht den tatsächlichen Inhalt der Videos wiedergeben. Hier sollen durch *clickbaiting* die Aufrufe des Videos erhöht werden. Dylers Q&A *#AskMe with My Sister Hala! (First time She's on YouTube)* und t1GGEErs Prank *The best Prank on my older brother I ruined his Car!! He beat me =(* machen eine weitere Strategie sichtbar: Das direkte Ansprechen des Publikums und die Aufforderungen, den Kanal durch Klicks, *shares* und *likes* zu unterstützen. Freunde oder Familienmitglieder, die in den Videos als *sidekicks* mitwirken, ändern die Dynamik der Videos und können helfen, neue Zielgruppen anzusprechen. Treten zwei oder mehrere Influencer gemeinsam in Videos auf, ermöglicht dies Cross-Promotion zwischen den Kanälen und fusioniert die Klickzahlen. Das dient dazu, die Reichweite zu erhöhen und letztlich als Werbeträger*in interessanter zu sein. Der dadurch erzielte Profit kommt zwar den Influencern, aber insbesondere den MCNs und Werbepartnern zugute.

Die Dramatisierung des zu erwartenden Inhaltes durch *thumbnails* und *clickbaiting* sowie die Appelle an das Publikum werfen die Frage auf nach Wahrheit und Vertrauen innerhalb von *social media communities*.[54] Katy Richardson beschreibt in ihrem Artikel „Front Stage and Back-Stage Kantian Ethics. Promoting Truth and Trust in Social Media Communities" den interaktiven Vlogger[55], der sich mit und in einer Community bewegt. Die Aktivitäten der von mir vorgestellten SMIs lassen sich nicht mit den Online-Aktivitäten vergleichen, die Richardson in ihrem Artikel als Beispiel dienen. Influencer bezeichnen sich zwar als Vlogger*in, haben aber aufgrund von Professionalisierung, Monetarisierung und Content-Marketing zu ihrer Community eher ein Geschäftsverhältnis bzw. ein Star-Fan-Verhältnis. Vordergründig wird jedoch das Konzept einer gleichberechtigten Community ohne Hierarchien beibehalten, um das Publikum an den Kanal zu binden und Vertrauen in den Influencer aufzubauen.

[54] Richardson 2013, 5f.

[55] Vlogger*in ist ein Synonym für Youtuber*in. Das Genre „Vlogging" (Vlog = Videoblog) bezeichnete ursprünglich eine Form des Videotagebuchs, in dem Youtuber*innen sich selbst mit der Kamera begleiten und die Situationen kommentieren. Mittlerweile ist der Vlog das Standardformat jedes/jeder kommerziell ausgerichteten Youtuber*in und „Vlogging" nach meiner Definition ein Sammelbegriff für Youtuber*innen, die sich thematisch nicht eindeutig Kategorien zuordnen lassen (wie z. B. Travel, Fashion & Beauty, Gaming).

Wie ich anhand von Its OZXs Video *LAMBORGHINI GOLD DIGGER PRANK* und seinem FMA *Verlässt Ozy YouTube?!* sowie den Beispielen zur *spicy noodles challenge* gezeigt habe, sind *product placement* und *sponsored content* fest im Aufbau eines Influencer-Videos verankert. Intro, *catchphrase*, Hauptteil und Outro rahmen die zu bewerbenden Elemente ein, während durch die Wahl der Formate *prank*, *challenge* und *follow me around* auch der Inhalt der Videos am Produkt ausgerichtet werden kann. Inhaltlich sind diese Formate offensichtlich dem Fundus der TV-Industrie entnommen und erinnern an Formate im amerikanischen, europäischen und arabischen Privatfernsehen, die im ersten Jahrzehnt des neuen Jahrtausends ihren Zenit erreicht hatten.[56]

Elke Wagner und Nicole Forytarczyk sprechen bei dieser Art von YouTube-Formaten zwar von „Kulturindustrieller Vermarktung“[57], wollen die Sprecher*innen jedoch nicht nur auf das Produkt reduziert wissen. Stattdessen argumentieren sie für eine emanzipatorische Position und das Potential, moralische Diskurse anstoßen zu können.[58] Auch wenn in meinem Artikel der Fokus darauf liegt, die kulturindustrielle Dimension von Influencern hervorzuheben, möchte ich dieser Argumentation zustimmen: Wenn man die Videos um die Merkmale des Konsens-Pools reduziert, lassen sich Aussagen zum Individuum treffen sowie moralische, soziale, kulturelle, politische und sogar religiöse Diskurse herausfiltern, die über die saudische Kulturproduktion jenseits des Marketings Auskunft geben können.

Neben der technischen Ausrichtung an Werbe- und Marketingstrategien sowie der stilistischen Anlehnung an TV-Formate ist besonders die Ähnlichkeit und Gleichförmigkeit der Influencer-Videos auffällig. Dieses Kopieren von bereits erfolgreichen Inhalten ist keine neue Erfindung der *digital content industry*, sondern bekannt aus dem Fernsehen, aus der Musik und dem Bereich der Kunst.[59] Der Soziologe Gabriel Tarde geht davon aus, dass das Kopieren und Imitieren ein sozialer Prozess ist und deshalb jedes soziale Verhalten auf Nachahmung zurückzuführen sei.[60] Bei

[56] Vgl. Khalil 2005, 54.
[57] Wagner/Forytarczyk 2015, 2.
[58] Ebd., 1.
[59] Vgl. Grüne 2016, 429.
[60] Tarde 1890/2009, 69.

Influencern ist dieses Kopieren offensichtlich, ohne dass dies jemals in den Videos selbst angesprochen bzw. reflektiert wird. Individualität und Originalität müssen für das Publikum vordergründig als Prämisse der Influencer erkennbar sein, rücken aber inhaltlich tendenziell in den Hintergrund. Wagner und Forytarczyk sehen das Imitieren und individuelle Interpretieren als emanzipatorischen Akt,[61] eine Einschätzung, der ich mich nach Sichtung der Influencer-Videos nur bedingt anschließen kann. Auch hier kann eine Diskrepanz bestehen zwischen den Anforderungen YouTubes (Reichweite generieren und Ähnlichkeit belohnen), den Wünschen der Werbeindustrie sowie der persönlichen Haltung des Influencers. Die Vorstellung einer Kulturindustrie nach Adorno/Horkheimer,[62] in der Ähnlichkeit und Massengeschmack dominieren, scheint hier ein sinnvoller Ansatz, auch in Anbetracht der oberflächlichen und konsumorientierten Inhalte. Das Publikum durch Videos ästhetisch, intellektuell oder emotional anzuregen entspringt nicht dem Wunsch, durch eigene Kreativität andere Menschen zu inspirieren (Selbstzweck). Vielmehr ist dies Voraussetzung für eine ökonomische Ausbeutung des Kulturproduktes „YouTube-Video", dem sich die Urheber*innen der Videos beugen müssen. Zudem wird der Inhalt so gestaltet, dass er einfach zu konsumieren ist und dem Publikum das Nachdenken und Interpretieren erspart. Dadurch wird das Video zur Ware und die Zuschauer*innen zu Konsument*innen mit der einzigen Aufgabe, den Marktwert der „Industrie" zu erhöhen. Adorno/Horkheimer betonen, dass diese Form der Massenkultur scheinbar demokratisch sei, in Wirklichkeit aber die hierarchischen Verhältnisse der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft reproduziere.[63] Diese Thesen bekommen meines Erachtens eine neue Relevanz, vor allem im Hinblick auf das vermeintlich demokratisierende und partizipatorische Potenzial des Internets bzw. der sozialen Medien.[64]

Am Phänomen der arabischsprachigen Youtuber*innen offenbart sich demnach die Notwendigkeit, eine neue Kategorie für diese Form des Entertainments zu generieren. Ich schlage den Begriff „Entermercial" vor, da er die Schnittstelle bzw. Grauzone zwischen Werbung und Enter-

[61] Wagner/Forytarczyk 2016, 19.
[62] Adorno/Horkheimer 1944/2006, 140.
[63] Ebd., 142f.
[64] Vgl. Fuchs 2017, 227.

tainment beschreibt, in denen sich Influencer bewegen. Determiniert und ausgefüllt wird dieses Genre von den Influencern, den Werbepartnern, dem Publikum und den Zwischenhändlern (MCNs).

6 Konsens-Pool und Authentizität

Neben „Partizipation" ist „Authentizität" eine weitere Zuschreibung für soziale Medien.[65] An den untersuchten saudischen Youtuber*innen lässt sich das Spiel mit „authentischen" Elementen, wie sie im Konsens-Pool in großer Zahl zirkulieren, verdeutlichen:

Hektische, schnelle Bewegungen sowie schnelles Sprechen sind die Markenzeichen der erfolgreichsten Youtuber*innen. Dazu kommt der direkte Augenkontakt mit der Kamera, der sichtbare Oberkörper sowie das Anklingen des Inhalts im Titel des Videos. Die gezeigten *thumbnails* der Kanäle von t1GGEEr, Dyler und Its OZX geben dies visuell wieder. Der Hintergrund der Videos ist minimalistisch, klassischerweise das eigene Zimmer. Dieses Szenario wird in den meisten Vlogs imitiert (ein Bett und ein Nachttisch sowie Bilder an der Wand), wenn das Video zu Hause spielen soll. Der Charakter des Influencers sollte sich in dem Zimmer widerspiegeln. Auch Aaron Duplantier (2016) beschreibt dieses Setting in seinem Buch *Authenticity, and How we Fake it*.[66] Das Abbilden von Subjektivität und Intimität erweckt, laut Duplantier, den Anschein authentischer visueller Erfahrungen. Aaron Duplantier spricht hier vom „authentic amateur", da das Selbstverständnis der YouTube-Community auf der Tatsache beruhe, keine Rüge dafür zu bekommen, amateurhafte Videos hochzuladen. Authentische Aspekte sind dabei z. B. Versprecher, unsaubere Schnitte, unerwartete Ereignisse (Tiere, Menschen, Dinge kommen ins Bild) sowie banale und ereignislose Inhalte. Die Basis dafür sind die klassischen, meist ungeschnittenen Homevideos, gedreht mit Camcordern, für Freunde und Familie bestimmt. Ursprünglich dienten diese Vlogs der Selbstdarstellung und waren an die Netzgemeinschaft adressiert. In der Folge etablierte sich mit simplen Schnittprogrammen und Webcams das „Vlogging" und wurde zum Wahrzeichen von YouTube.[67] Die

[65] Vgl. Duplantier 2016, 9.
[66] Ebd., 110.
[67] Green/Burgess 2009, 50.

Abgrenzung des Amateurvideos zu professionell produzierten Filmen, Fernsehsendungen und (Musik)Videos ist Teil des Gründungsmythos des Videoportals.[68]

Influencer nutzen dieses Image und übernehmen gewisse ästhetische und technische Merkmale der YouTube-Pioniere, um sich kommerziell besser zu platzieren und die Sehgewohnheiten der Generation YouTube anzusprechen. Bestimmte Handlungsweisen (z. B. sich selbst zu filmen, in die Kamera zu sprechen), Stilmittel (z. B. *jumpcuts*, Versprecher) und Inhalte sind in den Konsens-Pool übergegangen und gelten als Marker für Authentisches, obwohl die professionelle Videoproduktion von Influencern den „authentic amateur"[69] nur noch karikiert. Die Aneignung subversiver und/oder subkultureller Mechanismen durch die Kulturindustrie und der dadurch entstehende Übergang von „Underground" zu „Mainstream"[70] wird in kritischen Diskursen zu Subkultur, Underground-Kultur und Gegenkultur häufig angeführt. Die Kritik ist, dass äußerliche Merkmale wie Mode, Sprache und Musikgeschmack einer Gruppe bzw. Bewegung übernommen werden, während sozialpolitische Anliegen marginalisiert werden.[71]

Kommunikationswissenschaftler wie Patrick Vonderau weisen allerdings drauf hin, dass *social media platforms* zu keinem Zeitpunkt „Underground" waren. Sie sind seit ihrer Gründung auf Profit ausgelegt, und das subversive „authentische" Image stellt einen angenehmen Nebeneffekt und PR-Vorteil dar. Aus meiner Sicht ist dieser von ihm vertretene technische und ökonomische Zugang jedoch nicht ausreichend, um die ästhetischen und kulturellen Auswirkungen eines solchen „authentischen" *business of creativity* (Diwan Group) auf die Kulturproduktion arabischer Influencer differenziert darzustellen. Ich möchte mich eher Jean Burgess anschließen, der mit José van Dijcks Auffassung von „interpretive

[68] Green/Burgess 2009, 51.
[69] Duplantier 2016, 109.
[70] In diesem Kontext wird „Mainstream" als Konsens von (zustimmungsfähigen) Themen, Ideen und Inhalten definiert, die über Massenmedien zirkulieren und über die sich die Herrschenden innerhalb bürgerlicher Gesellschaften mit den Beherrschten abstimmen (Ryan/Ritzer 2011, 364).
[71] Vgl. Jauk 2002.

flexibility“[72] argumentiert, die YouTubes Charakter in den Anfangsjahren (2006–2010) beschreiben soll.[73] Ihm zufolge dominierten zunächst die Faktoren „under-determination, negotiation and experimentation“,[74] während eine schrittweise Verknüpfung von *user-generated content* mit finanziellen Interessen erst später eingesetzt habe. Er schließt seinen Artikel *From 'Broadcast yourself' to 'Follow your interests': Making over social media* (2015) mit der Feststellung, dass die Bewertung dieser Plattformen stets im Spannungsfeld zwischen Kreativität und Konsum stehen werde, und dass dadurch die kulturelle Generativität der sozialen Medien garantiert werden könne.[75]

Matthew Crick (2016) sieht YouTube im Kern als komplexes internationales System, das parallel alle Arten von Inhalten (kommerziell, *user-generated*, politisch, amateurhaft usw.) gegeneinander ausspielt. Einerseits werden durch die Video-Plattform die etablierten Medien strukturell herausgefordert, andererseits funktioniert sie aber nach klassischen kapitalistischen Mustern und restriktiven Grundsätzen bei gleichzeitiger partiell demokratisierender Wirkung.[76] Man kann davon ausgehen, dass ein Phänomen wie die Influencer, die durch YouTube entstanden sind und ihre Wirkung nur durch YouTube entfalten können, genauso komplex und vielschichtig funktioniert wie das System YouTube selbst.

7 Fazit

Über YouTube und seine Position innerhalb der Medienwissenschaften ist bereits viel geschrieben worden. Medientheorien wurden auf YouTube angewendet[77] und die Entwicklung der Plattform wurde von 2006 bis heute dokumentiert und kommentiert.[78] Trotzdem ist keines der beschriebenen Phänomene, ob Amateur-Vlogger, Video-Collagen, politische Statements oder Katzenvideos, mit der Dimension vergleichbar, in die die heutigen Influencer vorstoßen. SMIs sind die belächelten Online-

[72] van Dijck 2013, 68–69.
[73] Burgess 2015, 282.
[74] Ebd.
[75] Burgess 2015, 284.
[76] Crick 2016, 21.
[77] Siehe hierzu Crick 2016; Fuchs 2017.
[78] Siehe hierzu Snickars/Vonderau 2009; Kavoori 2011; Crick 2016.

Testimonials der Werbeindustrie, inhaltsleer, apolitisch und seicht. Bereits der Begriff „Influencer" stammt aus der Marketing-Branche und verdeutlicht deren Absichten, mit den neuen Gesichtern der Popwelt Geld zu verdienen. Die Akteur*innen nennen sich selbst Youtuber*innen und weisen die Vorwürfe bzw. Fragen nach zu starker kommerzieller Ausrichtung kontinuierlich zurück. Arabischsprachige Influencer rechtfertigen sich in Videos und geben Statements ab zu Beschwerden aus der eigenen Community, die meist über Twitter oder die Video-Kommentarspalten an die Influencer herangetragen werden. Sie haben enorme Klickzahlen, ihr Wort hat innerhalb der Fangemeinde Gewicht und ihre Inhalte gehen ungefiltert und ohne redaktionelle Prüfung mehrmals die Woche online. Nicht nur die traditionellen Medien und die Werbeindustrie haben dieses Potential erkannt, auch Think-Tanks und staatliche Institutionen machen sich darüber Gedanken, wie man dieses Potential und die enorme Reichweite bei den U24-Jährigen für politische Zwecke nutzen kann. Dies ist besonders für die Golf-Region relevant, in der die Hälfte der Bevölkerung unter 24 Jahre alt ist und die eine hohe Dichte an Youtuber*innen aufweist. Im Falle Saudi-Arabiens reichen die Überlegungen von *e-governance*[79] bis zu kultureller *soft power*, die über saudische Influencer im In- und Ausland direkt oder indirekt ausgeübt werden können.

Ein wesentliches Merkmal von Influencern ist es, professionalisiert zu sein und Werbeaufträge zu erhalten. Multi-Channel Networks arbeiten hier als Zwischenhändler zwischen dem/der Künstler*in und den Werbepartnern. Sie versuchen neue Märkte für die Influencer zu erschließen (z. B. im Bereich Musik, Mode oder Beauty) und kümmern sich auch um die interne Vernetzung ihrer „Kanäle", um in der Breite mehr Reichweite zu generieren[80] und viele attraktive Zielgruppen anzuvisieren. Der Einfluss dieser MCNs und ihre Kooperation mit YouTube stellt Wissenschaftler*innen vor die Frage, wie diese zu bewerten seien und ob sie zur Kommerzialisierung YouTubes beigetragen haben.[81] Grundsätzlich

[79] Einsatz von digitalen Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien zur Vereinfachung und Unterstützung von Prozessen zur Information und Kommunikation zwischen staatlichen Behörden bzw. Institutionen und Bürgern bzw. Unternehmen, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-Government, aufgerufen am 17.01.2019.

[80] Vonderau 2016, 362.

[81] Ebd.

gehen die Meinungen in die Richtung einer bewussten inhaltlichen Gleichförmigkeit, die YouTube mittels eines Franchiseprinzips fördert. Zwar lebt das Konzept vom Individualismus des/der einzelnen Videoproduzent*in als Teil des Gründungsmythos von YouTube weiter,[82] trotzdem ist es für die Werbe- und Marketingrelevanz wichtig, möglichst homogene Inhalte in der Breite (dies bezieht sich auf das Volumen der Klicks, Abos und *likes*) zu generieren. MCNs bauen viele Kanäle auf, von denen sich nur wenige durchsetzen. Die Gleichförmigkeit, die sich in dem Phänomen ausdrückt, das ich Konsens-Pool nenne, entsteht daher eher durch die Anforderungen der MCNs an die Youtuber*innen und ihre Auswahlkriterien, als durch deren Kreativität. Dies lässt zumindest die Forschung von Patrick Vonderau und Ramon Lobato zu *Media Industries* und MCNs vermuten (s. o.), die sich eher auf ökonomische Strukturen und marketingtechnische Hintergründe stützt. Es geht um die Struktur und die „Industrie" hinter den sozialen Medien und weniger um künstlerische oder kulturanthropologische Aspekte.

Kurzweilige, eingängige und simple Videos, die den Alltag und allgemeine Befindlichkeiten des/der Zuschauer*in spiegeln, bieten eine Projektionsfläche und schaffen gleichzeitig eine Bindung zu den Youtuber*innen. Sie kommunizieren häufig und bewusst mit ihrem Publikum und generieren dadurch mehr Authentizität und Glaubwürdigkeit. Diese Mischung aus Idol und bestem Freund/bester Freundin ist ein optimales Milieu für Produktplatzierungen und Werbung.

Für Influencer steht heute noch der Bezug zur Community, zu den Fans und Unterstützer*innen im Vordergrund. Der Wunsch nach finanziellem Profit, Aufmerksamkeit und Selbstdarstellung soll möglichst kaschiert werden. Youtuber*innen stellen ihr Tun als Arbeit für ihre Community dar, von deren Wünschen und Vorlieben sie sich inspirieren lassen.

All diese Aspekte sind Bestandteil des Konsens-Pools und Grundlage für (fast) jedes Influencer-Video und (fast) jeden Influencer-Kanal. Und obwohl Influencer alles andere als „Amateure" sind, hat sich dieser YouTube-Stil etabliert. Betrachtet man Influencer als eines von YouTubes

[82] Hartley 2009, 233.

ökonomischen Standbeinen (neben Musikvideos) und die MCNs als Zwischenhändler, lässt sich sagen, dass die Aneignung dieser Stilmittel und das Kokettieren damit eine neue Dimension darstellen, die mit dem Aufstieg der Youtuber*innen verknüpft ist.

Elemente, die sich beim Marketing im Fernsehen und in den „alten Medien" bewährt haben, werden neu eingesetzt, jedoch mit weniger Einschränkungen, Regeln und redaktioneller Kontrolle. Somit wird dem YouTube-Video mit seiner amateurhaften Graswurzel-Ästhetik ein neoliberaler Anstrich verliehen, der aus dem Influencer-Video ein *patchwork* aus Werbeclip, Teleshoppingkanal, Homevideo und Reality-TV macht, das ich als „Entermercial" bezeichne.

Es stellt sich schließlich die Frage, ob Inhalte auf YouTube ihren besonderen, der Plattform geschuldeten Charakter behalten werden oder sich wieder den älteren klassischen Formaten der Mainstream-Medien annähern. Die gezeigten Beispiele geben Einblicke in einen enormen Fundus an Material, das in Ton und Bild Aufschluss geben kann über kulturelle, soziale, religiöse und politische Dimensionen von Jugendkultur im digitalen Zeitalter. Eine systematische Medienperspektive in der Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft müsste den Aspekt der politischen Ökonomie ernst nehmen, um soziale Medien im Spiegel einer neoliberalen (Werbe)Industrie im Kontext des Golf-Kapitalismus adäquat untersuchen zu können.

Die Ansätze der Kritischen Theorie können dabei helfen, die Auswirkungen des multinationalen Kapitals auf Kreativität, Kunst, Ästhetik und Popkultur zu untersuchen.

Abbildungsverzeichnis

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Notes on Authors and Editors

Lale Behzadi is Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Bamberg. She has studied Arabic and Persian literature, Near and Middle Eastern Studies, and German philology in Halle, Göttingen and Cairo. Her research focuses on Arabic (*adab*) literature, theoretical and comparative approaches to modern and pre-modern Arabic texts, concepts of authorship and the history of emotions.

Cristina Dozio is Assistant Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy. Her research interests include contemporary Arabic literature, humour and satire, space representation and literary translation. She is currently working on her first monograph about literary humour in the contemporary Egyptian novel with a focus on proverbial comical characters, writing conventions and language play. She translates fiction from Arabic into Italian (Youssef Fadel and, with her colleague Elisabetta Bartuli, Dima Wannous and Alaa al-Aswany) and is a lecturer of translation at SSML Vicenza's postgraduate course.

Kurstin Gatt is a lecturer in Arabic studies at the University of Malta. His research focusses on the intersections of the literary, the religious and the political in modern Arabic discourse. More specifically, the scholar is interested in the art and function of linguistic artefacts circulated in the jihadist milieu. The results of the analysis presented in this book are based on the doctoral dissertation entitled *Decoding DĀʿISH*, which he submitted to the Freie Universität Berlin in 2019.

Gisela Kitzler is Senior Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Vienna, Department of Near Eastern Studies. She holds an MA in Arabic Studies from the University of Vienna. Gisela Kitzler spent three years living and working in Cairo (2012 – 2015). Her research area is Arabic Dialectology (mainly Egyptian Arabic) and Arabic Popular Culture. Her PhD project is on Egyptian *shaʿbi*- and *mahraganāt*-music, focusing on sociolinguistic aspects in the song lyrics, as well as the controversial discourse on these musical genres in Egypt.

Peter Konerding is a research and teaching assistant in Arabic studies at Bamberg University. After graduating in Islamic studies and Spanish at

the University of Basel (Switzerland), he obtained a master's degree in Arabic language and literature at INALCO (Paris). In 2019, he completed his doctoral thesis about popular culture and language ideology in modern Maghrebi literature at Bamberg University, for which he was awarded the Rotary Club Bamberg-Schloß Geyerswörth doctoral award in 2020.

Felix Wiedemann works at the Bavarian State Library as a specialist for Arabic and Islamic Studies and is a PhD student in Arabic Studies at Bamberg University. He holds an M.A. in Arabic Studies and an M.A. in Library and Information Science. As well as studying Arabic at the Université Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV) and Persian at the Loghatnameh Dehkhoda Institute in Tehran, he has experience of working in Morocco, Lebanon, the West Bank and the United Arab Emirates. His publications include two books and several articles on Arabic rap music – all openly accessible.

Sabrina Zahren received her Bachelor's degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich. She continued her studies at Aix-Marseille University, where she obtained a Master's degree in Arabic Studies and Islamic Studies in 2017. Since 2019, she has been working as a course coordinator and student advisor at the Institute for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at LMU Munich. She is currently working on her doctoral thesis on Saudi YouTubers and is a member of the research group "Arab Mass Media and (Trans)Regional Cybercultures."

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Over recent years, Arabic popular culture has become a focal point of West Asian and North African studies. Most of the new research dealing with it concentrates on the 'popular' as opposed to an intellectual 'high' culture far from the harsh and hierarchically organized reality many Arabic-speaking societies face today. Popular cultural practices are thus seen as a rejection of the elite and a stance against those who have 'something to loose' within paralyzed and conservative communities. Albeit not denying the subversive political potential associated with these practices, this volume intends to take a more nuanced and broader perspective. Arabic popular culture might engage with emancipatory claims, but it might as easily follow the capitalist rulebook of global marketing. It might fight against oppressive authorities, yet it can equally become their symbol.

Approaches to Arabic Popular Culture therefore closely looks at the aesthetic implications of a topic ranging from Lebanese hip hop over Algerian pop novels to jihadi chants in the 'Islamic State' as well as from Egyptian mahraganāt music over sarcastic stories about hash dens and time travel in downtown Cairo to Saudi-Arabian YouTube-influencers. Thus, the theoretical scope widens and the reader is taken on a delightful journey to the unsettling pleasures of contemporary Arabic art and culture.

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ISBN 978-3-86309-767-7
9 783863 097677
www.uni-bamberg.de/ubp