

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper looks at attempts by the Egyptian government during the twentieth century to protect and preserve the musical heritage of Egypt and links them to trends in the development of Egyptian music. The paper contains five sections, and contains recommendations for the development of policies tailored to the specific characteristics of Egyptian cultural heritage.

First, it is argued that government initiatives have been poorly planned and poorly followed up, and this is illustrated by example of the 1932 Arabic Music Conference in Cairo.

Second, the appropriation of Egyptian cultural heritage by the state through the use of intellectual property rights is examined and placed in the context of the development of an Egyptian cultural inferiority complex. It is argued that these rights are inappropriate for an orally-derived musical tradition such as Egypt's. The efforts of Egyptian cultural governmental organizations to promote and preserve the country's folk and traditional musical heritage in the period soon after the 1952 revolution are analyzed, and it is argued that these efforts are rooted in a political agenda that conflicts with the requirements for the preservation of authentic Egyptian musical traditions.

Third, the neglect of musical education is discussed and linked to the cultural inferiority complex examined earlier. It is argued that the development of a new musical curriculum is required in order to promote the Egyptian peoples' understanding and appreciation of their own musical heritage.

Fourth, attempts by the lower social strata in Egypt to overcome middle-class cultural domination through the promotion of pseudo-folk music are discussed. It is argued that this trend, which flourished in the beginning of the 1970s via the cassette industry, has contributed to the rapid deterioration and exploitation of Egypt's musical heritage.

Fifth, it is argued that recent trends in the cassette market connected to the rise of Islamic Nationalism require the development of new cultural policies. These should aim at protecting the Egyptian heritage of Quranic recitation from displacement by Saudi Arabian-style recordings.

## **The Protection and Promotion of Egypt's Musical Heritage**

It is important to understand that the aesthetics of folk and traditional Egyptian music stem from oral tradition. Within such a tradition, terms such as "creativity," "craftsmanship," "ownership," "innovation," and "invention" differ from their interpretation in the West, which is essentially a written tradition. It is from this Western tradition that the concept of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) has originated. IPRs derived from the written, Western tradition are not necessarily an appropriate means of protecting the cultural heritage of Egypt, as concepts such as copyright, patents, and intellectual property do not fit easily with an oral musical tradition. Therefore, Egyptian policies for cultural protection should not rely exclusively on IPRs. Instead, they should look to alternative means of protection and promotion in order to match the specific characteristics of Egyptian cultural heritage.

### **1. The "No-goal-nor-plan-nor-follow-up-syndrome" Characteristic of Governmental Institutions in Egypt**

In Egypt there have been several attempts by the Egyptian government to protect and preserve folkloric and traditional music. The first Arabic Music Conference was held in 1932 in Cairo under the auspices of King Farouk I of Egypt. The attending scholars and artists included major European figures such as the composers Béla Bartók, Paul Hindemith and the ethno-musicologist Curt Sachs. Recordings of major genres of traditional and folkloric Arabic music were made during the conference, and a large number of performers from the different areas of the Arab world participated (although most of them were far removed from the indigenous environment of their traditions). Unfortunately there is very little follow up of such potentially constructive activities, and this continues to limit the impact of government efforts.

Today, nearly 75 years after the first and most successful Arabic music conference, we find very little or no results of this event concerning the preservation, promotion or protection of the Arab musical heritage. Recordings have not even been transferred to LP or digital format, with the exception of a few samples that are now owned by Western institutions and which can now be found on CD's (of which the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has a copy). Although these samples are very valuable and important to preserve, there is a fundamental need for notation, analysis, and systematic and methodical study of this immense repertoire.

Since the 1932 Arabic Music Conference, at least 15 other Arabic Music Conferences have been held in Cairo with numerous unimplemented recommendations, no follow-up, and no clear vision or purpose. They had no or very little impact upon the protection and preservation of Egyptian musical heritage.

**Recommendation:** It would, therefore, be highly beneficial for national and international non-governmental organizations and civil society as a whole to take a leading role in the follow-up and the use of existing resources to promote the protection and preservation of Egypt's musical heritage.

## **2. State use of folk and traditional musical heritage for political reasons - an exploitation of IPRs**

After the revolution of 1952, the Ministry of Culture (under various names) was established. The establishment of the Ministry followed a decision that Eastern European countries that focused on folkloric and traditional music would serve as the model for cultural policy. One positive result from this decision was the invitation of the Romanian Jacques Tiberio who recorded the first and single LP of Egyptian folk music from different districts, in which the recordings were carried out in their places of origin.

Among the negative results of this decision was the establishment of Egyptian groups or other formations for folk dancing as well as for the wider performance of traditional music under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture. This marked the beginning of a distinction between text (the promotion and protection of Egyptian cultural heritage) and act (the political and commercial exploitation and distortion of this heritage). It also resulted in the beginning of a process whereby the Egyptian State assumes control and ownership of folklore and traditional music without its exercise of intellectual property rights.

The Egyptian state used this hybrid between semi-folkloric, semi-popular product as a cultural facade for socialism, equality and nationalism. The Egyptian state exported this product on every occasion to Europe. Internal distribution was managed and controlled by the state-controlled media. It was never presented as a commercial product, but as authentic Egyptian musical heritage. It is important to be reminded of the fact that in such an oral tradition 'ownership' of musical heritage is unclear: indeed, the very concept of ownership is a poor fit for the complex way in which oral culture is collectively held, developed, and spread between people. In addition, states in the region do own the past, present and future of a nation. Terms like "the people", "the nation" and "the masses" are used but do not refer to any real owner who would be compensated or gains royalties from the protection or the misuse of Egyptian musical heritage. Thus the state had and continues to have no obligation to return cultural expressions and products to their original producers. It is therefore inadequate to follow a Western approach of merely identifying the owner of cultural 'property' and seeking to protect their rights. Instead, a new policy should be designed for the region where that tradition of accepting the ownership of the government and state of all rights is questioned and reviewed.

Were the French government to seek to change the French national anthem, they would undoubtedly seek the approval of the French masses because the concept exists that this music is part of the French national heritage and there are designated masses who can vote and who actually own this music and its heritage. Were their national anthem to be changed without their consent, French voters would probably revolt and seek compensation from the government. France provides an example of a place where the Western concept of intellectual property rights hold sway, even when the owner is not an identified individual, but an unidentified group: "the people", "the masses" or "the French nation," etc... When the Egyptian government, however, changed the national anthem (and the design of the national flag) on more than one occasion since 1952 it was simply announced as a *fait accompli*.

As for traditional music, the situation was no better than with folk music. On a commercial level, the highest revenue stemmed from 4 or 5 Arabic music groups. Each of their sold-out concerts perform under the umbrella term of "traditional Arabic Music", a vague expression that has been

used to cover music from the late decades of the 19th-century up to the movie songs of the 1950s and 1960s.

The nature of Arabic traditional music reflects an inferiority complex towards Western orchestral music. Despite the aesthetic virtues of traditional Arabic music, among the semi-intellectuals of the Egyptian state in the 1960s the dominance of the written tradition of Western Art Music resulted in the development of a cultural inferiority complex. This resulted in a perception of traditional monophonic Arabic music, originally composed and transmitted within an oral tradition with its own aesthetics of improvisation, as inferior to Western classical music based around a symphonic orchestra, distinguished conductors, and performances within the distinguished setting of the European concert hall. Thus, the Egyptian state at that time attempted to foist the outward appearances of the Western symphonic tradition on to performances of Arabic music: 60-70 instrumentalists on a stage, using notated scores and adding a number and type of instruments very dissimilar to traditional performances, would be led by a conductor who in some cases would use movements that would be more appropriate for a late-Romantic symphony of Mahler. The original product was an intimate song or an instrumental piece that usually required five instrumentalists of the traditional Arabic instrumental ensemble (the *takht*) and a virtuoso singer, all imbedded in the aesthetics of the oral tradition of monophonic Arabic music.

Sadly, this new arrangement by the state groups has replaced the authentic, original product in the minds, memories and experiences of the middle-class and city-dwellers who have been the main consumers of state controlled media instruments (radio and television). It has become also the model for those in the countryside or remote areas of Egypt who have followed in the footsteps of local musicians who had previously come to fame and prestige by going to Cairo. The central role of Cairo for housing the country's cultural institutions produced a hybrid of distorted folk and traditional music that has exploited all intellectual property rights of the musical heritage.

**Recommendation:** Musical heritage and expression of folklore should be kept from being exploited by governmental institutions for political or nationalistic interests. Given the long history of negative impacts on the preservation and protection of Egyptian musical heritage resulting from the cultural and political centrality of Cairo, steps to circumvent this centrality should be pursued. These could entail an increase in responsible institutions and protection organizations in other parts of the country where exchange and interactive work can be done.

### 3. Educational curriculum and the protection of musical heritage

While the state governmental institutions in Egypt in the 1960s and early 1970s had adopted a socialist-derived policy to exploit traditional and folklore music for its political agenda, it neglected the role of musical education in promoting, protecting and preserving the cultural musical heritage of Egypt. There has been a complete negligence in failing to adapt and promote a curriculum that would enrich the experience of the local student in the classroom of his Egyptian musical heritage. However, the students' musical experience is limited to simplistic, patriotic/popular songs in inauthentic major and minor keys, performed on the piano or an electric keyboard, thus eliminating Arabic melodic and rhythmic modes and Arabic music instruments. Examples include the *kaman* (Arabic-tuned violin), the *oud* (lute), the *nay* (wooden Arabic flute) and many indigenous percussion instruments (for example, *darabukah*, *riqq*) and Egyptian folk-music instruments such as the *rebaba* (rebec), *simsimiyya* (Arabic lyre), etc. Once a generation

has arisen in Egypt that has an understanding and appreciation of its own musical heritage, and does not merely continue an inferiority complex disguised with Western misspelled language, the need for a type of intellectual property rights and policies that is inspired by Arabic cultural characteristics will be recognized. It will extend beyond an imitation of policies that have mainly served the issues of intellectual property rights within the Western cultural model.

**Recommendation:** It is important to design an educational curriculum and create media programs for children and youth that motivate students (of different ages and levels of education) to respect, enjoy, protect and be able to contribute to the Egyptian musical heritage. It should be emphasized in this curriculum that this material is to be learned as a study of the cultural expressions as a source of creativity and innovation, and not for the purposes of promotion of cheap political nationalism or racial discrimination. It should be considered as a part of a human musical heritage.

#### **4. Class struggle and the distortion of Musical Heritage**

Centuries of cultural domination by Egyptian middle-class culture has created a need in the neglected lower classes for a cultural outlet, resulting in the creation of a hybrid type of "semi-folk" popular music—commercial at heart with very superficial folkloric characteristic. In the first half of the 1970s, Egypt has provided an enormous amount of expatriate labor to the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, from different areas of Egypt. As a result of the extra income that these Egyptians enjoyed, they discovered a giant demon that contributed toward solving their inferiority complexes (regarding social strata) that had been fully neglected in the State cultural map, being dominated by the middle-class intellectuals and semi-intellectuals of the capital city, Cairo. This "demon" was (and still is) the cassette player, first brought home by the workers of the 1970s in their annual vacations, which led to a new music industry that quickly threatened Egyptian musical heritage in an unprecedented way. In the late 1970s, nearly every single taxi cab, juice shop, etc. in Cairo had acquired the latest cassettes of semi-folk/pop singer Ahmed Adawiyya, who had been banned from all State-dominated media. And in a few years, his sales of cassettes exceeded one million copies, substantially overcoming the domination that the main state performers (Abdel Halim Hafez, Umm Kalthoum, Mohamed Abdel Wahab, among others) had enjoyed for decades.

The cassette industry in the 1970s, 1980s and until today, has severely undermined the cultural domination by the state that had lasted for decades. This has participated in creating a genre of commercial and pseudo-folk music. Yet, despite debate about its authenticity, this highly developed commercialized music industry in Egypt has a high potential for the successful promotion of intellectual property rights in its commercial manifestation.

**Recommendation:** Although, superficially, this cassette industry is somehow respectful of the laws concerning intellectual property rights, regarding commerce, a policy of protection of musical heritage should be created to counter the trend of pseudo-folk music, which exploits the musical heritage of Egypt in a distorted, condescending manner. Of course, there is rampant illegal copying of Western cassettes in Egypt but unlike in the Western context, where this illegal copying is perhaps the primary concern, the impact of illegal cassette copying of domestically produced Arabic music cassettes in Egypt is of far less importance than the massive distortion of Egypt's musical heritage. Furthermore, in Egypt, even with such instances of illegal copying of cassettes and CDs, the music industry is flourishing financially, forming one of the most

successful domestic markets. The economic “threat” of any illegal copying has not been felt significantly and has not yet become as serious an issue as it is in Western countries.

### **5. The rise of Islamic Nationalism in the Arab Region and its Threat to Sacred Cultural Musical Heritage in Egypt**

The rise of Islamic nationalism in the region has rapidly participated in degrading the traditional heritage of Quranic recitation in Egypt. Through distribution by the cassette/CD industry, the traditional Egyptian style of Quranic recitation (with many of the ornate characteristics of Egyptian music) is decaying for the large majority of Egyptians because of a very popular Saudi Arabian trend of recitation and sermon). The artistic musical trends embedded in the Egyptian style of recitation have been acquired over long periods of time to represent musical qualities—melodic tetrachords, melodic range, expressiveness, relationship between text and musical declamation. Through this type of recitation, many of the historical features of Egyptian musical tradition are transmitted through this Egyptian style. A case in point is the comparison of Gregorian chant, Mozarabic chant and Roman chant during the Middle Ages. This reflects the different musical characteristics of different important cultural centers in Europe. This is not a religious debate but a musical debate over a heritage that carries many musical characteristics of a nation, and therefore needs a proper policy for protection and preservation.

**Recommendation:** Measures for the protection of the original Egyptian style of Quranic recitation should be taken as part of protecting the threatened musical heritage.