Audible Others:
Syrian Music and Aural Poetics in Lebanon

Ariane Salehi Lorrain

Department of Anthropology
McGill University, Montreal
August 2024

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology

Table of Contents

Abstract | p.4
Acknowledgements | p.5
Notes on Translation & Transliteration | p.6

Introduction | p.7
"The Key to Music" | p.7
Project Background & Positionality | p.9
Participants | p.11
Research Outline | p.14
Research Questions & Argument | p.14
Literary Review & Research Scope | p.18
Theoretical Background | p.19
Sound as Epistemology | p.20
Methods | p.22
Audiovisual Methods | *p.22*
Listening as Method | p.23
Theoretical Background | 26
The Ethics & Politics of Representation | p.29

Chapter 1 | Displacement and Musical Belonging | p.33
The History of Syrian Displacement in Lebanon | p.33
Atomized Families | p.36
Rural Displacement: The Beqaa Valley | p.37
Urban Displacement: Beirut | p.40
Survival Networks & Social Capital | p.41
Narratives Of Belonging | p.43
Lebanese Identity Post-Revolution and the Making of the 'Other' | p.43
Myths of Belonging | p.45
Bilad Al-Sham: The Levant | p.47
Vocal Identities | **p.49**
Otherization and Discrimination | p.50
Speech Performatives | p.53
Linguistic Identities | p.53
Double Voice | p.55

Chapter Two –Heritage Politics in the Beqaa Valley| p.56
The Duty to Remember | p.56
Syrian Musical Traditions | p.59
The Psychosocial Role of Music | p. 60
Displacement and Music: The case of Action for Hope | p.62
The Politics of the Humanitarian Gaze | p.63
***"I Made It Oriental":* Preservation & Transformation of Musical Heritage** | p.64
Performing Selves and Others | p.77
Parenting through Music | p.80

Chapter Three – Urban Trajectories of Syrian Music | p.83
Freedom of Expression | *p.83*
Place-Making in Beirut | p.84
"*We Were Disbanded*" | p.86
Accents in Song | p.90
Sonic Cosmopolitanism in Beirut | p.92
"You Can Play Anything That Comes to Your Mind" | p.94
Debates on Authenticity and Tradition | p.101
The Ruralisation of Urban Musical Aesthetics | p.102

Conclusion and Openings | p.104
Cognitive Dissonance | p.104
The Virtual Voyages of Sounds | p.105
Summary & Discussion | p.109

Coda | p.115

Bibliography | p.119

Abstract

This thesis documents emergent Syrian music in Lebanon, considering rural and urban trajectories of displacement through sound. Examining traditional and cosmopolitan musical tendencies in Beirut and in the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley along the Syrian border, it looks at the tension between the preservation and transformation of the Syrian musical heritage. Whether played to remember or played to forget, music sheds light on a double bind—retaining the past to sustain cultural identities and revive collective memory, or widening one's repertoire by integrating transnational influences. At a time of deepening precarity, this research discusses xenophobia in a Lebanon post-collapse and at war. I posit that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are "audible others" who must adapt their sonic identities to 'pass,' find work, or perform. Amid a heightened context in an already sectarian society, voices become a site of political and cultural negotiation, while music becomes a site of self-expression and contestation. I evaluate how displaced Syrian musicians reclaim, reconfigure and perform identities through music and voice and, in turn, how music has transformed their experiences of displacement in Lebanon over a decade in exile.

Keywords | belonging, cosmopolitanism**,** displacement, heritage, language, Lebanon, music (folk, popular, traditional, contemporary), memory, performance, place-making, refugee (first and second-generation), rurality, sound, tradition, transnationalism, urbanity, Syrian musicians, virtual, vernacular, voices.

Résumé

Ce mémoire documente la musique syrienne émergeante au Liban, considérant les trajectoires rurales et urbaines de migration forcée à travers le son. Examinant comment la musique traditionnelle ravive l'identité culturelle syrienne et la mémoire collective, et pourquoi les musiciens élargissent leurs répertoires et intègrent de nouvelles influences, cette étude révèle la tension entre la préservation et la transformation d'un riche patrimoine culturel immatériel. Qu'elle soit jouée pour se remémorer ou pour oublier, la musique incarne une friction entre conservation et affranchissement. Que ce soit pour se reconstruire ou pour se fondre, j'évalue la parole et la musique comme sites de négociation politique et culturelle. Dans les camps de réfugiés de la Plaine de la Bekaa le long de la frontière syrienne, comme dans la capitale cosmopolite de Beyrouth, les réfugiés syriens au Liban, En tant qu' « étrangers audibles », doivent moduler leurs identités sonores et vocales afin de naviguer une xénophobie grandissante. Dans un Liban en crise et en guerre, j'évalue comment des artistes syriens migrants négocient, réclament et affranchissent leurs identités à travers la musique et la voix, et, inversement, comment la musique a transformé leurs expériences de déplacement forcé après plus d'une décennie d'exil au Liban.

Acknowledgements

This research has had to adapt to several political upheavals across the Middle East between 2021 and 2024; each time, my mentor and supervisor, Professor Diana Allan, has embraced the way my project has had to pivot in response. I am grateful for her unwavering support throughout the journey of writing this ethnography. Her teachings, advice, trust, generosity, enthusiasm and friendship were all inestimable to the completion of this thesis. Her artistic practice as a filmmaker continues to inspire and nourish my own creative endeavours.

Interested in ways of pursuing anthropological research sonically, I audited Prof. Allan's Sound Ethnography seminar in 2021[1], where we tended to voices, speech, song, intimacy, memory, and translation as tools for understanding lived experience—all themes addressed in this text. The debates on authenticity that I engage with throughout this thesis build on a graduate musicology seminar I took in 2022 with Professor Roe-Min Kok,[2] who served as a thesis committee member. Our discussions on decolonial methods and her suggestion to explore families as symbolic universes that sustain traditions and selves have greatly enriched this text. In both seminars, I have discovered critical sound studies scholars that have been influential for my thinking.

I am grateful for Syrian friends worldwide, artists in political exile living in Lebanon, France, Germany, Mexico, Canada and Australia, who have marked me with their generosity, creativity, intelligence, and strength of character. They reminded me of the importance of solidarity networks and friendships in the face of adversity, and of the role of art, music and words in achieving revolutionary change. May their creative flame keep burning and help them push through the injustices. I hope to honour the Syrian musical heritage, the creative resistance of its practitioners, and to convey the wise teachings of the talented musicians that I met along the way.

I am thankful for the generosity of my peers, in particular Noura Nasser, Naïm Jeanbart, Cynthia Kraichati and Farah Atoui for all the discussions that nourished this text and for their questions and encouragements in times of doubt. I extend my gratitude to Amélie Ward and Gillian Chilibeck who have helped me with their careful readings. A heartfelt thanks to my kin and chosen families—in particular Wasim, Sara, and Maïté for their unflinching care. I am also indebted to the McGill Refugee Research Group and the McGill Faculty of Arts for supporting this research.

[1] ANTH 555, Special Topics in Ethnography : Soundings: Audio Ethnography, Theory and Practice, Winter 2021, Prof. Diana Allan. Graduate Seminar, Fall 2021, Department of Anthropology, McGill University.
[2] MUHL 680, Music and Colonialism, Fall 2022, Schulich School of Music, Music Research, Graduate Seminar in Musicology, McGill University, Professor Roe-Min Kok.

Notes on Translation & Transliteration

Given the centrality of orality and speech in this research, I transliterated colloquial Syrian Arabic in the Latin alphabet instead of adapting transcripts to Classical Arabic, which would have entailed yet another translation. Transliterations focus on utterances, or the way a language is spoken, as opposed to language itself. I transliterate keywords to keep close to the speakers' usage, epistemologies and intentions, to familiarize readers with the vocalisation of Syrian dialects, and to allow Arabic speakers to grasp subtle connotations that escape my English translations.

Colloquial dialectal Arabic, *a'miyeh,* has varied pronunciations and regionally specific set phrases. Syrian accents (*lahjat*), part of the Levantine colloquial, are plentiful and must be rendered differently. I rely on the adaptive and varied transliteration practices that exiled Syrians use in text, as well as my own ear in perceiving sounds, to transliterate colloquial accents phonetically. Given the phonetic alphabet is not instinctive to unacquainted readers, I borrow from the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMS) simplified system to codify Arabic transliterations.[3]

In referring to places and geographical landmarks, I favour Syrian endonyms over exonyms.[4] Onomatopoeias, blessings, idioms and lyrics are at times transliterated but not translated. These instances include terms that have become known to English speakers (i.e.: *wallah*), or convey emotions that might be 'understood' but not 'felt' even if translated, being part of a cultural ecology endowed with colloquial symbolic meaning (i.e.: *asmarani*). Key concepts in Arab music theory could not be translated but only defined, as they do not have equivalents in Western music theory. Musical genres (*qūdūd halabi*), song styles (*mawwal*, *awihah*), spiritual concepts (*enshād*, *tarab*), music terminology (*maqāmāt, sam'āī, taqsīm*) comprise a rich emic epistemology that is intrinsic to this research. I define these terms for readers, based on medieval dictionaries, *Nahda* encyclopedias (19th-20th century), and contemporary Arab music research.

Out of a concern for conveying the broader communicative range of speech in writing, I try to preserve the fluidity of speech and orality by maintaining rhythm, cadence, and minimizing editorial intervention. The result is a multivocal work where different dialects, ways of speaking, registers, tones, and rhythms are transposed into text. I hope that my translations convey the nuances, depth, and intentions of speakers, as well as the intimacy of our conversations.

---

[3] *Ta'marbuta* is rendered as 'eh' or 'ah', accordingly; 'ū' stands for *waw,* 'ī' for *ya'* and ā for *alef*. Diacritics (') denote *ayn* and *hamza*, and double consonants point to a *shadda*.

[4] For example, I favour the Syrian designation '*Qalamoun'* over "Anti-Lebanon Mountains"; likewise, I refer to the "camp" or *mokhayem* as their residents do, rather than "informal tented settlement", the legal term used by Lebanese and foreign authorities.

Introduction

> "Music is not only a product of society, it is also a way of transforming this society."
> — Nercessian 2002, 17.

"The Key to Music"

It is New Year's Eve in Beirut, we are leaving 2022 behind. On this day, the government gifts electricity until 1am, a once-in-a-year occurrence. At a *haflah* gathering, Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese friends are sitting around a coffee table in an intimate setting, eating finger foods, drinking tea, yerba mate, or wine. Guests share stories about the Syrian revolution, tragicomically retelling failed attempts to desert military service and other army anecdotes that highlight the existential absurdity of life and war. A playlist of *hanin* (nostalgic) songs—of the late Druze princess Esmahān, Nejat Sghirah, Abdel Wahab, Faris al-Atrache, Rafiq Shukri, Sabri Mūddalal, Fahed Ballan, Samira Tawfiq and Nour al-Hoda and Sabah[5]—provide an appropriate ambiance for our conversations. The only child present is Samah[6], Nawal and Amir's lively seven-year-old daughter. She is left out of the adults' bustling political discussion.

To everyone's surprise, sophisticated AI geolocation algorithms and Youtube's autoplay function radically shifts from *Shāmi* (Levantine) airs of melancholia to the Lebanese national anthem. Samah starts singing along; a friend rushes to press "next," but it is too late; the child knows the lyrics by heart. Her parents catch on and gently remind her that she is Syrian, not Lebanese. As we approach midnight, fireworks start crackling outside, while the discussion centres on the Free Syrian Army (*Jaysh al-Hūr*).[7] The juxtaposition of war stories with the sounds of explosions creates a direct association with bombing that no one can escape.[8]

As flashes of colour traverse the night sky, guests confess how much they hate fireworks. It recalls the ongoing Syrian conflict for some, childhood memories of the Lebanese civil war for

[5] Nejat Sghirah and Faris al-Atrache were Syrian-Egyptian classical singers. Rafiq Shukri is a famous Damascene vocalist and *'ūd* player. Sabri Mūddalal is an Alepine Sufi vocalist trained as a *muezzin*. Fahed Ballan is a singer from Sūeida, South Syria, who found fame from the 60s through the 80s in all the Arab world. Like Samira Tawfiq, he sang in a Syrian *Bedū* (Bedouin) accent. Nour al Hoda and Sabah were Lebanese singers specializing in the traditional *mawwal* musical genre.

[6] The names of participants have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality and anonymity.

[7] *Jaysh al-Hor*, or the Free Syrian Army, was a coalition of decentralized armed resistance militias in the Syrian Civil War. Its aim was to defend the lives of protestors and civilians from the regime's brutality and to accomplish the goals of the Syrian revolution. The military wing of the Syrian people's opposition to the regime, it promotes secular nationalism, democracy, and anti-Assadism.

[8] Memory messily blends colliding temporalities; by connecting the present to the past, traumas reshuffle memory. Its "narratives circulate in conversation and belong to everyday discourse" (Ricoeur 2004, 12).

others, and the 2020 Beirut port explosion for all.[9] Samah, gleaming with joy, is the only one excited. Her earnest astonishment is manifest in her big smile, wide eyes and high-pitch cries: "*Iii!!! Shoufi, shouf!*" She goes around the table, trying to gather our attention, pulls our legs, urges us to "look!" and rushes to the balcony. Halting the adult conversation, we rein our pains back in and step out to let her admire the fireworks. Her parents pretend, for the sake of her happiness, that they think it is beautiful. They share this moment of joy with her, even though it is reminiscent of suffering for them.

She is the happiest child I have ever met.

* * *

If I were to retrace the spark of this project, it would be that evening, where I met Amir. We quickly delved into a conversation about music, a practice we share. He spoke to me of his passion for the *nāy Farsi* (Persian reed flute), which given my Iranian origins, I took as flattery. When I asked him about the *maqāmāt*[10] (Oriental melodic scales), he brushed over the modes that are shared across the region: "There are Kurdish, Turkish, Iranian melodic scales…"[11] Meanwhile, Samah fell asleep; Nawal got her dressed and ready to leave. Amir just had time to conclude: "The *maqāmāt* are the key to music. But what matters, is what you have in your heart".[12]

His comment has stayed with me, and continues to inspire my interest in Arab musical traditions and improvisation, and the role they play in the lived experience of Syrian displacement, which is the subject of this thesis. A week later, while scouting theatres in Beirut to film a dance scene choreagraphed for International Migrant Day, I ask about the lighting technician. I recognize this family name—"the *nāy* player?" I ask. Delighted by the coincidence, I contact Amir to announce that, by chance, we will be working together. He invites me to join his family at their home, where we spend a night of songs and stories. We wake up at dawn and hop on his

[9] The Beirut port explosion (*al-infijar al-marfah*) on August 4, 2020 was caused by unsafely stored ammonium nitrate for over six years; no one has yet claimed responsibility for this negligence. In terms of magnitude, it is the third largest urban explosion recorded in history, after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. The explosion caused 207 deaths, and left more than 6.500 injured Around 300,000 people lost their homes. This traumatic event for all scarred psyches, and again, the Beirut's walls.
[10] The *maqām* (pl. *maqāmāt*) is the traditional Arab tonal system based on a scale, forming the basis of a piece. Though often referred to as 'Oriental scales', musicologists warn that reducing the *maqāmāt* to scales "ignores important aspects of their dynamism as a performance principle." (Shannon 2006, 73). No Western terminology can adequately translate the *maqām*; "modal melodic type" comes closest, if it also formulates interval relationships (equivalent to tonality) and movement across tetrachords.
[11] "*Fi maqām Kūrdi, Tūrki, Irāni…*"
[12] *"Al- maqāmāt al-muftah al-musiqa. bas al-mohem, huwwe shou a'endek be qalbek."*

motorcycle. It is Sunday morning in Beirut; the city is still asleep. We cross Chiyah, turn at Tayouneh, and reach the theatre in Hamra to prepare the scene ahead. Ensued a deep friendship with many heart-to-heart discussions, even from afar.

Like Amir, I have met the other participants of this study through creative endeavours and personal contacts rather than formal organizations. These relationships have developed into friendships through collaboration and artistic creation. By playing music in Beirut, I met a vibrant community of Syrian musicians, who became artistic collaborators and interlocutors for this study.

Later that month, Amir tells me about the Syrian musicians living in the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley; "There is so much talent in the camps, but no one knows about them; their sound is buried—buried!" Letting the participants of this research redirect my attention to what they deem important, and putting my camera and sound recorder to the service of voices and musicians that want to be heard, are what motivated me to pursue this line of inquiry.

Project Background & Positionality

This research is the outcome of seven months of ethnographic fieldwork in Lebanon spanning from Fall 2022 to Spring 2024. I initially came to Beirut in Summer 2022 to work as a cinematographer on a documentary about migrant domestic workers. I then co-taught sonic documentary workshops in Palestinian refugee communities in South Lebanon, where I learned to hear the camp through their ears. The following two Winters, I offered filmmaking training to Palestinian young adults in a refugee camp in North Lebanon. By making a collectively authored film, I learned to see the camp through their eyes. To record the film's original score, I met many local vocalists, poets, and musicians who contributed time and talent. In the process, I learned about traditional Arab musical and poetic forms such as the *zajal*, *mawwal*, *muwashshah*, *majina*, *ataaba*, and *awihah*.[13] In 2024, I got involved in a transnational radio initiative connecting independent radios around the world, contributing to transfer sound recording and editing skills in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps. Throughout these experiences, I gained an informed understanding of the challenges faced by

[13] The *Zajal* is spoken poetry in the form of call and response (*soal o jawab*), where two groups or individuals are dialogically competing, responding to each other's improvisations and outdoing each other's eloquence. The *Majana* is a popular oratory duel where poets compete over the images they create in words. The *Mawwal* is a way of vocalizing a song's prelude. The *Ataba* genre relies on a '*false friend*' where two potential meanings emerge from the same sounds. The *Awihah* is an improvisation where female relatives of the bride bless her and shower her with compliments through song, a live composition in the call-and-response mode.

displaced, exiled, refugee and migrant communities in Lebanon, and discovered community-based initiatives across the country that strive to fill social, cultural, legal, and psychological needs.

The sonic focus of these projects deepened a sentiment that hovered over me after a decade working with images. The potential of sound as a medium that can be quickly be mastered, requires less costly tools, and easily travels, makes it more democratic and allows for self-representation to emerge. It is more dynamic as it reveals relationality and resonates with listeners abroad. It does not filter or frame like a camera does; it rather "picks up" layers that are sometimes imperceptible.

Coming to Lebanon after the country fell into an unprecedented political and financial crisis,[14] I encountered those who were not yet able to leave. As a foreigner in Lebanon, I made lasting friendships with other 'outsiders,' mostly of Syrian, Palestinian, and Ethiopian descent. My outsider positionality afforded me forms of access and intimacy that would not have been possible had I been a Lebanese 'insider,' given the participants' fraught experiences with their host society and the deep mistrust arising from the stark power imbalances.

Though I am also an outsider to the Syrian community, some factors provided me with a shared common ground upon which I could enter. I have spent half of the past decade living around the Middle East, learning to read and write my mother tongue, Farsi, through the intermediary of Arabic. Likewise, I am learning the *maqāmāt* before delving into the theory of the *dastgāh*.[1] I know that these traditions intersect and, in the case of music, derive from the same sources. Trained in Western classical music on the piano, it is when I renounced sheet music that I started reconnecting with sounds more familiar to my ear. In the process of unlearning most of my formal musical training, I also relearned how to listen and tune in to the sounds that inhabit me, so to play the melodies that I had absorbed aurally. Moreover, as a filmmaker and musician engaging with other artists, there was a sense of mutuality that derived from our shared dedication to a creative practice. I relate to the need to communicate in non-linguistic means, through music or images, for a more intuitive and unrestrictive mode of expression that transcends language.

My advanced fluency in Levantine Arabic proved indispensable to conduct research effectively in the participants' mother tongue, and contributed to establish intimacy in our conversations. Though I am not a native speaker, research participants spoke Arabic in a non-

[14] By August 2019, Lebanon fell into one of the most devastating economic crisis since the 19th century, its currency losing 90% of its value. With the '17 October Revolution' and subsequent fall of governance that same year, the country still grapples with political instability. Precarity under a crippled economy and, more recently, the lack of safety in South Lebanon, has pushed millions of Lebanese abroad. Since 2019, emigration is estimated to have peaked at an all-time high in post-war Lebanon.

dominant vernacular dialect, and, as such, are generally more flexible in understanding different pronunciations and forgiving small mistakes. This working proficiency enabled me to conduct research without enlisting an interpreter in the field, or a translator to analyze findings.

While I can visibly 'pass' as Lebanese, I was often asked if I am Syrian when people tried to decipher my origins based on physical and vocal cues. The way I speak Arabic sometimes sounds "broken" (*maksour*), my accent "off" or "strange" (*qarib*) to the perceptive. To some extent, being ambiguously perceived as an insider/outsider in Lebanese society, a position revealed by my accent, helped me better understand what Syrians endure daily in Lebanese society. The political tension at the time of my fieldwork heightened the threat of liminality. I was asked by my landlord to never reveal my Iranian origins and to speak English or French over Arabic, connoting privilege and foreignness, as to not be "detected" by my accent. I had to learn to soften my guttural "qaf", whisper my "heh", and drop-in colloquial slang to avoid sounding 'other,' and therefore suspicious. Staying silent and diverting the curiosity of neighbours and shopkeepers was a draining experience that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are accustomed to, with far more real repercussions.

This introduction offers an overview of the project's background and of the people at its center. I follow with a detailed research outline which presents my research questions and argument, a literary review, an overview of my methods, as well as my theoretical and ethical frameworks for this project. Chapter 1 includes an in-depth discussion of the histories and geographies that contextualize the study, elaborating its thematic and theoretical concerns. I retrace the history of Syrian displacement in Lebanon and address narratives of belonging and otherization processes following the 2019 Lebanese revolution. I follow with my thesis on Syrian experiences of discrimination in Lebanon as "audible others", expanding my arguments on vocal identities. Chapters 2 and 3 turn to field research and ethnography, forming the core of this research. While Chapter 2 focuses on heritage politics, sonic memory, and family life in the rural Beqaa Valley, in chapter 3, I turn to urban music trajectories, place-making, and cosmopolitanism in Beirut. The conclusion addresses the cognitive dissonance induced by exile and the virtual transnational voyages of sound, before offering a summary and discussion of key arguments.

Participants

The Syrian musicians whose experiences I describe in these pages have been living in Lebanon for about a decade. These artists came to Lebanon as refugees fleeing war and political persecution, the consequence of a pacific civilian revolution turned tragic civil war. Without seeking to essentialize, generalize, or encompass the diversity of Syrian experiences in Lebanon, I have tried to include a variety of voices in this ethnography. Gender representation was a natural outcome of undertaking fieldwork as a woman, filling an important gap in this area of research. Participants also occupy different positions within Lebanese society, which affect their thinking and musical practice; all articulated stances that have shaped my ethnographic account.

I conducted research with four musicians—two women, Reem and Yara, and two men, Issa and Amir, aged between 16 and 38—who shed light on the different identities that develop in displacement and how they intersect with gender and age through experiences of migration. These musicians come from both urban and rural backgrounds, reflecting a small part of Syria's diversity, where each region harbours its own distinct cultural identity. Their sites of displacement, in Beirut and in the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley, further contrast urban and rural migratory trajectories. All four musicians have split families; while elders mostly stayed behind in Syria, siblings are spread over Europe and beyond.

Amir lives in Beirut with his wife, Nawal, and their seven year-old daughter, Samah, who was born in Lebanon. They come from Dara'a, the rural region of South Syria that birthed the revolution. Amir built his own *nāy*[15] (reed flute) as a child, what remained his main instrument ever since. He says it is thanks to the *nāy* that he was able to flee Syria. "If it wasn't for the *nāy*…". A self-taught musician who pursued autodidactic study[16], he can be found perfecting his technique every night, despite long work hours and a family to provide for.

Amir grew up in a family of informally trained musicians. His mother, still in Syria, sings many folk songs and lives with his sister, an accordionist and music teacher. His two brothers are exiled; while one plays the keyboard (*org*) for weddings in Jordan, the other performs Andalusian guitar in Spain. Though hailing from a rural region, Amir initially lacked contacts in Beirut, his talent and charisma helped him obtain the support of a Lebanese *kafil*[17] (sponsor) working in the

[15] The *nāy* is an open-ended, obliquely held reed-flute whose sound carries particular symbolic meaning, as will be discussed.
[16] These days, Amir perfects his technique with *maqām* exercices, using the method of Ustād Mohammad Fityan, an Aleppine *nāy* master who publishes free lessons online. See www.fityan-academy.com.
[17] Often referred to as a 'sponsor', a *kafil* is a legal guarantor for migrants who must be a Lebanese business-owner.

arts. In 2013, he found refuge in Beirut, where he works as a lighting technician for theatres across the city and plays the *nāy*, *mūjwez* (double-reed flute) or *'ud* as part of traditional ensembles.

Reem and Yara come from the town of Saida in Dara'a, South Syria. They were aged nine and six respectively when their family fled to South Lebanon in 2013, and have since grown up "moving from tent to tent" in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Now aged sixteen and nineteen, the sisters have faint memories of their childhoods in Syria. They live with their family of eight in a single-bedroom pre-fabricated UNHCR tent in one of the many informal tented settlement[18] near Bar Elias, along the Syrian border, between two long stretches of wheat fields.

Reem is a gifted multi-instrumentalist who plays the *'ūd* (luth), *būzūq* (lyre), and cello. She practices daily for long hours with her younger sister Yara, who recently graduated from a four-year study in singing and clarinet. The sisters started their musical practice at the Bar Elias Community Center, where the NGO Action for Hope (*'Amal al-Amal*) offers musical training. As part of their curiculum, they learned the *maqāmāt* (Oriental melodic scales), the *solfège*[19] (Western music notation), and Syrian folk songs on their chosen instruments. The sisters help support their family by teaching music to other refugee youth in the Beqaa, and by performing as part of concerts in Baalbek or Beirut. Their father, Kareem, a fierce defender of the Syrian cultural heritage and of his daughters' musical pursuits, is also a research participant in his own right. Though more a philosopher than a musician, his views on art have a great influence on his children. Parental support contributes greatly to make Reem and Yara's aspirations possible, as will be discussed.

Issa migrated to Beirut as a young adult in 2012 with his Damascene metal band. His urban social network helped him migrate from capital to capital. Issa hails from a lineage of formally trained musicians. His father, an accordionist, is related to Rafiq Shukri, a famous Syrian composer, '*ūd* player, and vocalist. Trained in classical percussion at Syria's Higher Institute of Music in Damascus, Issa is an accomplished drummer who played for the Syrian National Orchestra and toured the Middle East and Europe extensively before the start of the Syrian war.

[18] Though called 'camps' (*mokhayem*) by its residents, the official term, 'informal tented settlements', is important to understand the context and conditions of Syrian refugee settlements in Lebanon. The Lebanese government prohibited the construction of official UN camps to house Syrian refugees, fearing the "Palestinization" of these settlements, and a gathering "permanence" taking hold. All Syrian settlements in Lebanon are therefore informal, "irregular" and do not come with formal infrastructural services.

[19] *Solfège* is a method used to teach aural musical skills, pitch and sight-reading in Western music. It offers a way to distinguish notes acoustically, optically and by way of speech and signs. While sight-reading can be useful, listening skills are essential in order to play Arab music, due to its microtones. The First Congress of Arab Music, held in Cairo in 1932**,** gathered musicologists, composers, and music educators from the Arab world and from Europe in an attempt to transpose the *maqāmāt* into Western notation. Though this endeavour was regarded as unsuccessful according to many Arab music scholars, nowadays, *solfège* is taught in Arab conservatories to read sheet music. As such, the *solfège* represents a legacy of the region's colonial history.

Now a prolific member of Lebanon's music scene, he performs with his successful rock band and as part of jazz bands or indie groups in venues around Beirut. He collaborated with big names in the Lebanese music industry, including Ziad Rahbani and Zeid Hamdan. When I speak to Issa about his current musical projects, he moves fluently between different genres, be it jazz, metal, rock, contemporary (*mo'aser*), experimental (*tajrobi*), or "fusion".

These musicians are knowledgeable in various repertoires, spanning cosmopolitan 'Westernized' genres and traditional Syrian music. Whether "professional-trained" musicians with degrees from conservatories or "self-taught" musicians who professionalized under the migratory conditions in Lebanon, I did not recruit participants based on such labels. Formal education is not a requirement for musical accomplishment, especially in a primarily oral musical tradition where musicians draw from various learning environments—parental or informal apprenticeships with master musicians and vocalists, musician networks, autodidactic or online study—rather than institutionalized forms of study. The opposition between "self-taught" and "professional" does not account for interrupted schooling due to war, limited training opportunities, and the difficulty finding or affording skilled instructors for the instrument and tradition pursued once displaced. Moreover, granting the 'professional' label based on work opportunities does not account for the diminished forms of employment that displaced musicians experience. Therefore, I chose to work with individuals that are recognized as talented artists within the community of Syrian musicians in Lebanon, regardless of their training history and performance record.

I also include insights of interlocuters who were not research participants *per se*, but who helped me frame the specificity of refugeehood in Lebanon departing from their own experiences. These are the voices of Syrian artists in Lebanon and Europe who recalled their years in Beirut, their point of transit before reaching their country of asylum. What results from this approach is a polyphonic narrative with a few leading voices, a 'stereophony' (Barthes 1985) in vernacular tongues where individual journeys reveal shifting relations, ties, and identities.

Research Outline

Research Questions & Argument

Retracing rural and urban trajectories of displacement through sound, this research tends to the preservation and transformation of the Syrian musical heritage in Lebanon. The questions I explore involve the artistic expression of migrant subjectivities and subjecthood. Pursuing ways of knowing sonically, I ask how Syrian music has been altered by displacement—and, in turn, how Syrian musicians' experiences of displacement have been altered by music.

What happens after 13 years—when an environment is no longer exactly new, nor old, where refugee children grow up losing what little they might remember of their past life? While the act of remembering may help combat culture loss, can today's generation remember *for* past generations? Though collective memory can be suppressed or erased, it can also be invoked as a strategy for "speaking back" to dominant narratives. I argue that heritage represents living memory, not artefacts, that manifests in everyday practices oriented towards futurity, asserting individual and collective agency. Although the "Syrian musical heritage is striving to find its place amidst … the conservatory-based Western classical music, sustained by governments and conservatories, and the new popular music, sustained by a large market economy" (Shannon 2016, 223), it is also being preserved by young culture bearers. By re-territorializing traditional folk songs in exile, second-generation Syrian refugee youth and what I call the "1.5 generation"[20] are now purveyors of culture. These acts of preservation necessarily introduce questions about how "authenticity" and meaning are understood and passed on. Which modes of being do melodies preserve? Which symbols do lyrics ignite?

The ways in which Syrian refugees are disenfranchised in Lebanon underscores the significance of music in this context. Tending to the poetics of aurality in speech and song offers a different perspective on the making of social, political, and symbolic worlds in refugeehood. I suggest that oral and musical expression are shaped by individual, social and political forces, and recast displacement as situated, collective, embodied, and affective. Instead of seeking "the 'exotic,' the 'authentic,' or the 'ecstatic' (Shannon 2006), common Orientalist tropes in musicology and anthropology of the Middle East, I examine music creation as an everyday form of sociality, agency, and livelihood. I ask how sonic memory can help envision Syrian futures,

[20] I call the generation "1.5" the ones who have fled as children and keep only faint memories from home.

especially for second-generation refugee youth. Refugee communities employ various strategies for cultural revival. Music is a way to sustain traditions, families, memories, belonging, and a sense of community. For some of the musicians in this study, learning the Syrian musical heritage (*al-tūrāth al-mūsīqī al-Sūri*) is an active form of resistance, which close ethnographic investigation can reveal.

Music and voices help reveal the process of harmonizing displaced identities. How do Syrian musicians in Lebanon "negotiate cultural differences, otherness, and belonging as part of the activities and spaces of everyday life (…) while retaining awareness of the historical, political and geographical contexts in which they are also immersed" (Doughty 2019, 5)? What can music, voices, accents, listening habits, sonic aesthetics, music transmission, improvisation and performance tell us about the negotiation of selves in a sectarian society? How does sonic re-rooting take place from afar, or help project oneself in the future? What can music tell us about the urge to safekeep, and desire to transform? How have traditional musical binaries—classical/folk, traditional/contemporary, sacred/profane—been negotiated anew? What meanings and connotations did songs and genres acquire once displaced?

What became valuable in exile might not find the same value in a village of origin. Mirroring this situation, genres once associated with the elite became popular in exile. I examine transformations resulting from forced migration such as the classicization of folk music and the ruralisation of urban musical aesthetics, that have remapped patterns of rurality and urbanity.

Syrian refugees are increasingly part of transnational communities and networks that make them formulate wider belongings, moving beyond longing. Transformations in affinities and worldviews induced by displacement are reflected in song, a privileged terrain to understand roots and rootlessness, homogeneity and heterogeneity; "we cannot ignore the changes to subjectivity this process entails emotionally, internally, and subjectively to the very musicians who are trying to maintain their musical identity" (Habash 2021, 1384). Whether rediscovering one's heritage or transforming one's plural sound, I explore how Syrian musicians in Lebanon respond critically to expected performances through creative assemblages of distant elements that refigure notions of 'authenticity' and agency. I ask "what is performed when cultural sounds and languages are overlaid, mixed, combined and commingled" (Shannon 2006, 21).

In Lebanon, Syrian migrants are not described as refugees or asylum-seekers but as *nazehiin*, a pejorative term that connotes rural labour workers. Due to their temporary status or

lack thereof, they are seen as humanitarian assistance subjects rather than political agents with integral rights. Shifting the discussion on "citizenship" from a legal status to a focus on human experience, mobility, and agency provides a useful tool to discuss the impact of Syrian musicians in Lebanon's public life. Holding a liminal position in Lebanon, Syrian refugees are culturally somewhat 'at home,' yet are scapegoated by dominant society for the country's collapse. This state of limbo, between belonging and exclusion, poses a threat of cultural acculturation in particular ways. How does the discrimination that Syrian refugees withstand in Lebanon operate, despite the absence of racial or ethnic differences with their hosts? How are Syrians conceived as 'others' in Lebanese imaginaries, and how is their difference perceived, if not visibly?

Conceptualizing displacement as the existential condition of being 'other,' my research considers identity articulated orally, phonetically, linguistically and musically. I argue that a focus on voice, for its grain that reveals one's biography (Barthes 2009) and for its capacity to illuminate intersubjectivity in encounters, is a useful angle of analysis to address the lived experiences of "audible others" in a sectarian society. I call 'audible others' those who, despite the absence of visible differences with host society, are detected as 'others' aurally. I argue that Syrian experiences of discrimination in Lebanon are based on phenotype and slight variations in dialectal accents; a difference they must train themselves to dissimulate to deal with power relations in daily encounters. The vocal identities that Syrians perform in daily social interactions with soldiers, police officers, shopkeepers, and citizens reveal such challenges. Code-switching between vernaculars, taking on colloquial accents, or choosing silence over speech are some of the tactics (De Certeau 1984) used to navigate xenophobia and prejudice, or to pass checkpoints. The "proper" repertoires and accented voices the Syrian musicians must learn to perform and emulate in Lebanon shed light on national imaginaries and boundaries of permissible identities. Orality is the terrain where past, present and future are made audible.

As a practice of translation and dialogue that is directed towards research participants, my ethnography addresses issues of xenophobia, sectarianism and social tensions in Lebanon at a time of deepening precarity. Anchored in the catastrophic post-2019 context, after its economic and political collapse, and withstanding Israel's war on South Lebanon, this research exposes the consequences of ever-worsening conditions on the lives of Syrian refugees. I draw an ethnographic portrait of Syrian musicians in Lebanon asking what role music plays in their lives, and what it can tell us about their experiences of displacement.

Commented [MOU1]: fn:strategy as a tool to maintain the given power relations in its domain. Tactics, on the other hand, are the tools of the "weak" or subordinate.)
In addition to being an economic activity,6 I consider the street practices **of Syrian musicians as a tool they use to incorporate themselves into** the public space. In this respect, this article proposes street music practice and its use of the public space as a political act and focuses on **migrant musicians as political actors.**7

Syrian musicians as actors who participate in the conversation on this stage, not by talking (through language) but by singing (through music);

being actors in public spaces requires them to develop new skills. While explaining **these skills,** or, in other words, their choices and acts on this stage, I apply the term "tactic" as employed by Michel De Certeau (1984), **who suggests it as a tool of the subordinate in dealing with daily power relations**. Lastly, I argue that this musical practice is a political act in itself.

Commented [MOU2]:
is your project also directed toward your research participants? have they read it (or will you send it to them)?

Literary Review & Research Scope

Syrian Music and Displacement

While there is now a large body of literature on Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon, most of these studies investigate citizenship rights, socioeconomic hardships, educational or infrastructural needs, and offer policy recommendations for international development agencies. While I do not wish to gloss over the oppression, institutional injustices and suffering endured by these communities, I chose to redirect attention to something that has largely been neglected in such scholarship: the forms of creativity and self-expression with which Syrians strive to bring order and meaning to their daily lives, amidst inflicted chaos. Cultural rights are an integral component of human rights,[21] yet are often overlooked. Despite the constraints imposed by discriminatory laws and societal prejudices, I hope to show how Syrian musicians in Lebanon reclaim cultural rights through their creative practices. I argue that they retain agency by critically responding to and performing against expectations that the international donor community and mainstream Lebanese society has of them as refugees. I draw on critical voices in migration studies, especially those addressing Syrian labour and displacement in Lebanon (Malkki 1996, Chalcraft 2008, Picard 2016, Habib & al. 2019). I also engage with and problematize the literature on "refugee voices" to further challenge tropes of passivity and foreground refugee agency.

The thesis builds on recent scholarship on Syrian music and musicians in various contexts, including in displacement. Ethnographies on the musical practices of Syrian refugees in Turkey (Habash 2021, Öğüt 2021, Shannon 2019) and Europe (Silverstein & Sprengel 2021, Parzer 2020) are often framed around the 'integration' of Syrian refugees in 'multicultural' societies. Along with studies on the sonic practices of Syrian refugees in Jordan (Boswall & Al-Akash 2017) and on lyricism among Syrian diasporas in Argentina and Brazil (Espinosa 2020, Moser & Racy 2017), they have helped me contrast different aesthetic imaginaries deriving from other positions of exile and pinpoint the specificity of Syrian displacement in Lebanon, a particularly liminal position that further challenges notions of identity and belonging given their cultural similarities.

In contrast with other countries of displacement, my thesis sheds light on a reality that differs in three major ways: first, Lebanon is thought of as a point of transit rather than a final destination for Syrian refugees who are waiting to obtain asylum elsewhere; second, Syrians in

[21] The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001, Article 5. According to the 2009 UN Human Rights Council Resolution's point 5, "States have the responsibility to promote and protect cultural rights".

Lebanon are culturally and linguistically "at home", yet hold an ambivalent position as former occupiers, a relation fraught by the decades-long Syrian military occupation of Lebanon (1976-2005); third, Syrian musicians perform at, with, and for Lebanese audiences and venues. They have revitalized Beirut's music scene and found Lebanese allies in the indie culture scene.

To examine Syrian music-making in Lebanon and examine how these modes differ from their original setting, I reviewed music education in post-war Syria (Chahin 2023) and read the few recent ethnographies on Syrian folk music and resistance songs (Kalach 2020; Mostolizadeh 2019). I compared these analyses with a 2020 pedagogical guide published by the NGO 'Action for Hope,' who delivers musical training in the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley. This collective publication,[22] written in Arabic by Syrian music educators, challenges conservatory methods and proposes new ways of engaging students by tapping into their own cultural heritage. The inclusion of Syrian folk scores helped me identify part of the repertoire that has been preserved and, to some extent, the musical aesthetics that have come to represent heritage and belonging in refugeehood.

Most research on Syrian music predates the 2011 war and addresses liturgical and classical genres.[23] By focusing on folk heritage (*turāth*), rural (*baladi*), popular (*sha'bi*) and contemporary (*mo'aser*) music, this study foregrounds genres neglected by scholarship and documents intangible cultural heritage. Its scope is delineated by the participants; I offer an account of the musical styles I have encountered over the course of my research. These include folk songs[24] from rural areas, a rich oral culture in colloquial tongues, as well as "fusion" or cosmopolitan contemporary genres. The time period covered by this study spans from the participants' recollections of the "height" of the Syrian music scene in Beirut, as of 2012, to a crisis-ridden Lebanon after the 2019 revolution, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and the owar on Gaza and South Lebanon that is ongoing in 2024.

Music acquires heightened power at moments of encounter, both as a means of preserving existing boundaries and in the creation of new identities. Harmonizing identities in displacement may operate by preserving the Syrian musical heritage or by hybridising one's sound. The anthropologist Michael Jackson thought "[t]he migrant is obliged to re-member himself, to constantly piece together, like a bricoleur, new assemblages from the various aspects of his past and present selves" (2011, 205). Whether the process of reconciling one's former and present

[22] "New Sound: A Guide to Teach Different Music: The experience of Action for Hope in Teaching Music" *Sot jdid: dalil ila ta'lim musiqi badil: bna 'ala tajrobet madares al-'amal al-amal al-musiqie.* (My translation). Action for Hope, 2020.
[23] Well-researched genres include the Sufi practices of *sama'* and *dhikr*, liturgical chants, and the classical urban *tarab* genre.
[24] The debate between *aghāni* (song) and *mūsiqā* (music) in the Arab world distinguishes songs with lyrics from instrumental music. In the modern period, and as a consequence of the Cairo Congress, *mūsiqā* has come to refer to instrumental music only.

belonging leads to aesthetic cosmopolitanism or to the rediscovery of lost folk, I argue that music, as a non-logocentric form of expression, offers a medium that may escape cultural and linguistic divides. By communicating in "another language," the musicians in this study refigure notions of "authenticity" and revisit nation-state constructions as encounters of friction and integration, what Stoever called "the sonic colour line" (2017). Music, as a polysemic, subjective experience, plays a role in the reactualization and transformation of selves in the face of social transformation.

Sound as Epistemology

This project explores ways of knowing through sound to understand how vocal selves are reshaped in displacement. It rests on the idea that culture is as much heard as it is felt and seen. Of all mediums, sound—including voice and music—might be best suited to represent processes of cultural transmission, as music and language are learned aurally and transmitted orally. The sociality of music as a "cultural activity" (Merriam 1969, 217) or "learned behavior" (1964, 27) is particularly true for folk music, which forms a collective repository of practices inscribed in the embodied memory of practitioners[25], summoned as means of storing and transmitting knowledge.

Steven Feld's call for a sounded anthropology, not only *of* sound but *in* sound, was field defining. His theory of 'acoustemology'[26] "inquires into what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening" (Feld 2004, 11). Indigenous scholars equally emphasize sound and music as *knowledge* (Robinson 2020; Simpson 2004; Oliveros 1993) with attuned, critical listening as a favoured mode of analysis. Ecomusicologists understand music as a *sound-world* integrated into a local ecosystem and seek how a musical performance both affects and is affected by the broader cultural, social, and geographical environment in which it manifests.

Sonic cultures of the Arab world, where aural arts such as poetry and psalmody are highly esteemed cultural forms, have shaped an "oral aesthetics of performance and listening" (Shannon 2006, xviii). Perhaps also a result of Islam's iconoclasm, the spiritual importance of the sense of hearing (*sama'*) in Arab and Muslim civilizations is underscored by sonic practices such as the call to prayer (*adhan*), Quranic recitation (*nowah*), chanting verses to remember God (*dhikr),* listening to liturgical or mystical recitation (*samā*), and the poetic traditions of lament and elegy (*rithā'*). Though these religious practices are not considered 'music' as such, they emphasize the

[25] See Diana Taylor, *The Archive And The Repertoire,* 2016.
[26] Feld coined 'acoustemology', a term which conjoins "acoustics" and "epistemology" to theorize sound as a way of knowing.

spiritual potential of sonic phenomena, to which the human soul would be particularly susceptible. Music is an important medium for transcendence in Sufi traditions, and can induce a state of 'flow', cause spiritual awakening (*wajd*) or even rapture (*saltanāh*) in players and listeners. The wide use of Sufi terminology in Arab musical jargon attests to this relationship; one undertakes a path (*masir*) through the melody's journey (*rehla*) as it soars in the air (*sayir*) before reaching a temporal margin (*barzakh;* where souls rest before the hereafter). Amorphous, immaterial and transcendent, sound is spiritual by nature given its immateriality—it spreads like gas, travels far and wide, in water and air. It could be said that listening "makes the invisible present" (Ihde 1976, 51).

Turning to emic sound epistemologies, my research is informed by early treatises on classical Arab music theory by medieval Arab philosophers, sociologists and musicologists such as al-Kindi (850), al-Fārābi (950), al-Ghazali (12th CE), al-Isfahani (1131), Ibn Khaldun (1377), Ibn Roshd (1150), and Ikhwan Al-Safa' (10th CE). Other archival sources include records of the First Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo in 1932, traditional Syrian music recordings from the 1950s onwards, *maqāmāt* transcriptions, and modern French sources (d'Erlanger 1930). These documents retrace the Westernization of Arab music in the 20th century. Contemporary Arab music scholars (Abbas 2018, Kassab-Hassan 2008, Racy 2003, al-Qal'ah 1997, Touma 1996) provided invaluable insights into Arab music theory. I considered the emotional codification of the *maqāmāt* to understand music as a symbolic and affective realm.[27] The association between scales and sentiments has survived to this day as an encultured way of feeling and reacting to music. Offering a potent tool for emotional release, "transformative blending" (Racy 2003) helps to harmonize contrasting emotions. A survey of research in music therapy (Parker & Mufti 2016, Heynen & al. 2022) support my discussions on the psychosocial role of music in daily life amid displacement.

Musical heritage can help displaced Syrian communities sustain an active relationship with their pasts and history, igniting communal memory (Shelemay 2001) and providing a sense of continuity. As Jacques Attali has argued, music is "a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community" (1985, 6). In the face of dislocation, artists may cultivate traditional repertoires as a means of securing a connection to selves. By linking heritage to futurity, I point to the potential of improvisation as a musical form that both safekeeps the past and builds upon it.

[27] Early music dictionnaries attribute particular moods and feelings to each *maqam,* allowing listeners to intuit what emotions are conveyed in song. Al-Kindi is said to have been inspired by Platonician and Aristotelian beliefs in a relation between musical harmony and the soul, and in recognizing music's psychological effects. He recorded the emotive codification of the *maqāmāt* in early treatises.For instance, *maqām Sabā* is known to be sad and mournful, while *Bayāt* is joyful.

Methods

While this project relies primarily on anthropological methods and literature, it also draws on musicology, linguistics, philosophy, performance theory, psychology and history to form its arguments. It is directed to researchers interested in sound studies, music and migration in the Near East. By addressing the politics of ethnographic collaboration, the ethics of representation, and the ability of audiovisual mediums to convey affective knowledge, this study also engages with ongoing debates in visual anthropology, media-making, and critical theory.

Conducting a form of slow ethnography, I trace a set of issues - flexibly and patiently - with my interlocutors. Long-term research with fewer participants permits vertical depth rather than horizontal breadth, privileging the qualitative over the quantitative. The participatory nature of this research sought to carve spaces where presence, agency and critical self-representation could emerge, inviting participants to address concerns that *they* deem important. I situate their insights using the narrative device of the anecdote, or 'ethnographic vignette.' Using participant observation as a research method means my source materials include many conversations, which were all conducted in Arabic. Given that I favoured informal conversations over formal interviews, I also relied on fieldnotes and memory to record these conversations and observations.

As a researcher, filmmaker, media trainer and novice learner of the music studied, I practice a form of relating that is closer to that of an artist. I use multimodal methods and my experience in image and sound to deepen and illuminate my anthropological investments. I carried multimodal research from "feeling the limits of language to convey the complexity of human experience" (Allan 2022, 304). In *Departure Melodies*, the short film that accompanies this text, I tried to convey the affective and embodied dimensions of music and social life.

Audiovisual Methods

With the consent of participants, I recorded and sometimes filmed their musical practices, public performances, and some of our conversations. As performing musicians, they are used to being on stage and on-camera. Recording and mixing their compositions, filming their performances for their own portfolios, and teaching photography to their spouses and children, are some of the ways that I was able to give back.

The benefits of audiovisual mediums for ethnographic research are manifold: they allow participants to narrate selves, challenging misrepresentations; they tend to the present rather than

the past or future (the typical temporalities of traditional interviews); and they help reveal (inter)subjective experiences and dynamics. Filming, "itself a mode of thought and of being" (Gallope 2017, 253), conveys knowledge that is not just conceptual and verbal, but also attitudinal (Crapanzano 2004). As a practice of witnessing and a moment of encounter, filming is a form of participant observation that attests to experience and relationality. Following cultural theorist Susan Sontag, in research, as in film, we should learn to recover our senses; "we must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more" (1966, 104). I turn to music as a means to open up cultural and social worlds, focusing on audition as an incorporated feeling of experience and relation.

Music displays affective, embodied and aural knowledge that audiovisual mediums are best suited to capture. Audiovisual recordings form relevant documents in the case of living oral musical traditions that are not always transposed into notation. Sound recordings also permit a verbatim transcription, showing how participants articulate their own experiences and putting forth their eloquence. In transcribing and translating filmed interviews, I had the advantage of having recorded pronunciation, intonation, emphatic cues, gestures and emotions.[28] I noted these non-verbal cues much like a playwright would, as they all contribute meaning to speech.

I interpreted materials using thematic analysis to delineate prevalent concepts and frameworks, and employed discourse analysis to study subtext, register and context, evaluating power dynamics behind utterances. With repeated viewings at the editing stage, filmmaking entails a 'close reading' of materials. In the process, it provides glimpses of other possible meanings and contributes to a "thick description" (Geertz 1973).

Listening as Method

Focusing on what Syrian refugees suffer from, rather than what sustains them, might leave us deaf to the rich Syrian culture and the voices of its inspiring artists and thinkers. It may even amplify the vulnerability of Syrian refugees when we voice *issues* rather than *listen*. The political importance of listening as an ethnographic method is central to my approach. Adopting a posture of "deep listening" (Oliveros 1993) helped me develop an "ethics of listening" (Hirschkind 2006) in order "to speak nearby; not about" (Minh-Ha 1992). In music, especially in group improvisation, one must listen and make space to reach harmony; a process of attunement that requires presence

[28] Historian Rosemary Sayegh contrasted "body-straight" Classical Arabic (*fus-ha*) from spoken Arabic dialects that "are accompanied by a rich repertoire of facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements." (Sayegh in Allan 2021, 295).

and deep listening. I strived to apply the same precepts in conducting this ethnography. In other words, I tried to get my ears as close to their world as I could (Feld 2004),

This research is animated by an investment in new forms of listening which are required for researchers to get beyond logocentric limitations, as "voice" is not always or only expressed through "speech" (Parpart & Kabeer 2010). This entails honing the ability to "listen and hear" voices when they are silent (Jackson 2012) and to "be attuned to their unsayable truths, to perceive their quiet frequencies of possibility" (Campt 2017, 45). The goal is to listen otherwise, while "abandoning the teleological quest for meaning and understanding" (Rangan 2017, 286). I used sound as a method and as an angle of analysis for its capacity to communicate ways of knowing and being beyond 'vococentrism' (Nancy 2009, x).

In listening with displacement (Western 2020), I tended to soundscapes, to the environmental sounds of collectivity, to what is heard and what is not, to accents in speech, and to music. I attended settings where music was performed, listened to, rehearsed, shared, and made, in both rural refugee settlement contexts and in Beirut. I attended private rehearsals in homes, gaining insights on the place music holds in everyday lives, and family attitudes towards music. I attended participants' concerts and jam sessions in a variety of venues. In some instances I was invited to visit them at their workplaces, stepping backstage in theatres, in a cotton-candy factory in the suburbs of Beirut, or between wheat crops in the Beqaa Valley.

The particular acoustics of the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley obstruct sonic privacy and intimacy. Wind whistles between packed rows of tents and gusts flap their vinyl walls, whose thickness may not surpass 10 centimetres. The provisional infrastructure of homes allows baby cries and intimate conversations to leak through walls. In Beirut, the few hours of daily electricity limit electronic music practice; the cost of data curtails music streaming; silence, archives, or live music are chosen as alternatives; buzzing generators create a constant low-hum that underlies music recordings, live concerts, and daily life. In both environments, listening brings its own sets of challenges but also a richness of sonic meaning. Noise can be seen as a limitation, or as imbuing other layers of meaning to the act of listening to musical forms.

Reem and Yara's father, Kareem, taught me the importance of listening beyond words. He spoke of the "language of the listener" (*lūghat al-edn*) and the ability of non-human life forms to communicate—birds, trees, waves—"each in their own language." I adopt his understanding of the "language of the melody" (*lūghat al-lahn*) and second his claim about music as language. In

catering to the nonreferential aspects of spoken language—the sonorous, musical, and averbal forms of testimony—deep listening necessarily involves listening *beyond* text, to the way music allows people to bind and transform and transcend their situation. It seeks what lays behind the visible, to grasp how the world presents itself when we *listen* to rather than *look* upon it.

Following Steven Feld's practice of "listening to histories of listening" (2015, 17), I tended to historical forms that are carried sonically across generations and displacement. Discourses about music and listening habits[29] uncover aesthetics, which constitute the "point of entry into subjective experience, in all of the latter's psychological, phenomenological, and political valences" (Allan 2012, 165). I examined aesthetic values accorded to different peoples, places, and times—Syria and Lebanon; rurality and urbanity; the past, present, and future—to understand how collective memory is imagined in exile, and to unpack the interaction of intersecting musical cultures.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I attended many *sahrat* (*soirées*) where I was invited to 'listen together' (*nestema'*), the focus being on appreciating music. Listening *to* but also *with* others amplifies certain things and muffles others, and points to how it might be heard otherwise. I learned how my interlocutors distinguish "good" from "great" performances by comparing recordings, often with the late Syrian tenor vocalist Sabah Fakhri as a reference. I learned that, from their perspectives, the emotional effect of a performance outplays vocal skill or accuracy. This process revealed how listening "is a directed, learned activity: it is a definite cultural practice" (Sterne 2015, 19). Achieving this aesthetic awareness was carried out in the company of musicians and audiophiles, who possess a valuable skill. As musicologist Jonathan Shannon noted in his research in pre-war Syria, "listening itself is a performative and creative act" (2006, 161).

I employed musicology methods in the analysis of lyrics, recordings and available scores to investigate realms such as vocal treatment, the place of improvisation, and affect in performance. Learning to recognize Arab melodic scales (*maqāmāt)* and rhythmic patterns (*iqā'āt*) helped me retrace the origins of songs, understand their correlations with urbanity or rurality, and situate them within a wider history and geography of Oriental music.[30] There is much to be gained by incorporating sound as part of our toolkits to understand social realities. By writing around materials, in the manner of CD liner notes, music leaves more room for interpretation.

[29] Murray Schafer asks, "Who's listening? What are they listening to? What are they ignoring or refusing to listen to?" (1986, 14).
[30] In referring to "*mūsiqa sharqiye*" (Oriental music), participants designate a Middle Eastern repertoire comprising Egyptian, Levantine, Turkish and Persian musical traditions.

Theoretical Background

This study centers on orality as cultural transmission and aurality as everyday speech and as song. It builds on recent advances in sound studies (Chen Chye Tan 2012; Eidsheim 2019; Gatt & Lembo 2022; Ochoa Gauthier 2014; Ranjan 2016; Robinson 2020; Weidman 2014, 2020) to reveal intersectional forces present in voices. Together with philosophy and cultural theory (Adorno 1976; Foucault 1967; Rancière 2004; Gallope 2017; Shapiro 2019), I analyze speech performatives as ways to navigate public spaces and social stigma. I take inspiration from linguistic anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1962; Derrida 1985) and performance theory (Taylor 2016) to address the production and interpretation of difference in vocality. I hope to contribute to an emerging field of scholarship on critical listening and on sound, music and voice in contexts of displacement, migration, and exile (Western 2020; Silverstein & Sprengel 2021; Chávez 2017).

Syrian music has transformed the Lebanese cultural scene and, in turn, displacement in Lebanon has transformed Syrian music. I second the position that "the study of relations has now, arguably, become the study of the culture itself" (Nercessian 2002, 18). To perform for Lebanese audiences, Syrian musicians must expand certain skills, or "tactics" (de Certeau 1984), used to navigate xenophobia and deal with daily power relations. Voicing and music-making involve techniques of the body (Mauss 1934) and embodied knowledge whose inherent performativity may momentarily suspend political divisions or gendered taboos (Abu-Lughod 1986).

Music, performance and orality are forms of resistance to acculturation, and ways to voice and transform one's identity. Whether linguistic or musical, performance gives the possibility to momentarily *become other*—at home, at checkpoints, or on stage. It represents a form of agency, playing with a set of emerging realities that may or may not lead to a new world. I explore identity as a process of self-composition akin to musical improvisation; to borrow from anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Jonathan Shannon, "thinking of the self as a musical score, identity is an act of composition in specific historical moments and spaces" (Shannon 2006, 66).

I sought to counter damaging portrayals of Syrian lives in Lebanon—a flattened image that obscures agency and individuality—by exploring the creative responses that displaced musicians have developed as they "build an aesthetic shelter in a new land" (Meerzon 2012, 8). To understand migration through musical practices, as ongoing sites of sociality and creativity, "is to step outside of dominant discourses about migration" (Habash 2021, 2) and to make tangible, audible and

public otherwise hidden or marginalized ideas, discourses, and experiences. The goal is to think not *about* sound but 'think sonically,' allowing sound to generate its own forms of thought.

In the frontmatter of *The Performing Self* (Poirier 1992), Edward Said warns against

> "what people do not experience if, instead of looking at linguistic performance, they take language at face value; if they seriously believe that words and objects are in stable contact with each other; if their own professional expressions of piety and awe, of groups or ethnic particularity, come to stand for real piety and real awe, real identity, real particularity, which in fact have to be forged and reforged constantly." (1992, xii)

Similarly, Gilbert Simondon's concept of 'individuation' (1964) considers an individual as a *verb* rather than a substantive, a *becoming* rather than a state, a *relation* rather than a term. Without seeking to essentialize Syrian culture, "salvage" its heritage, nor cast a monolithic identity at risk of being lost, I am interested in ways that identity can be reclaimed and reshaped through music and voice. I argue that identity—understood as an unstable nomadic state traversed by a multiplicity of tensions—can be reframed and performed. Challenging the idea of singular roots, Deleuze and Guattari (1980) suggest to approach rootedness through the 'rhizome,' which they describe as an "enmeshed root system". Thinking of individuals as multiple amalgamations and the sum of their relations defies notions of 'authentic,' unified, or 'fixed' identities. I hope to show how individuals, as sites of internal differences, hold multiple and contradicting positions.

The liminal position that Syrians hold in Lebanon, as "ambivalent strangers" (Bauman 1995) who are "almost but not quite" (Bhabha 1994), draws a focus on otherization processes in a historically diverse country that is often remade by transient communities. I discuss citizenship and belonging in exile (Said 2000) through the concept of the vernacular (Bhabha 2004). The vernacular, in my view, evolves from influences that are present locally and regionally; whether temporarily, historically, virtually, or otherwise. I am interested in how sociability and cultural production generates alternative worldviews, and how these in turn transform musical sound.

I explore how music helps reimagine selves and create alternative communities of sense (Shapiro 2019) in conditions of displacement. I borrow from Bachelard (1957), Lefebvre (1992), and Bourdieu (2005) to understand place-making in displacement and expose the environments that participants are embedded in, whether real or virtual. For displaced communities who can only convene virtually, and even more so in a time of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 1999), transnational networks constitute important social forces that shape immaterial spaces of refuge.

The cultural and linguistic similarities of Syria and Lebanon have a double impact on refugees. Commonalities make it easier, especially for youth, to relate to their social environments and to build bridges with their host community. Lebanon feels 'familiar' to Syrians who, though culturally 'at-home,' feel 'othered' by their hosts. Hostile social environments make many seek to assimilate, a process that may eventually lead to the loss of Syrian heritage and cultural specificity in the conscious memory of young refugees. The transnational realities of Syrian refugees posits them as "cosmopolitan actors that necessarily and properly destabilize nationalist projects" (Beck 2007). Theories of postcolonial hybridity (Glissant 1990; Young 1995) were pivotal to my thinking of identities between two sectarian nation-states with a complex history of affinity and subjugation. Conceiving the Levant as a cultural continuum that spans over current borders is closer to the transnational reality induced by forced migration, overpowering national forms of identification. Discussions on post-nationalist, pre-statist, and fluid forms of belonging in the Near-East, not riven by nation state logics (Maalouf 1998; Kassir 2006), help move beyond the dialectic of 'foreign others' (Ahmed 2000; Amin 2012) and defy strategic essentialism (Spivak 1985). Critiques of methodological nationalism (Anderson 1983; Chakrabarty 2000) ground these debates.

Music expresses and negotiates complex aspects of history, identity, and difference; "as an important boundary marker and an emotive signifier of 'place,' music regularly provides an arena for negotiating and playing out local, national, regional and even global identities" (Nooshin 2009, 19). The very performativity of music and voices illuminates the tension between constructions and imaginaries (Appadurai 1996), or what Said termed an 'imagined geography' (1978), that is, a fabricated sociocultural space that reflects imagined belongings. Since sonic aesthetics are "overlaid with fictional environments and cultural narratives" (Tan 2012, 35), music may help us understand and interpret how national narratives and ideologies are enforced and how they are challenged (Stone 2017; Weidman 2016). Jonathan Sterne wrote, "there is always more than one map for a territory, and sound provides a particular path through history" (Sterne 2003, 3). Syrian musical traditions are part of a wider cultural basin shared with Lebanon, traversing national aesthetics through the lived geographies of its practitioners. As a medium able to reify, resist or subvert positions of authority, music's affective force also contributes to its entanglement with power. Inspired by this line of inquiry, I address music – its potentials and limitations – as a vehicle for agency and empowerment. Much like sociologist Jacques Attali, "my intention here is thus not only to theorize about music, but to theorize through music" (1977).

The Ethics & Politics of Representation

In the tent of a refugee camp in the Beqaa Valley, Reem and Yara's father, Kareem, a profound poet and philosopher, asked me to represent their reality "in all elegance and poverty," a phrase I always return to as an ethical guideline. He extended a blessing and a warning for my project, elucidating why and how he accepts his family to be filmed. In his words,

> This tool in her hands is mindless. Leave it on its own—what will it film? But she, through her feelings with the camera and with people, will catch the angles that most don't see. There are cameras everywhere. But the filmmaker is the one who, through this lens, sheds light on people who really need to transmit their situation to the whole world. We wish that the user of the lens will be truly honest, a faithful messenger for the musician and for the language to appear to all societies, in all of its elegance and poverty. The honesty—as long as the user of the lens is honest. The filmmaker's honesty is proportional to the truthfulness of the recording. But when can honesty be truthful? When the owner of the lens owns real feelings. Filming in several places and moments similar to each other composes in the end an image of a person or a community in all truthfulness, so that the other side can see it with all its feelings. For sure, honesty is the best way.

It was with these thoughts on honesty in mind that I turned my research inside tents and homes, focusing on the private realm of the family—a microcosm created by individuals where tighter frames reveal larger imaginaries. In doing this, I challenge that which is readily visible in favour of what is seldom heard, in an attempt to make way for other, much needed perspectives on displaced forms of life. In his *Reflections on Exile,* Edward Said laments how war "has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (Said 2000, 174). He insists "on the right to see the community's history whole, coherently, integrally. [To] restore the imprisoned nation to itself" (Said 2000, 97) In this vein, and that of honesty, I hope to dispel common tropes of passive refugeehood and contribute to debates on agency in migration studies by focusing not just on scenes rarely seen, but also on moments of creativity in everyday life.

Within a broader 'development' culture of storytelling that presents "carefully curated narratives with predetermined storylines as a tool of philanthropy, statecraft, and advocacy" (Fernandes 2017, 2), I tried to facilitate a space allowing for dialogue, where participants might revert the positionality vis-à-vis the researcher. I avoided methods that exacerbate vulnerability or that reproduce the structures of aid and asylum interviews, which serve reductive frameworks of flight, suffering, and refugeeness (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017). Syrian refugees are often asked to tell

their story, repeating a narrative that speaks specifically of their suffering to obtain refugee status and asylum abroad. Striving to suspend performances of victimhood - that can become internalized, survival strategies in an aid economy - I was attentive to how "refugeehood implies simultaneously experiences of victimization and practices of overcoming it" (Korac 2009, 8).

One day, at the theatre, while talking about self-representation on stage and on camera, Amir told me about his chosen laconism. He explained why he avoids talking about suffering, disappointments and hardships, so not to be perceived or present himself as a "beggar:"

> "I don't like this way, of begging. Suffering exists everywhere, among all peoples. It depends from people to people. Maybe their country is a bit better than our country, or their house is a bit better than our house, many things… But in the end, we all have problems. But maybe our problems are bigger because of exile (*tahjīr*), killings (*qatl*), forced disappearances (*ekhtefa' al-qāseri*) and arrests (*eteqāl*), and dreams (*tomūh*) that got crushed, and 100,000 things. I can keep counting. Really, sometimes I say two words and cut it short. I swear, I am cutting it short. I say two words because I don't want to talk a lot. Sometimes I feel that my words, later, to the one who listens or the one who watches, will come off as begging. It's not that I don't have power—I'm cutting everything short to two words and that's it."

Vocality is often related to resistance and political agency.[31] A voice requires a listener in order to be heard, establishing a relation of 'soft power' between the speaker and listener. Yet this power can also structure what can be said, who listens, and how it is heard, regardless of what was intended. Amir's experience evokes "the echo," which as Weidman explains, is a "means by which one's own utterances are returned in distorted form without being heard, [and] is par excellence a figure of frustrated communication" (2016, 323). Expressing oneself musically - or as Amir suggests, not speaking much at all - can be liberating when words lose their potency, become redundant, or are at risk of being interpreted differently. As noted by Parpart & Kabeer, in "an increasingly dangerous world," the option of silence over speech can be an empowering strategy (2010, 8). Power – *qodra* – can also be silent. In choosing silence, Amir claims his right to opacity, what the Creole writer Édouard Glissant describes as the foundation of relation, in freedom. Glissant reminds me that "to feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him" (1997, 193). Similarly, I embrace the ambiguity of ethnography and its uncertain closure.

[31] For anthropologists Feld and Keil, the ethical researcher's predicament is "giving voice to people whose validity, indeed, whose humanity, is denied or silenced by the world's dominant cultures" (1994, 285).

While I remain critical of the pretention of 'giving voice' to the 'voiceless,' "literally meaning that those who are/need to be given an opportunity to speak up never had a voice before" (Minh-ha 1991, 29), perhaps "music gives voice when nothing else can" (Nooshin 2009, 30). Voicing *differently* might help "lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people" (Said 2000, 175). Dealing with "cruel images" and the "blind spots of hypervisibility," Palestinian filmmaker Oraib Toukan noted that "many struggles are hypervisible, and yet we still cannot see them, let alone hear their claims exactly as they are uttered. Why is it that we still cannot *see* what we're actually seeing?" (Toukan 2022, 2). My decision not to film descriptive images of informal tented settlements stems from my concern working with communities at risk of being misrepresented through a miserabilist gaze—populations "as visible in their suffering as they were invisible before it" (Taylor 2016, 113). The mediatic representation of the Syrian conflict and its aftermath foregrounds a "spectacle of misery that is in fact deliberately crafted to disincentivize spectators to care or act" (Boltanski 1999, 12). In newsreels, the same images circulate again and again until they lose all political force.[32] When images become 'mythologized' and flattened, they risk losing several layers of meaning, as is especially true for the humanitarian gaze in the representation of refugeehood (Yaqub 2023). Working against the assumed intelligibility of images, the elusive signifying practice of sound questions our politics of knowing and not-knowing. Not seeing amplifies hearing (Chion 1993), and the opacity of sound counters the presumed transparency of images.[33] In withholding the image, I seek to suspend stereotypes that perpetuate suffering.

While researching Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon, Diana Allan came to question her impression that while we think we know what refugee settlements look like,

> do we know its sounds? Have we heard the speaking subject, set in social and material relation, or tracked how an embodied history of exile is carried in soundscapes or phonetically, in the sonic qualities of voice? How might hearing inform seeing, and "sonic thought" (Labelle 2020) unsettle an overdetermined politics of looking? (2022, 1120)

To invert the myopia of ocularcentrism, what Jonathan Sterne termed "audiovisual litany" (2003), we should substitute the distance of the visual with the immersiveness of the sonic (Cox 2016).

[32] See *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Sontag 2003) and *The Society of Spectacle* (Debord 1967).
[33] Cultural theorist Michael Shapiro writes of the disruption between what is seen and what is expected-to-be-seen. In his view, "relation is constituted by the way of vision. [In] false representation, something slips … and is always to some degree eluded in it-that is what we call the gaze" (2019, 119). Image and sonic disruptions create "a space for oppositional communities of sense to find recognition so they can emerge as politically invested counter-collective subjects."

Hearing imparts a feeling of immanence that vision seems to lack (Yue et al. 2017). Ambiances and 'room tones' contribute more than the image to the impression of *being there*; the same image feels close or far depending on the proximity of its sounds; the nearness of a voice testifies to a relation's intimacy.

Approaching lived experience through sound can also counter the extractivist urge to 'capture' images, allowing for a different way of relating and observing. While we speak of 'shooting' or 'capturing' images (Azoulay 2021), whose perspectives are framed and contained, in recording sound, one must sit in silence and attune to the acoustics and intimacy of a space, where breath and other subtle sounds shape a particular affective, social and sensorial environment. Sound recording catches elements that are imperceptible, and reaches further than the eye can see.

My long-standing interest in documentary practices that steer away from traditional interviews, logocentric narratives, expository modes and synchronous forms that "lasso the ear to the gaze" (Rangan 2017, 285) makes me turn to praxis, gestures, rhythms, affect, and unspoken forms of communication to suggest rather than impose. Both in this text and in *Departure Melodies*, the short film that accompanies it, I tried to draw honest, graceful, and empowering portraits, while witnessing the place that music holds as an anchor in their lives. Without ignoring the participants' daily struggles as refugees, I wish to transmit their creativity, subjectivity, talent and wisdom as artists and thinkers.

Departure Melodies
Documentary directed by Ariane Lorrain, 29min, HD, colour, 2024.
In Arabic, with English subtitles.
Viewing Link: https://vimeo.com/alorr/departure-melodies
Password: Samaa

Chapter One

Displacement and Musical Belonging

The History of Syrian Displacement in Lebanon

On March 15, 2011, when Syrians poured into the streets in nation-wide protest against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, they did so in song. Public places became filled with voices of women, men and children chanting a growing repertoire of songs learned in homes, through social media, and on the streets. By mobilizing the voices of protestors across the country, including those of "a generation who had grown up in an environment where public dissent was unheard of" (Boswall & Akash 2017, 170), popular songs formed a chief tool of resistance to express defiance and hope.

The Syrian revolution quickly turned sour as military state oppression waged violent repression against pacific demonstrations. By early 2012, it had turned into a wide conflict with global ramifications, provoking a tragic civil war that is ongoing after 13 years, left unresolved. The consequences have been catastrophic, with more than half a million civilian deaths[34] and over 14 million displaced internally and abroad, representing 50 per cent of the pre-war population of 23 million. Nearly 7 million refugees[35] were forced to flee Syria, of which 5.5 million are in camps and cities in neighboring countries. About 1.5 million Syrians found refuge in Lebanon, where they endure terrible living conditions and lack basic human rights.[36] In recent years, the normalization of ties between Arab states and the Baathist regime of Bashar al-Assad, still in power following the treacherous war it fomented, faded dreams of a safe return home.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are in a "protracted refugee situation," defined by the UNHCR as one in which "25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given asylum country." Stuck in a state of limbo—with no political solution to the Syrian conflict, nor guarantees for their safe return, amidst worsening conditions in Lebanon—Syrian refugees hang on to the uncertain hope of obtaining asylum in Western

[34] According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on March 15, 2024, the death toll of Syria's war stands at over 507,000.
[35] The Universal Human Rights Declaration states, "Everyone has the right to go to another country and ask for protection if they are being mistreated or are in danger" (Article 14). The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Art. 1) defines a refugee as one who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."
[36] To the UNHCR, the number of Syrian refugees stands at 924,161. This figure does not account for unregistered individuals.

countries. While many have gone to Europe, risking dangerous irregular crossings of the Mediterranean sea,[37] many more were left behind, with no improvement to their situation in sight.

From the outset of the Syrian war, the Lebanese government refused to establish formal refugee camps—at early stages, displacement was thought to be temporary and informal tented settlements were only meant as an emergency measure. The Higher Relief Commission initially registered the displaced, until the Lebanese Government asked the UNHCR to take on this role. The dissociation of the state led to the privatization of the response to displacement and set the stage for an aid economy implemented by donor countries and non-governmental organizations.

In 2014, Lebanon was the country welcoming the most refugees per capita.[38] The Lebanese Government issued a series of regulations to halt Syrian migration and monitor residency renewals, which required the payment of an annual fee of 200 USD per person aged over 15, as well as taking a formal pledge not to work. As a result of these policies, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are denied the right to work,[39] to own a business or a bank account,[40] and suffer from transgenerational inequality and extreme poverty.[41] They face great difficulty in accessing housing[42] and healthcare, have only limited access to education and legal protection, and struggle to register births, deaths, and marriages. Many are legally bound to a *kafil* and have precarious legal statuses, if any.

In 2015, the Lebanese government demanded that the UNHCR suspend registrations, thereby limiting the provision of assistance, and further restricting opportunities for legal residency and the issuing of work permits (Grandi & al. 2018). Although this policy might suggest a decrease in the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, these figures hide an increasing number of unregistered individuals living in deeper precarity. The overwhelming majority (83 per cent)[43] lack legal residency, meaning they cannot move freely through checkpoints across Lebanon nor leave the country. Difficulties in obtaining or renewing residency permits heighten risks of exploitation and abuse among people who fled persecution and war (Janmyr & Mourad 2018).

[37] In 2022, a migrant boat was left to sink, making 87 victims and causing public outrage (*L'Orient Today*, September 23, 2022).
[38] The Lebanese government's estimation is 1.5 million Syrian refugees, 210,000 Palestinian refugees (of which 30,000 came from Syria), and 11,238 refugees of other nationalities. At the time, Lebanon's population was 6.5M (UN Refugee Agency in Lebanon).
[39] Syrian refugees in Lebanon are legally allowed to work in three sectors: agriculture, construction and cleaning services. In 2018, only 0.5% of working age refugees had valid work permits, increasing exposure to difficult conditions and insecure employment.
[40] Remittances form an important aspect of the informal economy among displaced Syrian communities worldwide. To curb banking limitations in Lebanon, Syrian refugees rely on transnational networks of solidarity to send or receive money.
[41] According to a recent report, 90 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in extreme poverty (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, 2023).
[42] In 2024, the Beirut Governor issued regulations further limiting Syrians' access to housing. Lessors have been asked not to conclude contracts with displaced Syrian tenants before obtaining municipality approval (L'Orient Today).
[43] A recent "Vulnerability Assessment Survey" uncovered that "in 2022, only 17 per cent of Syrian households in Lebanon indicated that all family members aged 15 and above had legal residency" (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, 2023).

In 2019, unprecedented economic and political crises in Lebanon triggered mass protests, culminating in the October 17 revolution.[44] A series of catastrophes ensued—the Beirut port explosion in 2020, another fall of governance, a deepening economic crisis, the COVID pandemic, and a cholera epidemic in 2022. Today, Lebanon is barely staying afloat and has yet to emerge from its protracted crises. The country lacks even the most basic resources such as clean water, electricity, food, and gas. With a dwindling currency, ever-rising inflation, and acceleration of the country's dollarization,[45] food insecurity is growing at alarming rates.[46] Discrimination is easily amplified by scarcity; stigmas of 'otherness' are compounded, deepening social inequalities.

With the start of the Gaza war in October 2023, which has implicated Lebanon in a wider regional conflict, the living conditions of Syrian households have deteriorated sharply. The psychological, economic and political effects of warfare have further marginalized displaced populations, who were already on the fringes of society. Israeli attacks in South Lebanon, the Beqaa Valley, and Beirut have exacerbated the country's instability, and insecurity increased fear-based policies towards refugees. Once again, hundreds of Syrian refugees have attempted the terrifying crossing of the Mediterranean.[47] Others have had no choice but to return to Syria, the result of a prolonged instability, sustained fear, deportation threats, economic precarity and restricted rights. In April 2023, the Lebanese Armed Forces initiated unlawful mass deportations[48], forcefully returning nearly two thousand refugees to Syria over the course of a month, including unaccompanied children.[49] The majority of Syrian refugees remaining in Lebanon are left unregistered, with no legal status nor valid passports,[50] unable to settle there or elsewhere, and rendered stateless in a country in crisis and at war.

---

[44] Referred to in Lebanon as *al-thawra* ('the revolution') or *harakat sab'atash tishrin* ('the movement of October 17')

[45] The Lebanese Lira lost over 98 percent of its pre-crisis value by 2023. In the same year, food inflation was at 274 percent.

[46] About 582,000 Lebanese residents (15% of this population) and 411,000 Syrian refugees (about 27% of Syrians in Lebanon) are in a food insecurity crisis and require urgent humanitarian action to prevent acute malnutrition; this latter number is estimated to grow to 33% by September 2024. 35% of Palestinian-Syrians in Lebanon are in "Acute Food Insecurity Crisis," the highest rate among all refugee communities (IPC, December 2023).

[47] In November 2023, eight boats carrying 327 passengers left Lebanon. By comparison, November 2022 saw only four boat movements, carrying 137 passengers" (Syria Direct, 2023).

[48] This is a step beyond the previous practice of indirect deportation through non-renewal of residency visas.

[49] 2023 is said to have been the most severe year of deportations. According to Human Rights Watch, "Since April 2023, there have been over 100 raids, 2,200 arrests, and 1,800 deportations of Syrian refugees. In all cases examined, deportees were registered or known to the UNHCR" and were carried despite justified claims to asylum. Lebanon's General Security "returned" 6,345 Syrians from 2019 to 2021, implementing the Higher Defense Council's decision. The 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified by Lebanon in 2000, requires that "a state shall not expel, return or extradite a person to another state where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be in danger of being tortured."

[50] The Syrian passport renewal, the most expensive in the world (500 USD), is another obstacle to mobility that leaves second-generation Syrian refugees born in Lebanon undocumented. In Lebanon, status is hereditary, making evident that "exile can also manifest itself as a condition of birth" (Meerzon 2012, 6).

Atomized Families

Atomized by war and displacement, its members missing or dispersed, Syrian families are often recomposed or incomplete. After losing relatives and friends to war, Syrians have had to grieve their country and pasts. Forced migration further fragmented social networks and the cohesiveness of families. The Syrian war has spread and split families around the globe, leaving them unable to reunite, and struggling to recreate a 'home' elsewhere.

It is important to remember that over the course of thirteen years, Syrian refugees have established meaningful communities, loved, and birthed families in Lebanon. A Syrian friend who fled to Beirut after Istanbul, however, spoke to me about his choice *not* to become a father:

> Having a child is a big responsibility. How can I offer a child a fair life with the economic situation here? If that child is born here, he or she will be stateless [won't have citizenship, *jensiyeh*]. And when he grows up, he will have to go to war. This is the reality in the region. So no, I will not have children.

The effects of war are still very much alive in the lives of political refugees. Men, in particular, still fear torture given their more visible involvement in the revolution, or as part of resistance militias such as the Free Syrian Army. Those who deserted the Syrian National Army during the war, morally refusing to kill their compatriots, risk forced conscription upon return. The ones who attempt to cross into Lebanon are profiled as illegal migrants rather than visitors, and thus turned around. As a result, women can cross the Syrian-Lebanese border more easily than men.

While some elders who remained in Syria are sometimes able to visit their relatives in Lebanon, the journey is costly and rare. Amir was preparing for his mother's visit from Dara'a, South Syria. It would be only the second time that Munia meets her granddaughter; the first time as an infant, this time, at seven years old. Samah does not seem to remember her grandmother, but Munia's love for her granddaughter is so great and warm that the connection quickly grows fond. Amir's father, however, was not able to follow and visit them in Beirut.

> "There are circumstances that didn't let him get out of Syria. *Zorouf*. The circumstances that Syrians know well. Just like I cannot enter now. Same thing…"

Despite not having seen his father in over a decade, Amir tells me that he never leaves his mind. His love for him is "something that cannot be described …" Speaking to a common friend, Amir recounts the particular importance of his mother's visit at this time:

> "Ariane knows. I brought my mother from Syria. Ariane and I are very close friends. Very. She came to our house and stayed a night and met my mother. I

> brought my mother from Syria so that I can see her. Because me, I cannot return to Syria. In all honesty. I cannot go to Syria or else, directly… You know what I mean? I told myself, I will go get her, because I felt that maybe it's over, I will leave. I know myself. If I travel, it's over. I will not be able to see her. So I brought her here for a visit, and now, I'm waiting, honestly. Every morning, I wake up and open my phone and my email, to check if there is any message from an embassy, anything… So I am living on hope—for something or someone to get me out of here."

Munia's visit created fond memories for us all. The time we spent singing, playing music and dancing together, the meals we spread on the *sofrah* and shared in laughter, felt from another place and time. I am grateful for the intimate moments that I was able to share, knowing that meeting one's mother is the most meaningful sign of a true friendship. Although Munia's visit was short, her loving presence and constant blessings provided comfort and assurance, grounding the nuclear family in its most mundane daily rituals. She reminded Nawal and Amir of their past lives and of where they come from; speaking in an unflinching Dara'a accent, singing folk songs they had forgotten, and preparing the homecooked meals of their childhoods, she revealed how the imaginative landscape of the family is often a highly gendered affair. To quote anthropologist Martine Ségalène, "our symbolic estate is most often the work of women" (1986, 11).

Symbolic anthropology (Geertz 1973) considers how families form symbolic units through their practices. In an era of globalized individualism, "the burden of producing family myths, rituals, and images have passed to the domestic group itself. Today each family is its own symbolic universe, its own cosmos, its own community" (Gillis 1997, xviii). It constitutes a point of reliance and of 'psychic orientation' in contexts of displacement, and is where young identities are forged. I will describe the families that participants live *with* and the ones they live *by* (Gillis 1997), considering fictive kinship, symbolic families, and ways of relation that sustain displaced lives.

Rural Displacement: The Beqaa Valley

Given that the Lebanese government has adopted a "no-camp" policy preventing the establishment of formal camps for Syrians fleeing war, refugees have typically sought shelter in two types of areas. While the majority (62 percent) have settled and dispersed in cities, particularly in Beirut, 17 percent of registered Syrian refugees live in informal tented settlements (Grandi &

al. 2018), mostly in the rural Beqaa valley[51] (Tol & al. 2013). The settlement of refugees in this region is linked to different historical, sociopolitical and economic factors.

One of Lebanon's poorest regions, the Beqaa has historically welcomed a great number of Syrian field labourers (*al-'amel al-Sūri*), providing a workforce in agriculture and construction.[52] A 120km-long fertile valley running from North to South Lebanon along the Syrian border, the Beqaa represents 40 per cent of Lebanon's arable land.[53] The valley is nestled between two mountain chains: Mount Lebanon (*Jabal Lubnan*) to the West, and the Qalamoun mountains[54] to the East. These mountains stand as a constant reminder of exile for the residents of the camps who face the inacessibility of their homeland as a horizon, only 16km away.

Most Syrian households of the Beqaa live in non-permanent structures, mainly UNHCR pre-fabricated tents.[55] The makeshift infrastructure of bare boards of plywood layered with white plastic tarps is susceptible to floods in high rainfall, cold temperatures in the winter months, and extreme heat in summer, with no shade or tree to be found.[56] The land where camps[57] are located is often private. While some tents are sponsored by Islamic charities and foreign donors, most Syrian refugees must rent their tents for 40USD monthly. Tenants are prohibited from building permanent structures, including walls, or having a television or internet at home.[58] Mobility is a persistent obstacle for Syrian refugees in the Beqaa, who are hindered by legal restrictions[59] and by the distance to workplaces, schools, and public services. This creates a high-dependency on increasingly scarce supplies of fuel, the cost of which is already prohibitive. The sparse public transportation in the region curtails access to education and affects children the most, who are left with even fewer opportunities for personal development. These conditions push many Syrian

[51] Tol & al. write that "the Beqaa has one of the largest concentrations of refugees living in informal settlements, with the lowest school enrollment rates and nearly half of all households reporting overcrowded conditions" (2013, 36).
[52] Before the Syrian revolution, 250,000 Syrian labourers resided in Lebanon, working in construction, agriculture and manual work. Referred to as "Syrian labour," (*al-'amel al-Sūri*), they often live on work sites, or in poor neighbourhoods and villages across Lebanon. See John Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*. Stanford University Press, 2008.
[53] The Beqaa Valley has become increasingly arid in recent years due to limited rainfall, heavy agriculture, and nomadic grazing.
[54] *Qalamoun* is the Syrian appellation of the mountain chain. Its etymology shares a root with *khameleon* (chameleon), as it is said that when the sun hits the mountain, it reflects many different colours. The Lebanese nomenclature is *Jabal Lubnan al-Sharqiyye* (Eastern Lebanese mountains), while to Western geographers, it is known as the Anti-Lebanon mountains.
[55] Some of these settlements are located on privately owned property, and are thus not under the direct jurisdiction of UN agencies nor the Lebanese government, adding to the considerable economic and social vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees.
[56] Many casualties and injuries caused by fires and severe weather attest to these challenges.
[57] Though informal settlements are not officially named "refugee camps," Syrians call these *mokhayem*, literally 'place of tents'.
[58] In an interview with a Syrian humanitarian aid worker (March 3, 2024), I was told that residents of sponsored camps must attend the mosque daily in exchange for living rent-free, to satisfy donors' benevolence. A guardian who lives on-site monitors residents.
[59] Lebanese laws particularly restrict mobility rights for Syrian male adults, hindering their ability to find or attend work.

refugees in the region into under-the-table low-wage manual labour at a very young age.[60] Others travel to the capital to work for a month at a time, in factories or in construction.[61]

Without the social capital nor the funds to settle in big cities, many families in the Beqaa hail from rural regions in Syria. Their trajectories differ from those who migrated to Beirut and other Lebanese cities. Stark differences in background, connections, and means undergird migratory journeys and sites of resettlement. The 'molecular' social organization of these camps, where nuclear families live in close proximity to one another, engenders a lack of privacy that particularly affects women. This is also true within the closed quarters of the tent, as large families invariably share a single room, and women often care for the old and young. Camps can also prove to be hostile social environments. Living in transient social formations poses its own set of issues. Whereas in Syria, people would have cohabited in a town or neighbourhood based on shared affinities, religion and values, in refugee camps, community is reconfigured based on need and status alone. As I discuss, not being able to choose one's neighbours can lead to complex problems.

In the Beqaa Valley, I conducted research by focusing on the nuclear family, a little explored microcosm yet such a central and significant part of life in these communities. Family plays an active symbolic role in safekeeping traditions, and acts as one of the "natural symbolic formations that helps live meaningfully at the threshold within multiple worlds and competing obligations" (Appiah 1997, 624). Home culture and established cultural traditions take precedence in informal tented settlements, with its crammed rows of tents - and not much else - where each household constitutes a rich symbolic universe of its own.

While cultural traditions are kept alive within homes in these provisional environments, there is "a tension between the domestic as a preservationist, psychic refuge from cultural discontinuities and the public as a space of encounter with difference" (Bauman 2000, 61), creating a chasm between first and second-generation refugees. Alert to the threat of discontinuity in a context of global dislocation, Bauman fears that abandoning traditions—culture, history, language, and family—will set individuals adrift in 'liquid modernity' (2000).

[60] The average age for beginning work in informal settlements in the Beqaa is as young as 10.9 years (Habib & al. 2019).
[61] To travel from the Beqaa to Beirut for work, one must take a tuk-tuk and three communal vans, which becomes costly. A roundtrip costs one million Lebanese Lira, 11.5 USD in 2024, or 11% of median monthly incomes for Syrians (95USD in 2023).

Urban Displacement: Beirut

Urban displacement in Beirut presents a very different picture. As a 'place of refuge,' Beirut has historically welcomed refugees indigenous to the region (notably Palestinians and Armenians, but also Circassians and more recently, Iraqis). It is said that around one third of the capital's daytime population is non-Lebanese. Yet the militarization of public space in Beirut and its many checkpoints "punctuate the city with 'barriers' that direct and contain the flow of moving bodies and vehicles" (Shapiro 2019, 56), becoming a source of fear and producing a particular cartography of Syrian life in the capital. Particularly in cities, the *kefala*[62] system provides the middle and upper-class Lebanese society with low-wage laborers and domestic workers.

Most Syrians residing in Beirut live in subpar housing in impoverished neighbourhoods, informally developed urban areas, and industrial areas (such as Karantina, Dawra, Tariq al-Jdideh, Bourj Hammoud), and the city's numerous abandoned homes. One Syrian friend, upon arrival in Beirut, rented an apartment in the Palestinian refugee camp of Mar Elias. "The nicest years of my life" is how he summarized his experience. This is telling of the multiple layers of displacement in Lebanon and of the solidarity that emerges among 'othered' populations in Beirut, manifesting in the city's refugee camps.[63] Commenting on the political and social possibilities of these exilic gatherings, Meerzon observes that "if Anderson's imagined communities are based on continuity of narratives and linguistic, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity, the exilic community suggests a counter-arrangement – a community based on rupture, heterogeneity, and a shared experience of displacement" (2012, 33). As a refuge and haven for refugees of different origins, camps create the conditions for different kinds of alliance to form.

The possibilities for new forms of encounter and relation forged in the crucible of exilic life is suggested by the comment of another Syrian refugee whom I met in Beirut: "It was only once exiled that I have discovered Syria." Having fled rural Syria as a young adult, he had not had the opportunity to travel within his country. It is in exile that he met Syrians from many regions and religions and came to appreciate the diversity of his country's people and cultures. His experience of cosmopolitanism in exile was one of travelling within his homeland, connecting "the

[62] The *kefala* system recruits thousands of migrant domestic workers through agencies and 'sponsors' (*kafil*) to work in private homes across Lebanon. Mostly women from Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Bangladesh, these workers lack basic rights and are at the mercy of their employers, often living in their homes. Their presence contributes to cultural exchanges in the city, i.e. food cultures, alternative economies and solidarity networks, albeit on a limited scale considering 'ghettoization' and 'invisibilization' processes.

[63] I have also met Ethiopian and South Asian women who rent in Palestinian refugee camps while they work independently as domestic workers for Lebanese households in wealthier neighbourhoods. It is cheaper, and it feels safer, with less discrimination.

experience of urban modernity to the experience of migration and dislocation" Shapiro 2019, 58). A multiply displaced Palestinian friend once told me, on the road to Beirut from Tripoli, "I am everything (*Ana kūl shi*)—Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Lebanese now. From the point of view of identity, individuals are the sum of where they have been."

In Beirut, Syrian musicians often rely on temporary non-kin families as their support networks. In this context, home-making is better understood as a relational construct. In transient communities constantly reshaped by the departures of its members, 'temporary families' create an elastic, moving, and mutable weave. The metaphor of 'family resemblance' (Wittgenstein 1953) captures the communal family-like bonds that form in refugeehood. Relating to one another, despite not being related, is a way of representing oneself as part of a group, shaped by common values and affinities. The experiences of Syrian bands that migrated from Damascus to Beirut exemplifies how music can provide a 'family,' as will later be discussed.

Survival Networks & Social Capital

Amid displacement, support networks are paramount for survival. The arrival of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is secured by their bonds, starting with distant relatives, friends, and acquaintances (*ma'aref*), who provide a safety net and help find a footing in a new land. After fleeing the dangers of war and political persecution, many Syrians refugees have not yet found the feeling of safety provided by a community, or by knowing they can rely on extended family. As one friend put it,

> "*Kan fi zorouf al-harb, baaden saret zoroof thani.* There were the circumstances of war, then it became another set of circumstances. When I first arrived in Beirut, it was a struggle; I remember not having enough to eat; my dinner was rice and ketchup. In Syria, I would never go hungry—no matter where I am, I will find a place to sleep. Here, [in Lebanon], it is not like this. You are on your own."

Family structures and values are as important in exile as they were formerly in Syria. But when kinship can no longer bind a society who accorded much value to family unity, new models emerge—"taking root, henceforth, will be of a different nature. It is in relation. Filiation cannot be replanted elsewhere" (Glissant 1997, 61). Traditional anthropological models of the family based on biological and genealogical descent (Collier & al. 1982) hinder our understanding of the social webs that sustain refugee communities. Marxist anthropology offers a lens through which to evaluate the importance of social networks as concrete material relations, as individuals can only

survive by acting in concert and by co-operating with each other. This is true among the Lebanese, where a fragile sectarian balance shaped a society highly segregated on the basis of religion (*dīn*) and minority allegiance (*tayyefe*), where social capital within one's community is what allows to succeed. It is of utmost importance for Syrian refugees to build a social net; a *kafil* (sponsor) or employer can act as a guarantor, a well-placed official can act as a protector, and allied citizens might help in case of need, such as facing arrest, accessing medical care, legal help, or education.

A recurrent word is *wāsta*, a petty form of corruption operating in a complex network of relationships and practices. Gained through honour, reputation, and influence rather than money,[64] *wāsta* is a form of social capital that has become the norm in a country with little guarantees, where a connection to someone in higher places can always bend the law or get one out of trouble.

> AMIR: I know myself at checkpoints. I am legal at 100%. You can't put anything on me. If you pick a fight or want to entertain yourself with me, I'll "show you the red eye." I'll let you feel that there is someone supporting me. I'm not alone.
> JAWAHER: *Wāsta, wāsta!* Corruption, corruption!
> AMIR: *Tamaman, tamaman…* Of course, of course…

"The key currency here is "wāsta"—connections and influence, in a way not atypical of patron-client relations elsewhere in the Mediterranean" (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1993, 80). Musicians' networks and the social capital they accumulate are key to their success (Scharff 2018). In Lebanon, like elsewhere, contacts open doors to perform.

[64] See Peristiany, *Honour and Shame in Mediterranean Societies*, 1966.

Narratives Of Belonging

> "Identity can only exist with an *awareness of the other*, which is "the very 'relation'" that must be studied between cultures" - Nercessian 2002, 18.

Lebanese Identity Post-Revolution and the Making of the 'Other'

The October 17, 2019 revolution[65] reconfigured Lebanese identity, and its citizens are still grappling with its reformulation in the aftermath. For the first time in Lebanese history, Sunni, Shi'a, Maronite, Christian Orthodox and Druze communities marched side by side, asking for the corrupt government to step-down. Although the Lebanese uprising fostered new and commendable forms of solidarity, by articulating a new "we" (*nehna*), it seems to have also, inadvertently, reinforced a narrative that further excludes outsiders. This emergent coming-together, which cut across sectarian and confessional divides, was in some sense contingent upon amplified exclusionary practices and discourses that raged against an outsider 'other.' Robert Young has observed that cultural 'others' are constructed "in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change" (Young 1994, 3). Likewise, fixity of identity is sought in times of upheaval. The Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf thought of identity as a "false friend", a pun evoking homophones in linguistics; in his view, identity "starts by reflecting a legitimate aspiration, and suddenly becomes an instrument of war. … Where does the legitimate affirmation of identity end, and where does the overstepping on the rights of others start?" (Maalouf 1998, 41)

Mainstream public discourse provides insights into the ethos of citizenship that undergirds Lebanese politics. Several terms are used in Lebanon to refer to Syrian refugees; *muhājirīn* (those who live in the *mahjār*—the place of immigration), *moqimīn* ('residents'), *laje'īn* (those who escaped) or *nazehīn* (rural migrants who settled in cities), the term preferred by Lebanese media, imbued with classist connotations on rurality. The stigmatization of Syrians in Lebanese society runs deep, uncovering a complex history of occupation, exploitation, and marginalization. The Syrian military occupation of Lebanon lasted from 1976 to 2005. The troubled past the countries share still looms over the present, affecting the way Syrians are perceived. The longstanding presence of Syrian labour workers has also crystallized enduring stereotypes in Lebanese

[65] *Harekat sabātash tishrin*, 'Movement of October 17'. The Lebanese revolution's slogan, whose trace still lingers on the walls of downtown Beirut, reads '*Kullon yani kullon'*, or "all of them means all of them," implying that all politicians are corrupt.

imaginaries. Ash Amin blames the "slew of personal and collective labeling conventions – inherited, learnt, absorbed, and practiced – that flow into the moment of encounter" (2012, 5).

Lebanon's sectarian (*tayefiyeh*) and confessional political system depends for its functioning on the government's prohibition of census updates on the ethnicity and religion of its population. In the wake of a long and traumatic Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), this measure is justified by the fear of a demographic war.[66] Along with the undisclosable number of Syrians who remain undocumented in Lebanon, these policies make it nearly impossible to estimate demographics accurately. Perhaps working against its own aims, not knowing the data makes people hypersensitive to 'outsiders' and heightens xenophobia. As speculations about statistics abound, dominant public discourse conspires that the Lebanese are 'outnumbered' by Syrian refugees. Amid the economic crisis, it is often claimed that Syrians are 'better-off' than Lebanese citizens because of the UNHCR aid they receive.[67] Such distortions result from the absence of reliable information, combined with a lack of trust in a corrupt and failing political administration.

In times of insecurity and upheaval, many Lebanese have bought into these narratives, adopting a rhetoric of fear. Syrians are blamed and scapegoated for Lebanon's losses and collapse, easy targets to explain the country's freefall. This climate exemplifies what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'stranger danger,' the attitude whereby migrants, immigrants, or refugees become collateral damage "deprived of the opportunity of a safe and decent life and deprived again of inclusion in the human community" (2016, 136). Yet to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the very condition of refugee otherness and exclusion is the sole positionality "in which it is possible today to perceive the forms and limits of a political community to come" (1995, 117) and foresee our collective fate.

Myths of Belonging: Phoenicianism and Bilad al-Shām

The narratives upon which modern nation states are founded are central to the formulation of 'insiders' and 'outsiders.'[68] "Imaginative landscapes of belonging come in many forms," writes anthropologist Anna Tsing; "we need to study how such imaginative terrains are differentially and dialogically negotiated, refused, or erased" (2000, 345). In order to understand the Syrian experience of discrimination in Lebanon, we must first tap into national myths of origins. As noted

[66] The fear of a religious unbalance threatens Lebanese Christian and Shi'a communities, as the majority of Syrians are Sunni.
[67] Yet, half of the Beqaa's refugees rely on diminishing World Food Program assistance as a source of income (UNHCR, 2017).
[68] As Laudan Nooshin aptly wrote, "a nation defines itself in terms of what it includes and what it excludes" (2009, 20).

by Edouard Glissant, the roots of identity are "founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth" (1997, 143). The Lebanese narrative locates its origins in the Phoenician civilization—a claim to non-Arabness emphasizing a coastal Mediterranean identity,[69] what Samir Kassir calls "Phoenicianist Lebanesism" (2006, 55). This myth of origins formulates a racial distinction from Syrians, whose Arab roots are to be found in the Canaanite or Assyrian civilizations.

Given the creation of Lebanon resulted from a close affiliation to Europe,[70] its elite see themselves as cosmopolitan and take pride in a polyglot nation where French and English are taught alongside Arabic in all levels of education, an attitude also reflected in musical styles and aesthetics, which consciously leans West. On the other hand, many Syrian artists locate their cultural heritage (*turāth*) "in the imagined life ways of a pre-modern Syria—indeed a pre-"Syria" Syria, when the land was merely "*al-Shām*"" (Shannon 2006, xvi).[71] Lebanese identity thus positions itself in opposition to Syrian identity, which is viewed as attached to its heritage, its 'Arabness,' with its unspoilt 'authenticity' that its sizeable Bedouin population and desert lands have come to symbolize.

Yet Lebanon and Syria formed one country before the Sykes-Picot agreement divided the Ottoman Empire among European powers in 1917, after the First World War. New nation states were named and new lines were drawn in a territory where populations historically shared a vast cultural heritage and social habitus. *Bilad al-Shām*, or the Levant, refers to the pre-colonial territory and contemporary cultural area that encompasses Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, as well as portions of Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. It is a region "which could be viewed as geographically, culturally and historically having been a united entity that was separated by the colonial powers" (Van Dam 2017, 1). In the modern era, when several imperial powers took ownership of the region (Ottoman Empire, French Protectorate, British Mandate),[72] it was still referred to as *al-Sham*[73].

[69] Al-Sawda was one of the first writers to link the Phoenician past to the Lebanese present in his 1919 book, *For the Cause of Lebanon* (*Fi sabil Lubnan*). He writes, "as a nation is proud of its roots and draws its good virtues from its good progeny, so is Lebanon proud to remember and remind us that it is the cradle of civilization in the world. It was born at the slopes of its mountain and ripened on its shores, and from there, the Phoenicians carried it to the four-corners of the earth" (in Kaufman 2001, 181).
[70] Initially contained to 'Mount Lebanon,' *Le Grand Liban* was formed as a French Protectorate in 1920 by annexing the Christian majority from Mt Lebanon and its surrounding former Ottoman provinces, including Tripoli, Sidon, and Beirut. The French ruled with the help, and in favor, of the Maronite Christians of Mt Lebanon, who constitutionally must preside the country.
[71] In 2002, musicologist Nancy Currey argued that "people in Syria can use music to negotiate the struggle between an identity rooted in the modern nation-state of Syria and one rooted in the more traditional concept of 'Bilad al-Sham' …, the struggle between a Syrian identity and an Arab identity; and the maintenance of a strongly Arab and necessarily anti-Western canon" (2002, 9).
[72] The division of population into majority-minority and confessional groups was a pillar of the Ottoman empire's millet system. French colonial authorities and the British Mandate era further reinforced confessional divisions. See Ussama Makdisi, 2000.
[73] While the city of Damascus is *Al-Sham*, *Shāmi* is both 'Damascene' and the adjectival form of *Bilad al-Sham* (the Levant).

Today, *Bilad al-Shām* evokes a return to precolonial borders in a decolonial and pan-Levantine perspective.[74] Édouard Glissant's Creole identity made him see how "the limits - the frontiers - of a State can be grasped, but a culture's cannot" (1997, 165).[75] Because of their past, it could be argued that when escaping to Lebanon, Syrian refugees went where they felt they belong; an extension of their homeland—or at least, their neighbour.

It took the Syrian Government nearly 90 years to acknowledge Lebanon's sovereignty. Until 2009, when its decades-long occupation of Lebanon ended,[76] it still considered Lebanon as one of its provinces, an irredentist call to "Greater Syria" (*Sūriya al-Kobra*).[77] Despite a history of political drifts and friction, cultural flow has been sustained between Syria and Lebanon; "cultures can be shared when States have been in confrontation. From the foundation of Lebanon in 1920 until the start of the Syrian war in 2011, the border between both countries was fluid and somewhat insignificant. "People grow up, or are educated in such a way that they have a particular political geographical map in mind, which may differ from the geographical maps in the minds of other people in different regions" (Van Dam 2017, 4). Given family roots often crisscross and overlap both countries, the relations and movements across and between them were long sustained, and the area was conceptualized as continuous. Only recently have families spread across both countries became split, with the hardening of borders and impediments on free movement.

Earlier borders were just as artificial, irrespective of geographical or ethnic lines. "Often they just reflected the zones of influence among rival powers" (Kassir 2006, 3). From early history, the Near East was a region reigned by city-states (*dūwayleh)* such as Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli, Sidon and Tyr, each city proud of its cultural specificity, ensuring its people would defend it in case of war. As the late Lebanese writer Samir Kassir aptly summarized, "the Arab *universitas*, as it were – revolved around a host of urban centres of cultural production, and drew on a web of diverse 'sub-regions,' each with its own anthropological sensibility, or specialization" (2006, 35). In Kassir's view, "[Arab] identity lies primarily in its shared history and a deep seam of shared

[74] It is important to note that ISIS (*da'esh*) use *Bilad al-Sham* to invoke a return to the Caliphate, a theocratic state for all Sunnis; both far-left and far-right call for a return to pre-colonial borders; to emphasize unity, or to reassert religious rule. The "Golden Age" is imagined as a period of cultural unity and peace among ethnic and religious groups, or as one of religious supremacy.
[75] Equating nation-state boundaries with society is called 'methodological nationalism,' an approach that fails to account for cultural flows that influence lived experience, or the interpolation of networks and power that extend across states and regions. Glissant suggests parting with the hidden violence of filiation through 'relation identity,' which informs "not simply what is relayed but also the relative and the related. Its always approximate truth is given in a narrative" (1997, 27).
[76] The Syrian occupation of Lebanon ended with the Cedar Revolution in April 2005, following the assassination of Rafic Hariri.
[77] *Suriyya al-Kobra* (Greater Syria), made popular with Anton Saadeh's ideology of The Fertile Crescent (*Mashroua hilal al khasib)* and the Syrian Nationalist Party, encompasses Syria, Lebanon, and Mesopotamia. Its rare intellectual adherents in Lebanon wish to reposition the country towards its Arab neighbours rather than Europe, in a Pan-Levantine and decolonial perspective.

culture (however diverse its expressions have been, and continue to be). Both these elements explain the existence of a regional organization defined by linguistic identity" (2006, 68).

The cultural area of the Levant is best illustrated by the Levantine dialect shared across the region, and by its many regional accents (*lahjat*) that span across national borders. The northern coastal area from Lattakia (Syria) to Tripoli (North Lebanon) share the *saheliyeh* coastal accent. The short Damascus-Beirut liaison—as important for trade as for movements of population, and, with them, ways of speaking—made urbanite natives of both capitals able to perform a *lahjeh beida* (lit. 'white accent')—a 'softer,' 'neutral' urbanite *lingua franca*. In all these cities, however, one can distinguish a local from a stranger based on hyper-localized codes of dress, behaviour, and speech. A Beiruti travelling to Tripoli will be perceived as an outsider by locals who pick up on accent and body language. A Damascene will take on a *halabi* accent (from Aleppo) if speaking to an Alepine, revealing regional sociopolitical hierarchies. As Henri Lefebvre noted in his *Rhythmanalysis,*[78] "the relation of a townsman to his town … is a relation of the human being with his own body, with his tongue and his speech, with an ensemble of gestures" (1985, 95).

Levantines inherited a regional, confessional, and genealogical conception of selves, prevailing over other forms of identification. This conception of identity indigenous to the region echoes Chakrabarty's call to 'provincialize' history (2000), redressing dominant frameworks of nationalist thought and cultural essentialism. Turning to emic ontologies and lived experience allows to challenge critical race theory and rethink belonging through regionalism and vernaculars.

In the Levant, difference "is generally constituted along axes of religion, ethnicity, and locality, rather than race and color" (Silverstein & Sprengel 2021, 6). Anthropologists of the Middle East Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar highlight the "unsuitability of race as a historical force and discursive construct, considered by many to be foreign to lived experience in the region" (2012, 547). The Arabic word for racism, *al-unsurriye*, refers to 'root,' not race. One commonly asks where a person is from *aslan*, 'originally,' referring to a particular geographical location and genealogy.[79] "Like *asil* (having a root or foundation) and *asli* (underived, original), *asāla* refers to rootedness, fixedness, permanence, and lineage" (Shannon 2006, 5), and therefore to social class.

[78] *The Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities* builds on historian Fernand Braudel's conception of the Mediterranean as a regional totality where commercial and religious exchanges have created a plurality of distinct, yet related and interdependent, local cultures. Recently, Mediterranean studies have pursued this line of inquiry, presenting both of its shores as a cultural area.
[79] "*Asāla*, like identity (*huwiyya*) and selfhood (*dhātiyya*), articulates notions of political and cultural unity" (al'Azmeh 1992, 27).

Though racial categories may be hidden or denied, their "unmasking can reveal crucial roles in the constitution of difference in Arab-majority societies" (Deeb & Winegar 2012, 553). In this context, it is more accurate to speak of discrimination as a socialization process that casts Syrians as 'ambiguous others' or 'ambivalent strangers' (Bauman 2006). Discrimination operates by projecting a social identity onto individuals, distributing or removing privileges and benefits based upon it.[80] As such, I examined intersectional forces that impact Syrian lives in Lebanese society—ethnicity, accent, gender, religion, rurality, urbanity, as well as social capital—while being careful not to collapse identities by considering their rhizomatic (Deleuze 1980) specificities.

In a region with many 'compact minorities' (Hourani 1949), conceptions of self vary. Amin Maalouf has written at length about the complexity of identity in the Near East, and in particular Lebanon. He writes of a divided society where "men and women carry within them contradictory belongings [or] live at the frontier of two opposed communities, beings that are traversed, in a way, by ethnic or religious lines of fracture" (1998, 45). He refers to the region's liminal identities as **"**border crossers by birth, or by the coincidence of their trajectory."[81] Even Glissant referred to Lebanon as "the place of Relation" (1997, 30). How have displaced populations Indigenous to the region transformed the frontier space linguistically, culturally or interpersonally?

A common formulation of belonging that escapes national divides is a 'Levantine' identification, in the adjectival form of *al-Sham,*[82] '*Shāmi*.' I heard this formulation of one's roots most uttered by multiply Palestinian refugees who lived in Syria, Jordan, or Iraq before Lebanon, displaced several times over a lifetime or a few generations. '*Shāmi'* is a transnational, inclusive and encompassing identity marker that acknowledges the diverse populations indigenous to the region - many of whom have endured several exiles.[83] I interpret the use of this term as a way of harmonizing exilic identities and creating common ground and unity rather than difference, emphasizing a shared ethnolinguistic identity and cultural heritage. Just as saying "there is only one God"[84] is a diplomatic way of negotiating religious difference and emphasizing shared piety among various religious groups, identifying as '*Shāmi'* is a way to navigate sectarian divides.

[80] Another social category of 'otherness' is 'foreigner' (*ajnab*). Tied to white privilege, it "embodies proximity to white power and delimits the boundaries of such power [in] a racialized process of exclusion and/or privilege" (Silverstein, Sprengel 2021, 3).
[81] The original French reads, *«Frontaliers» de naissance, ou par les hasards de leur trajectoire* » (Maalouf 1998, 45). Lebanon is to Maalouf "a country where we are constantly called to question ourselves on our belongings, our origins, our relationships to others, and on the space we can occupy in the sun or shade" (1998, 21).
[82] *Al-Sham*, translated as 'Levant,' literally means "the North" (from *shmal,* 'north'), or the northern regions of the Arab East.
[83] As of 2023, over 30,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria, displaced from Yarmouk, Deraa, and Neirab camps, live in Lebanon.
[84] "*Rab wahed,"* "*Allah wahed"* or "*Allah nafso*" are all different ways to say "God is one and same" in Levantine Arabic.

Vocal Identities

Audibly marked by the geographies of migration, voices reveal an aural poetics of displacement. Voices are arguably the most personal identity marker; sound scholar Amanda Weidman reminds us that they "can serve as deeply felt markers of class, race, geographical origin" (2014, 40).[85] In her view, listening to voices in their multiple registers grants insights "into the intimate, affective, and material/embodied dimensions of cultural life and sociopolitical identity" (2014, 38). The voice also reveals intersubjectivity; in its relational aspect—as a performance, an event, and an encounter with a listener—it shapes "both aesthetic horizons and political modes of relation" (Rangan 2017, 286). As described by sound scholar Don Ihde, in the voice lies "the *what* of saying, the *who* of the saying, and the *I* to whom something is said" (1976, 171).

Interested in how voice—an 'absent object' (Barthes 1981)—can signify independently of what they say, Allan asks "what might be gained by approaching voice not simply as the vehicle of discourse and data, but as sound and resonance?" (2022, 1125) As a vehicle for emotion that "moves between and ties people together" (Stevenson 2017, 75), a voice's grain, tone, inflections, pauses and silences are what Pooja Rangan calls "audibilities." In her view, we should find "critical tools for attending to these disorienting, paralinguistic, and extravocal soundings" (2017, 286) expressed through speech, music, or otherwise. Similarly, I take voice as sound, music, and text, and draw on linguistics and ethnopoetics to reveal social meanings attributed to accented speech.

Aurality represents a relevant angle of inquiry to understand discrimination towards a community that, despite the absence of racial or ethnolinguistic difference with its hosts, is otherwise 'othered' by them. Voices have a heightened importance in a sectarian society where – as a symptom of its hypervigilance over origins and identity – the slightest variations in dialect, accent and vocabulary may be perceived. In his research on sound and citizenship among migrant communities in Athens, Tom Western proposes to listen *with* displacement as a way to understand how borders materialize in speech, as "voices carry the border within their timbres" (Western 2020, 304). Taking inspiration from this frame of inquiry, I tended to the politics of voices – speaking and singing – to critically evaluate these as the intersectional manifestation of identity markers.[86] I argue that Syrians in Lebanon are not "visible minorities" but 'audible others,' a difference

[85] Likewise, Pooja Rangan wrote that "vocal inflections, colloquialisms, timbre, and accent … can chart desire and (un)belonging across differences of class, ethnicity, gender, ability, and sexuality" (2017, 284).
[86] Like the ontological turn, the linguistic turn tends to the relationality of voices as encounters of speakers and listeners.

detected through subtle variations in speech patterns within a same language. Scrutinized vocally and decoded aurally[87], Syrian experiences of discrimination in Lebanon rest on phenotype.

Derrida referred to the ear as "an organ for perceiving difference … the ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the autos of my autobiography" (1985, 51). While perceiving difference—such as noting an accent—can be an invitation and the recognition of the singular existence of an individual's history, it can also entail a closure to relation, or a threat to one's safety. Listening "can construct racial and gendered hierarchies of sound, discern identities based on voices and soundscapes, and police difference through the ear" (Stoever 2016, 281). As such, throughout my research, I tended to how voices are constructed, mediated, heard, and interpreted. The appropriate accents (*lahjah*) and tone (*lahneh*) that Lebanese audiences expect from performing vocalists favour certain pronunciations over other. As sounds and inflexions are loaded with connotations, the way songs are sung can reveal stigmas between social groups.

Otherization and Discrimination

The fear to move around, especially if undocumented, is coupled with the fear to speak up in streets, shops, and public transportation, as to not be 'detected' by one's accent. In speaking of their experiences of marginality and discrimination in Lebanon, participants described humiliating (*edhlal*) interactions, fear (*khof*), and harassment (*tahārosh*). A Kurdish-Syrian friend recounted that he did not dare to step out of his small apartment for nearly one month last summer, when ultra-right wing Lebanese Christian militias conducted raids targeting Syrian refugees in Achrafieh. These gangs walked around the neighbourhood to 'spot' Syrians, before approaching them with questions to make them reveal their accent—if their difference was audible, confirming their Syrianness, they were beaten.

Dealing with demeaning comments, insults, and beatings in public space make Syrians feel undesirable and dehumanized. Amir tells me that in his interactions with Lebanese soldiers at military checkpoints (*hājez*), "there is not much dialogue; they [LAF soldiers] just want to entertain themselves with me. They have nothing else to do." He greets them with the formula *Yaatik alafiyeh, ya watan*, "May God bless you, patriot." If his emulated Lebanese accent is slightly off, he is asked to show a residency permit (*eghameh*), a piece of ID (*hūwiyeh*) or to state his nationality

[87] In his study of acoustic interculturalism, Cheng Chye Tan writes, "it is in an aural reception of sound that perceptions, reactions and meanings are derived" (2012, 35).

(*jensiyeh*). This script is the outcome of an improvisation where participants re-enacted their experiences at checkpoints, alternately acting as a Lebanese soldier and themselves.

SOLDIER	*Min wen inte? Hon, Lubnani?*	Where are you from? From here, Lebanese?
AMIR	*La, Sūri.*	No, I am Syrian.
SOLDIER	*Ma'ak eghame?*	Do you have a residency card?
AMIR	*Na'am, a'endi.*	Yes, I do.
SOLDIER	*Farjini.*	Show me.
AMIR	*Ala rasi. Hay eghamati.*	Of course. Here is my residency permit.
SOLDIER	Keep it. I don't want it. Who's your sponsor? What does he do for work? How long have you been here for? And you, what is your work?	
AMIR	I work as a handler, a labour worker. I take any work that comes to me.	
SOLDIER	You are a labourer *('amal*). Who authorized you? Why do they trust you? I can't, like this… I have to see. Yalla! Get your sponsor's number.	
AMIR	*Ala rasi, watan. nehna jahzin.*	Of course, patriot. Whatever you need.

After calling his sponsor and giving him a hard time, the soldier let Amir pass, this time around. As he walks past the checkpoint, Amir's mask drops. Losing his composure, he mumbles a remark that the soldier overhears. The situation quickly escalates.

SOLDIER	*Allah ma'ak.*	May God be with you. Don't pass by this street again.
AMIR	*[mumbling to himself]*	Okay, I will go and put myself in the garbage now.
SOLDIER	What did you say? You're talking to me? Come closer! What did you say?	
AMIR	Sorry, I was talking to myself because I was a bit angry from work. Please, excuse me…	
SOLDIER	Come here! What did you say? Tell the truth!	
AMIR	I said, "I will live in the garbage".	
SOLDIER	Boss, this guy is messing with us. Talking to himself. What did you say?	
AMIR	I was talking to myself, patriot. Is it prohibited to talk to oneself?	
SOLDIER	You were insulting us? You don't like it here? (*Ma a'balak?*) If you don't like it, leave! Leave, if you don't like it!	
AMIR	We will all leave. Not just us—even you. I am sure that you want to leave too.	
SOLDIER	*Chou btehki?!*	What are you saying?!
AMIR	*Hadha al waqe'a*.	That's the truth.
SOLDIER	Sit down! Put him in, guys!	

In saying that he will "put himself in the garbage," Amir criticizes the loss of dignity inflicted by discrimination, intimidation, and lack of rights. He provokes the soldier's nationalist pride when he says that *even he* wishes to leave Lebanon, pointing to the country's collapse.[88]

[88] A study published by *Information International* states that over 215,000 Lebanese left the country between 2018 and 2021.

Speech Performatives

Though speaking the same language as their hosts—Levantine Arabic—Syrian refugees in Lebanon adapt its utterance to fit local phonemics, strategically positioning themselves vocally. Vernacular accents are the basis on which inclusion or exclusion is measured within a given locality. I understand speech as a cultural performance situated in specific sociopolitical, historical, and linguistic contexts. For Syrians in Lebanon, speech becomes "a performative site of negotiation between self-perception and the host culture's perception" (Meerzon 2012, 14). They must adopt vocal strategies to 'pass' checkpoints and 'blend in' socially. Their first reflex is to hide their difference and emulate their hosts, hoping to "be mistaken for the country's children" (Maalouf 1998, 48). While Syrians in Lebanon sometimes succeed at imitating their hosts, "most often, they don't. They don't have the right accent, nor the right nuance of colour, nor the right surname or name or papers, their stratagem is quickly turned stale" (Maalouf 1998, 48). I draw on linguistic anthropology and performance theory to analyze the speech performatives that Syrian refugees enact in Lebanon as survival strategies to navigate an increasingly xenophobic society.

Performative utterances are not flawless to the acute listener, however, as social groups who speak the same language hold certain vocal attributes in common that would be impossible to confuse. The Lebanese are experts at this guessing game; with a subtle thread of questions, they can easily find out their interlocuter's religion, social class, and origins, demonstrating a 'ruse of recognition,' as Homi Bhabha puts it (1994, 165). Convincing only "so far as competence allows it to go," (Chomsky 1965, 10) speech performatives represent what media theorist and sociologist Hebdige called 'a struggle within signification:' "a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life" (1979, 17).

Tom Western describes speech performatives as ethical, cultural, creative, and social processes. In his view, "citizenship should be heard as something performed and enacted, claimed and defied, protested and resisted, sounded and silenced" (Western 2020, 302). Strategies include taking on the local accent (*lahjah*), code-switching between colloquial Syrian and Lebanese ('*amiyye*), choosing words wisely as vocabulary reveals dialectal variants, adopting a formal register of politeness (*takalof*), a tone (*lahneh*) of humility, and knowing what to keep to oneself, or when to remain silent. Choosing silence or taking a voice other than one's own can both help Syrians go unnoticed, obscuring the 'readings' of their identities. Silence and utterances form indirect and subtle everyday forms of resistance in achieving "sonic citizenship" (O'Toole 2014).

Syrians in Lebanon must train themselves to 'soften' their pronounciation, avoiding harsh guttural '*qafs'*, or changing the *tamarbuta* sound '*ah*' to as a more open '*eh.'* Dialectal vocabulary also differs; the Syrian *Lesh* ('why') changes to *leh*, *hād* ('this') to *haydeh, ani* ('I') to *ana*; *shlonek* ('how are you') to *kifek*; *kafū* ('enough') to *khalas;* '*ashān* ('because') to *le eno*; *osbou'a* ('week') to *jom'ah,* etc. Adopting the Beiruti accent also means dropping in English and French loanwords that are uncommon in Syria; "*hi,*" "*bonjour,*" "*merci ktir*" and "*bye*" often replace Arabic equivalents in Lebanon. These foreign words can be used to denote a higher social class, level of education, or cosmopolitanism—in other words, what has been thought to represent 'Lebanism.'

Attentive readers of their environment, Syrians in Lebanon come to recognize how most of their interactions with host society are in some way scripted. Their tools of everyday communication undergo processes of theatricalization, summoning an "instinct of theatricality" (Evreinov 1923) for their presentation of selves (Goffman 1959). Performance theory helps to critically think about how speech patterns "contrastively invoke and enact particular stereotyped contexts of use, kinds of speakers and their characterological qualities, and cultural values" (Nakassis 2016, 150). An act of translation and cultural mediation, performing vocal identities is "a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline" (Bhabha 2004, 122).

Whether vocal, musical, or corporeal, I take performance in its broadest sense, as "a means of intervening in the world [within] a system of codes and conventions in which behaviors are reiterated, re-acted, reinvented, or relived" (Taylor 2016, 40). Likewise, Derrida thought of performance as 'citational,' only successful if it repeats re-itterable utterances (1985). Performance theorist Diana Taylor thought it "neither true nor false, neither good nor bad, liberating or repressive, performance is radically unstable, dependent totally on its framing, on the *by whom* and *for whom*, on the why where when it comes into being" (Taylor 2016, 40).

Linguistic Identity

While Theodor Adorno saw language as the medium "transfusing the collective into the individual" (1976, 31), Roland Barthes believed that the relation to language is political. He deplored that "there is no political theory of language, a methodology that would expose language's processes of *appropriation* and permit study of the "propriety" of enunciative means, something like the *Capital* of linguistics" (1981, 121).

Following Saussure's distinction between '*langue,'* the result of social convention, and '*parole,'* the personal use of language, French linguists used the term 'utterance' (*énonciation)* to study how speakers appropriate languages. Unlike discourse (*énoncé*), utterance is how a speaker 'positions' him or herself in language by means of specific 'indices' or marks. The disjuncture between what is said and how it is uttered implicitly reveals "its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality" (Bhabha 2004, 207).

The Egyptian sociolinguist El-Said Baddawi challenged the dichotomy opposing learned Classical written Arabic (*fus-ha*, equivalent to *langue*) to the many and varied spoken colloquial tongues (*a'miyeh*, equivalent to *parole*), with the so-called 'standard' variant (Modern Standard Arabic) in-between both ends of the spectrum. Rather, he suggests several levels of usage, reminiscent of musical 'bridging.' His theory is especially accurate in Lebanon's trilingual society, a mélange of accented polyvocalities. Where similar versions of a same language are found, the *vernacular*, as a locally-specific elocution, takes all its meaning. To quote cultural theorist Michael Shapiro, "all (sub)cultures, in a sense, are part of the vernacular continuum, which in some cases bridges cultural identities and in others intensifies solid antagonisms" (Shapiro 2019, 47).[89]

The similarity between the Syrian and Lebanese colloquials, that are "almost the same*, but not quite*" (Bhabha 2004, 123), make them easily reproduced. The Lebanese colloquial is already known to Syrians through music, media,[90] and interlinguistic contact. When the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote '*ana lūghati'*—'I am my language,' he emphasized the rooting and identity-making functions of language. I wonder whether constant code-switching might lead to enculturation, or to acculturation for second-generation Syrian refugees who adopt colloquial Lebanese through schooling and socialization, relinquishing their family's dialect. Deleuze and Guattari note that "if contact with the music and phoneticism[91] of one's own language is lost, the relationship between language and the body is destroyed" (1980, 185). The threat of linguistic acculturation is thus one of self-alienation, or of becoming a stranger to oneself.[92]

---

[89] Similarly, the opening of *Milles Plateaux* reads: "There is no language in itself, nor are there linguistic universals only a throng of dialects patois slang and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. Language is essentially heterogeneous reality; there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 6).

[90] From the 1990s to 2005, Syrian antennas tuned into Lebanese TV channels. Conversely, before the start of the Syrian war, the success of Syrian soap operas across the Arab-speaking world increased the passive acquisition of Syrian Colloquial Arabic.

[91] The terms *etic* and *emic* in anthropology derive from the twin terms *phonetic* and *phonemic* in linguistics. Whereas phonetics study all distinguishable sounds within a language, phonology studies how speakers *perceive* these sounds.

[92] In Arabic, *ghurbah* refers to the experience or the state of being alienated, estranged, and not belonging, and connotes a foreign or lonely place where one feels like a stranger (*gharīb*). It is related to *mughtarab*, the place of immigration, and *gharb,* the West.

Double Voice

Social stigma and the consciousness of oneself as an 'other'[93] leads Syrians refugees to engage in vocal mimicry, a sign of a double articulation. Hyperaware of the ways in which their identities are perceived and collapsed—by authorities, society, media, NGOs—Syrian refugees in Lebanon come to develop a form of 'double enunciation.' Over time, through ambivalence in dialogue (Young 1994, 16), a double voice may turn into a 'double consciousness' (DuBois 1903; Fanon 1952), whose 'identity-effects' "are always crucially *split"* (Bhabha 2004, 130).

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan described mimicry as camouflage (1978), a form of resemblance which imitates and takes on the dominant culture, copying its language, manners, and ideas. Bhabha argued that mimicry either "disavows its otherness" or reveals "authorized versions of otherness" (2004, 130). In both cases, mimicry is a sign of the inappropriate "at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed" (Bhabha 2004, 126).[94] To psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, mimicry is a sign of 'entanglement' that causes psychic damage to one's sense of self; an 'imposter syndrome' of sorts. Bhabha sees in mimicry the potential for new forms of solidarity to emerge and believes that in creating a "third space of enunciation," a 'double voice' may disrupt the authority of dominant discourse (Bhabha 2004, 54).

Both Fanon and Bhabha warn against cultural assimilation or 'identification,' and suggest to move towards self-reformulation,[95] or 'identity'. Jean Baudrillard warns against getting caught in 'simulation' (1981). In his chapter "Errantry, Exile," Glissant offers an eloquent description of refugeehood: "wandering, one might become lost, but in errantry one knows at every moment where one is - at every moment in relation to the other" (1997, xvi). Identities are molded to specific sociopolitical conditions, according to the context or the encounter, and what it calls for.

[93] Always having one's being on one's conscience is what Paul Ricoeur called a '*conscience altéritaire'* (1990, 43).
[94] He adds, "the desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry [is] the final irony of partial representation" (Bhabha 2004, 126).
[95] To Fanon, initiators of cultural change bear hybrid identities; a simultaneous sameness and difference caught in translation.

Chapter Two

Heritage Politics in the Beqaa Valley

> "The craft of singing (…) is the first to disappear from a given civilization when it disintegrates and retrogresses." – Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah,* 1377, 31.

The Duty to Remember

The Syrian musical heritage (*al-tūrāth al-mūsīqī al-Sūri*), threatened as a result of war, is at risk of further disintegration in displacement. In *Traditional Syrian Music*, Hassan Abbas writes:

> the killing of hundreds of thousands of Syrians has eliminated many of the bearers of this heritage, and the displacement of millions from their lands, with many of them dispersed across the globe, splits communities and weakens cultural identity, its associated practices, and the traditions and experiences that bring people together and unite them (2018, 25).

Families, atomized by war and forced displacement, are unable to gather around songs. Taught through socialization, folk music "requires presence—people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by "being there," by being a part of the transmission" (Taylor 2003, 243). As Leanne Simpson reminds us, "the oral tradition requires specific skills that need to be fostered amongst children and perfected all the way through life" (Simpson 2004, 377). When it is difficult access "the instruments, objects, artefacts, cultural and natural spaces and places of memory" (UNESCO 2003[96]), voice takes a central importance in the transmission of heritage.

From an Indigenous perspective, "*how* you learn is as important or perhaps more important than *what* you learn" (Simpson 2004, 380). As an oral (*shafahi*) tradition, Syrian folk music is transmitted intergenerationally through communal listening practices. To play, one must first learn how to listen; especially imperative given its microtones[97] ('*urab*), which limit the accuracy of notation. Transcriptions to Western musical notation only approximate musical reality. The precise intonation of notes must be learned aurally; they consist in "many gradations of pitch, each of which is learned precisely by ear by practitioners of the tradition" (Abu Shumays 2013, 236). Learning to recognize the *maqāmāt* and memorizing melodic progressions forms the basis of Arab

[96] The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage raises the right of communities to use dialects, "to continue the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills necessary to ensure the viability of the intangible cultural heritage", to access education that respects cultural identity, gives tools for creative expression, and keeps heritage alive.
[97] Arab music possesses microtones or quarter-tones. Not found in Western music, they correspond "more or less to *half flats* and *half sharps"* (Reynolds 2007, 136), though their intonations differ from scale to scale, as do flat and sharp notes.

music pedagogy.[98] Through listening and praxis, the main modes come to form "a catalogue, or lexicon" (Abu Shumays 2013, 243)—"the collection of modulations becomes the unconscious knowledge of both practitioners and listeners in the tradition" (Taylor 2003, 243). Over time, melodic scales and progressions become symbols and patterns, crystallizing into a tradition.

A powerful cultural representation, folk music conveys meanings and feelings that make the world intelligible. "Through its fundamentally iconic and concrete functioning, music can foreground the character of people's involvement with their biographies, their societies and their environment" (Tan 2012, 183). As an ethnopoetics,[99] folk songs help build symbolic identification to a group. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, "music makes the individual conscious of his physiological rootedness [and] appeals to our group instinct" (1969, 28); it is the means by which we learn about and express who we are. Syrian musicologist Najla Kalach views traditional folk music as representing the summation of a people's history and the particular colour of its inflections and language (Kalach 2020). She posits that in singing folk songs, musicians preserve cultural as well as linguistic heritage.

It could be assumed that "tradition becomes a luxury when there are a new set of existential demands to be dealt with" (Habash 2021, 1381), such as in refugeehood. Yet, there is a sense that if these practices are not sustained and recorded, they might disappear. This is the greatest concern of Kareem, the father of Reem and Yara, two talented young musicians living in the Beqaa Valley. The family came to Lebanon in 2012, initially settling in the South. In 2019, they had no choice but to move to informal tented settlements, after the electricity plant where father and son worked shut down. In Yara's words, they have since been living "from tent to tent." The value that the parents grant to creative expression and active cultural transmission, and the one that their children, though raised in Lebanon, accord to the Syrian heritage, is truly inspiring. Sitting in the family's tent in a refugee camp close to Bar Elias, Kareem speaks of a will to resist amnesia and the erasure of traditional music, and to keep the Syrian heritage alive—"beating with life:"

> "Our message to the whole world, is that our heritage (*tūrathna*) is about to be buried. We wish to make the Syrian heritage beating with life, for all the world.

[98] Students first learn the *Sama'iyyat,* a listening and mimesis exercise. "This knowledge, which stems to the Ottoman era, acts as one of the building blocks of Arab music even in its contemporary practice" (Currey 2002, 13).

[99] I take ethnopoetics in the sense of a poetics of speech. Like music, it involves multiple and complex reference to symbols. Ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax thought that music's primary effect "is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work" (Lomax 1959, 929), symbolizing the totality of "personality shaping experiences."

> Without this very lens, if it doesn't shed light on this instrument, and without the instrument's player, if they don't perform traditional music, the heritage will die."

Displaced families cope symbolically with unrecoverable loss. As the poet Nathaniel Mackey poignantly observes: "Music is wounded kinship's last resort" (1987, 29). Kareem's words underscore the urgency of the duty to remember the Syrian heritage, "an imperative directed towards the future, which is exactly the opposite side of the traumatic character of the humiliations and wounds of history" (Ricoeur 2004, 9). Remembering through music becomes the family's means of retrieving some unity and 'normalcy' from the past, keeping everyday familial life alive through artistic expression and ritualistic acts of remembrance. Learning the Syrian musical heritage sustains a sense cultural continuity. By preserving ancestral melodies and playing the *nāy* (flute), *dāf* (drum), '*ūd* (luth), or *būzūq* (lyre), musicians sustain collective memory, promote recovery processes, and nourish their community. Songs can reignite positive childhood memories and reinforce a sense of belonging to the places and communities that people have left behind. Much like a mother tongue, traditional music serves to remember heritage and re-member kin.

Whereas recordings create a trace, the intention is to keep the tradition and repertoire alive with practitioners. The musicologist Hassan Abbas, in his book on Syrian musical heritage, writes:

> While traditional music always requires institutions for preservation, conservation, and documentation, its repository remains the hearts of its people, and its flame continues to burn no matter how tall the rubble or how immense the heap of ash. Continuous hard work is inevitably needed if spirit is to be breathed into this ember, reviving and resurrecting it within the next generation, and in the generations to come (Abbas 2018, 15).

By renewing and amplifying the sociability and solidarity forged by participation, "performed acts of remembering oppose the imagined horror of forgetting" (Feld & Fox 1994, 40). In *The Embodied Mind,* Francesco Valera posits that "memory should be considered as an act; we remember a text by reading it, a story by telling it, and a journey by undertaking it" (Valera 1992, 5). Likewise, traditional music must be performed to be remembered. Safekeeping the Syrian musical heritage is an active form of remembrance and a communal form of resistance to culture loss, one that gathers a community around shared symbols and memories.

Syrian Musical Traditions

Arab musical traditions are conceptualized around melodic modes (*maqāmāt*) and rhythmic cycles (*īqā'āt*). Although the number of *maqāmāt* remains unknown, it is believed that they exist in hundreds.[100] Their names, in both Arabic and Persian,[101] refer to ethnic groups (*Kūrd, Fārsi*), regions (*Hijāz*), rhythms and tonics (*Do-gāh*, *Se-gāh*, *Chahar-gāh*), and symbols (*Bāyāt*, *Sabā*).[102] Like the anthropologist Leanne Simpson, I invite readers to consider "Indigenous song as both an aesthetic thing and as *more-than-song*" (2004, 45).

Syrian music comprises various genres: popular (*sha'bi*), folkloric (*fulkluri*), Bedouin (*badawi*), classical (*klāsiki*), as well as contemporary (*mo'aser*), which includes experimental (*tajrobi*) and pop music. Closely related to the classical repertoire is that of sacred music, including liturgical Christian and Sufi musical traditions of the Near East. Before the modern Syrian state was formed in 1946, the various ethnic and religious groups that inhabited and travelled across its land—Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Kurds; Muslim, whether Christian, Jewish, Druze, or Yazidi—contributed to this rich musical heritage and shaped many local musical traditions.[103]

The ethnomusicologist Jonathan Shannon writes that "a critical term in contemporary Syrian discourses of modernity and cultural authenticity has been that of heritage (*turāth*)" (Shannon 2006, 24). It is the term that participants most used to describe their musical traditions. Deriving from the root *w-r-th*, meaning 'to inherit,' it denotes patrimony, inherited customs and traditions attributed to a group. It has a different weight than *taqlidiyeh*, which translates as 'traditional,' though they are used interchangeably.

Tūrāth dispels and resolves the binary between folk and classical music as it refers to two cultural practices: the classical heritage (*al-turāth al-klāsiki*), referring to the cultural production "from the Umayyad through the 'Abbasid eras [from 750 to 1250 CE], often considered a Golden Age of Arab culture" (Shannon 2006, 78), and the popular heritage (*al-turāth al-sha'bi*), referring to music of the rural and urban nonelite classes, with an emphasis on rural areas. These ancient compositions are of anonymous authorship and of collective ownership. A song's melody (*lahn*),

[100] Popular folk heritage music typically uses about a dozen *maqamāt*, the most recurrent, often in *maqām Hijāz*, *Kūrd*, or *Bayāt*. Some are rarely played and hard to come across. Other *maqamāt* are used in the urban classical *Tarab* musical tradition.
[101] The *maqāmāt* have been recorded in Al-Farābi's *Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir,* in c. 920, and were later theorized by Persian musicologist al-Isfahani in his *Kitab al-Aghani* (*Book of Songs*) in 1216-1220.
[102] While *Bayat* means 'houses', *Sabā* means 'youth'. *Dokah*, *Sekkah* and *Jaharka* refer to the second, third, or fourth tonic. Indo-European numbers (*do, se, chahar*) are understood across the Silk Road, but have been Arabicized to fit the Arabic alphabet:
[103] Syrian musicologist Rami Chahin notes that music of "the inner Syrian desert, the Syrian coast, Kurdish areas, and the Bedouin desert differ considerably, although many share similar music theories and instruments" (Chahin 2023, 5).

accent (*lahje)*, words (*kalam*), rhythm (*iqa'*) and instruments (*a'lat*) all point to its origins. Sounding distant times and specific locales, songs are invaluable records of a people's history and culture. To Murray Schaffer, "History is a songbook for anyone who would listen to it" (1977).

A 2013 Syrian bank note showing musicians producing "the oldest musical note" (*al nota musiqiya al-ūla*), the earliest example of music notation that was found on a 3,500 year-old Sumerian clay tablet ("H6", on the right) in the ancient port city of Ugarit, on Syria's coast. In 1951, archaeologists found 29 tablets inscribed in the Babylonian cuneiform script. Researchers believe they are inscribed with lyrics, catalogues of songs for various occasions and moods, and religious hymns (Molana-Allen & Porter, 2018).

The Psychosocial Role of Music

Songs and scales carry much more than mere sounds, which the emotive codification of the *maqāmāt* attest to. Historically, each *maqām* has been associated to particular emotions, moods or therapeutic realms.[104] "Certain modes are meant to sound sad and mournful, others happy and lighthearted, and still others dignified and stately" (Reynolds 2007, 135). Early treatises qualify *maqām Rāst* as serious, *Hijāz* as nostalgic, *Bayāti* as carrying vitality, joy, and femininity, and *Sikāh* as "conjuring feelings of love" (Touma 1996, 43). Associated with physical sensations, mental states, or images, melodic modes "are essentially experienced as abstract emotional "flavors" rather than explicit sentiment-like conditions" (Racy 2003, 203).

This tradition recognizes sound as a phenomenological experience transcending the mind-body dichotomy and transduces feelings into sounds. The affect produced by music may trigger *tarāb*—a drastic shift from one emotional state to another, or the combination of strong and seemingly opposite emotions. The medieval scholar Ibn Mandhūr defines *tarāb* as "the setting in of joy (*farah*) and the going away of sadness (*huzn*)" (1233, 557). The music dictionary of Iraqi scholar Husayn Ali Mahfūdh defines *tarāb* as "lightness that overcomes you, thus causing you to be joyous or sad," and "lightness that results from extreme sadness or extreme joy" (1977, 203). I take inspiration from what Jihad Racy coined "transformative blending" (2003, 203) to speak of

[104] Somewhat akin to how minor scales and tonalities carry the affective connotation of 'sadness' in the Western world.

Arab music's ability to channel, express and resolve extreme emotions. By moving through the *maqāmāt*, musicians can transform sadness into happiness, thus offering emotional alleviation.

Participants refer to "jamming" as a 'circle' (*halqa)* or a 'listening' session *(estem'a)*. These friendly encounters foster a "mutual tuning-in relationship" (Schutz 1964, 115) around an activity that gathers players ('*azef*) and listeners (*sami'ah*). As a coming together, music fosters presence and harmonizes a group's emotions. It has been shown that playing and listening to music strengthens "the psychological connectedness to a social group or a community" (Heynen & al. 2022, 1434), providing a space to forge connections and experiences. As a moment of encounter, music gathers, fosters presence, and has the power to engage us directly and emotionally through shared feeling. Creating a moment of communion, to make music is to "convene others and create common space in daily life" (Nagi & al. 2021, 2). To cite the historian Achille Mbembe, "this will to community is another name for what could be called the will to life" (Mbembe 2021, 3).

Before claiming a transformative power, it could be said that music sustains communities and is a way to cope. Lévi-Strauss thought that music "substitutes for experience and produces the pleasurable illusion that contradictions can be overcome, and difficulties resolved" (Lévi-Strauss 1971, 5). Yara, now 16 years old, was only 4 years old when she arrived in Lebanon. She tells me,

> I left Syria in 2013. From van to van, I found myself in Lebanon. I was so young. I don't know how, but I got out! (*she laughs*) I have been living in the Beqaa for the past four years. From a house to a tent—this is how my story started. Living from tent to tent. My psyche got tired. I don't know what happened to me, but my psyche got tired. I mean... Because I kept moving from tent to tent. Until something happened to me. I registered for a music institute, Action for Hope ('*Amal al-Amal*). I graduated as a singer and as a clarinetist. I entered in 2019 and graduated in 2021.

Yara is radiant when she sings; she shines bright and enlivens all her surroundings. After playing the clarinet, an air of calmness washes over her. Music-making is a meditative practice with proven therapeutic effects—psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical alike—that contributes to psychosocial wellbeing. A 'direct' form of self-expression, music anchors in the present moment, allows to appreciate one's creativity in real-time, and gives strength to traverse challenging emotional states. It is a beneficial therapeutic tool for youth who suffered from war and displacement that can be used for emotional regulation and to express conflicting emotions.

Displacement and Music: The case of Action for Hope

Creativity and social engagement have been shown to help overcome social barriers, foster resilience, and adapt to conditions of adversity in displacement.[105] Music-making "can be actualized by working, supporting family, building relationships, maintaining communication with others, staying determined in the face of adversity, and finding moments to convene and enjoy themselves" (Nagi & al. 2021, 5). In researching adolescent resilience in the Syrian refugee camps of Bar Elias, Nagi & al. have shown that, for young refugees, "[Syria] remains a source of inspiration and identity that connects refugee adolescents to their present community and a space that protects and contains the bonds of their family and neighborhood" (Nagi & al. 2021, 5).

To meet these needs, the grassroots NGO Action for Hope ('*Amal al-Amal*) was developed jointly by Syrian and Lebanese partners in 2013 to offer 'cultural relief' to Syrian refugee youth in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. They established two cultural community centers in the Beqaa Valley,[106] offering music education and cultural activities. Their activities include training Syrian musicians and traditional instrument-makers, representing rare learning opportunities amid a stark lack of training otherwise available in the region. Around 55 young students join each year to embark on an 18-month study programme focused on Arab music. The programme aims to foster self-expression, economic independence, and the transmission of the Syrian cultural heritage. "Students develop a range of personal and social skills, including confidence, self-esteem, independence, leadership, a sense of wellbeing, identity, and self-expression." (Sound Connections 2019). The educators and students that I met all spoke of the organization fondly—for some, like Yara, it was life-changing.

The program goes beyond in-the-moment therapy or relief by equipping young people with real tools and skills they can build lives with. After graduating, many become professional musicians working as music teachers and performers, should they wish to. The program's challenges stem from the broader social context, including music being seen as taboo amongst more conservative people, and a lack of career pathways. Yet its aim to preserve and celebrate

[105] It is beneficial for adolescents to join vocational courses and to "engage in creative activities to build relationships and morale. These connections embody elements of communal resilience as these networks provide a foundation, purpose and direction towards concrete opportunities." (Nagi & al. 2021, 6) Resilience comprises effective responses to social challenges, providing ways to adapt to stressors through "connections to family, peers, and environment that helps derive a sense of security" (Nagi & al 2021). In forced migratory contexts, adaptation entails "constantly negotiating and (re)assigning meaning to resources and experiences to make sense of their suffering" (Nguyen-Gillham & al., 2008).

[106] The Bar Elias Training Center serves a refugee population of 351,972 (as of 2018, UNHCR) by offering music and theatre training, while the Ghazzeh Cultural Center, 20km away, hosts a library, screenings, and a filmmaking training program.

traditional Arabic music has engendered a sense of pride amongst the community. This changed attitudes towards music amongst the wider community, "it challenges conservatism whilst staying true to heritage and culture that people recognize as their own, and increased acceptance of music as a viable education and career pathway" (Sound Connections 2019).

The Politics of the Humanitarian Gaze

I entered the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley through Amir, who used to teach the *nāy* and listening skills in traditional Arab music to Syrian refugee youth in the region. When I met the Wardan family, trust grew quickly as I began to play music with them too, creating a bond between us. Playing with children also helped create a relaxed environment, despite the camera's presence.

The camps' residents are used to foreign visitors; mostly officials and humanitarian workers. This creates a certain climate within which Syrian refugees are often expected to perform songs that cater to their sponsors - something that I was trying to avoid. I sensed this tension when Yara and Reem's mother, Soraya, initially asked her youngest son, Bilal, to sing *Madresati* (*My School*), a song about the importance of schooling that children are often asked to perform for dignitaries and NGO representatives who visit the camps before promising funding.

Playing for the camera changes musical meaning and performance; it differs from playing together, playing with and for family, playing for paying audiences in Beirut, or playing for Syrian weddings and celebrations in the Beqaa. Different audiences, real and imagined, dictate the musicians' choices of songs, as well as spoken and sung accents in addressing the crowd. The voice and the repertoire are always curated to speak to specific audiences in certain ways.

Initially, as a foreign researcher with a camera, I embodied the 'imagined audience' for which he sang. Not being linked to the NGO and developing a long-term friendship with the family eventually changed the nature of songs they performed in my presence. This was part of my rationale in deciding not to enter this community through the association, but rather meeting families through personal contacts, which was beneficial for researching the place that music holds in daily familial life, and to steer clear from expected performances of refugeehood.

"*I Made it Oriental*": The Preservation and Transformation of Syrian Musical Heritage

Gathered in the small provisional yet intimate shelter that is the Wardan family's home in the Beqaa, I sit with the two older sisters of the family, Reem and Yara, to talk about music. Both are talented musicians who contribute to the preservation of the Syrian musical heritage. Reem is a multi-instrumentalist specializing in string instruments. An accomplished performer, composer and improviser, she has a serious and deepfelt air to her when she plays. Her younger sister, Yara, is a vocalist and clarinetist; she has an endearing rebellious streak and a lightness to her, balanced with a great sensibility—a born performer. The musical space of this household is predominantly female. —While all the siblings enjoy their sisters' music, each have their own creative practice.

Kareem, their father, is a poet and philosopher. In a poetic register and a tone that conveys deep philosophical reflection, he shared his theory of music resting on attuned listening. Dramatized with repetitions and long silences,[107] his eloquent soliloquy is close to *hadīth sha'eri* ('poetic speech'), an oratory art demonstrating literary and musical play.

In the course of our conversation, which I recorded for the film, I was struck by the manner in which Kareem described musical perception as a form of listening—the ear mediates one's external surroundings, but also learns to convey one's inner state. The rhythm and musicality of his speech—its cadence and embodied idioms—which was directed both to me and his family members who were also sitting in the room and listening attentively, are hard to capture in translation. The challenge of translation is twofold because it involves a move from oral to textual form, as well as Arabic to English:

> The musical being differs from the regular human—by the language of the melody. The musical ear [is that] which conveys. The focus of human emotions is always a focus on listening. The musician is a very sensitive listener. He feels emotions differently than everyone else. That's why he represents reality through his ear. He acts through his senses. [*He points to his ear, as to emphasize the sense of hearing*].

Unlike the 'natural human' *(al-ensan al-tabiy'aī),* the 'musical being' or 'musically-inclined human' (*al-ensān al-mūsīqī)* possesses a 'musical ear' (*edno musiqie*) that allows him or her to communicate in 'the language of the melody' (*loughat al-lahn*)—that is, music. Kareem

[107] Folklorist Américo Paredes noted that when folk poetry is written down, "the repetitions, the refrains, the strong parallelistic devices that hold it together may become too monotonous to an ear that is guided by the eye" (Paredes 1964, 81).

foregrounds the musician's sensitive ear as the means through which an emotive reality might be intuited and translated into the medium of music. He highlights the importance of listening for the creative act of playing music, which he understands as representing reality through the senses.

> From the beginning, we said [to our daughters]: "You chose the right path to deliver all your emotions, without you speaking. Without any words [*bedūn kalām*], you deliver your emotions [*sho'ūrek*], your message [*kalāmek*], your feelings [*ahsāsek*], to the other side—whether to a human, an animal, or even all of nature."

In Arabic, '*kalam'* has a dual meaning; while it translates as 'words,' it can also mean 'message.' Thinking of music as a universal language exceeding in clarity that of language itself, Kareem posits that music allows one to "speak" and deliver a message without words. In referring to "the other side," he considers all non-human life forms, situating the self as part of a wider relational ecology shaping a sonic one.[108] Kareem's perspective evokes the ontological turn in anthropology, where poetics and symbolic relationships open to other kinds of realities.

> From the trees, we hear leaves moving; from the sea waves, we can hear many things. In addition to the sounds of birds, of animals… Whichever form the language takes, this is language. Whoever gets it, gets it. Whoever doesn't, doesn't.

In attuning to the health of the land and the languages of animals, Kareem's words above echo non-anthropocentric Indigenous ontologies of sound. He considers all of the sounds that shape sonic landscapes, what Murray Schaffer called the 'soundscape' (1977)—an "auditory 'terrain' that maps the composition of noises, sounds, music and human melodies in a particular space and context" (Truax 1984, xii). Demonstrating a holistic understanding of language—as encompassing communicative acts from all living forms, verbal and non-verbal—music is to Kareem the sum of instruments played, languages spoken, animal cries, leaves rustling and breezes whistling. The attuned listener may perceive flocking birds and silences as communicative, conveying "affective tonalities" (Shapiro 2019, 142). In recognizing that not everyone is able to grasp the non-logocentric communicative faculties of sound, he reminds me of Indigenous scholar Dylan Robinson's critique of "hungry listening," a knowledge-driven mode of listening that "prioritizes the capture and certainty of information over the affective feel, timbre, touch, and texture of sound" (2020, 38).

[108] Kareem's view reminds Heidegger's "dwelt-in-the-world," or *being-in-the-world*. He argues, humans "are brought into existence as organisms-persons within a world that is inhabited by beings of manifold kinds, both human and non-human. Therefore, relations among humans, which we are accustomed to calling 'social,' are but a subset of ecological relations." (1951, 5).

Sometime later, after drinking tea, Kareem again underscores the way in which music serves as a universal language of perception and relation:

> Music, in its origins, is language and culture; a *universal language* [emphasis added] that both humans and animals are fluent in—all of nature shares language. Human and animal, even all of nature, share language. But who will understand it? Only when it becomes musical language, everybody will understand it. How will it be expressed? How will it be delivered? Through the language of the listener. So we said [to our daughters], "Oh God, your cultured language—which is music—will be a great gate for you to reach the whole world."

Both music and language are systems of symbolization. According to Lévi-Strauss, myth and music share the characteristic of "being languages which, in their different ways, transcend articulate expression" (1969, 15).[109] Music, he says, is "a myth coded in sounds instead of words" (1969, 27). By describing music as a cultured language, Kareem evokes Glissant's assertion that "thought makes music" (1997, 93). By conceptualizing music as a universal language, emphasizing its faculty to communicate with all humanity and living forms, Kareem grants it a spiritual form. He continues:

> In the Arabic language, the commas, the colon, the semi-colon and the exclamation point serve to analyze, and to express feelings and emotions. '*Where?*' There is something here; there is a question. '*Exclamation*!' '*What?*' The meaning of these words and punctuation, these are your emotions. It's always the same punctuation; there is only one *solfège* in the world[110], and the instruments are one and same. But the emotion you add, and the melody, it's clear! There should be emotion that *you* give; it is different from any other person. We all speak. But when I speak, the melody I speak by differs. It's the treasure inside every person, as emotions are different from one person to another. This is the internal being (*al-kamīn dākheli*).

By drawing a parallel between linguistic punctuation and musical notation, Kareem reinforces the idea of music as language. Like language, musical intelligibility is structured through punctuation to articulate intentions, rhythm, and emotion—phrase length, dynamics of call or response, pacing and patterns of rests apply equally to language and to music. In *Punctuations* (2019), cultural theorist Michael Shapiro's study of how the arts think the political, one reads:

[109] Lévi-Strauss posits that since "music stands in opposition to articulate speech, it follows that music, which is a complete language, not reducible to speech, must be able to fulfill the same functions on its own account" (1969, 45).
[110] In its iconic referentiality to symbols, the *solfège* is a musical text like other systems of symbolization and non-verbal signs.

> There is no element in which language resembles music more than the punctuation marks. The comma and the period correspond to the half cadence and the authentic cadence. Exclamation points are like silent cymbal clashes, question marks like musical upbeats, colons dominant seventh chords; and only a person who can perceive the different weights of strong and weak phrasings in musical form can really feel the distinction between the comma and the semicolon (Shapiro 2019, 3).

What Kareem coins "the internal being" or "the treasure inside every person" is reminiscent of what Barthes called 'the grain of the voice,' described as "the encounter between a language and a voice, [the] friction between music [and] language" (Barthes 1985, 185). Unique and emotive, the internal being manifests its individuality with a specific timbre, colour and tone. Voice is presence to oneself, resonating with character and emotions for others to hear; it is one's treasure:

> Truly, in music, there is nothing before or after it. It will now make us cry, and it will make us happy at the same time. Without you speaking (*bedūn ma tehki*).

Kareem's point about expressiveness without or beyond speech is as if music, as it were, relieves one of the infelicities and inadequacies of speech, which in contexts of displacement becomes ever more fraught. For Syrian refugees in Lebanon, expressing oneself through music, in ways that also enable certain forms of anonymity, concealment and deniability, can be enormously significant. As noted by Cheng Chye Tan, **"**music can emphasize the relatedness of human existence with a directness and concreteness that language cannot easily reproduce" (Tan 2012, 183). Music communicates what escapes speech, expressing what does not get said in ordinary language.

Reem, Kareem's eldest daughter, who was sitting listening attentively to her father, echoed his views on music: "Honestly, music is a language for me. It is something very nice that I enjoy. When I am sad, I play. When I am happy, I play. I play—I can't say it in any other way."

As a medium to convey emotions, "music 'presents' the inner world of human feeling in a way that language cannot" (Nercessian 2002, 67). Music expresses and gives form to feelings.[111] The philosopher Susanne Langer aptly noted that "without this expression, those feelings do not have any perceptible essence" (Langer 1967, 87). In a dialectic relation with the body, music

[111] A Gestalt psychology approach to emotional meaning theory posits that music "presents to the ear an array of auditory patterns which at a purely formal level are very similar to, if not identical with, the bodily patterns which are the basis of real emotion. (…) the auditory pattern make music, whereas the organic and visceral pattern make emotion" (Pratt 1952, 17).

channels affect as well as cognition—it impresses emotionally "as part of a broader affective syntax" (Racy 2003, 75). In short, "music sounds the way emotions feel" (Pratt 1952, 24).

As we sit together around the wooden stove, in their cramped yet cozy home, we are bound by music that weaves between us, joined in the act of listening. Reem strums an air on the *būzūq*:

> REEM: "This is Sayyed Darwish, isn't it?" *Sayed Darwish, mū?*
> KAREEM: "In which *maqām*?" *Min ay maqām?*
> REEM: "For sure, it's [*maqām*] Bayat!" *Akid Bayat!*

As this exchange between father and daughter suggests, listening is also interactional. When musicians play from memory, it is by following the thread of a tune. Fleshing out the melody, they invite others to name it, and sometimes to join in. This space is grounded in the confidence of a shared repertoire. In this guessing-game, listeners are asked to remember a famous song, whose it might be, and to name its *maqām*. In doing so, they are enacting and reinforcing collective memory.

When I ask Reem which kind of music she likes playing the most, she is quick to respond:

> I prefer old music. I like to rediscover heritage (*ashiyah tūrathīyah*) more than the music released nowadays. I mean… It's really vain (*hābeta*), honestly… I like to discover old music more. I research them—to read into them. (*abhas aleyhon. taftish, yani)* [*Her hand gestures as if to underscore the importance of this detail.*]

For Reem, this preference is not only a question of taste, nor a romantic aesthetic preference for the old (*qadim*); rather, it is an endeavour to uncover and learn a forgotten heritage. Finding old songs and researching their origins is an important part of her practice as a musician. Songs of the Syrian *turāth* take on significant meaning for second-generation Syrian refugee youth who only retain faint memories of their homeland. I was particularly struck by Reem's youngest siblings who, despite having been born in Lebanon, with no lived experience of Syria, still seems to understand it as central to their identity and recognize in it something essential that must be preserved. For Reem, Yara, and their family, it is clear that playing these songs is a way to maintain and restore their identity as Syrian musicians, but also specifically "from the town of Saida." This localizing of origin underscores the importance of regional musical traditions, over and above national ones.

As we talk, Yara picks us her clarinet case, which also serves as a percussion—it offers low (*dum*) and high pitch (*tak*) strokes, essential for Arab rhythm (*iqa'*). Yara gives some insights on their creative process: "My sister, here [Reem]—She composes, and I sing. I mean, she is the master mind, you could say. The—What is it called, mom? The mind…" Trying to remember the

correct word, she turns to her mother for help. "*Al muddaber*," Soraya replies. "The conductor!", repeats Yara.

As the sisters move swiftly through a large repertoire of Syrian folk (*tūrāth*), popular (*sha'bi*) and rural (*baladi*) songs that they have learned over the years, Reem goes on to explain why she likes the *būzūq,* noting that "because it's more popular… it lets me play folk music as much as I want, very comfortably." The *būzūq* is a lute whose frets mark quarter-tones while the first string sounds the tonic (*qarār)*. With its 'folksy sound' and its build that provides the grammar of the *maqāmāt*, it is destined for popular music. A social instrument played *with* and *for* others, the *būzūq* gathers people around songs known by all.

Calling upon the different times and spaces of their imaginaries, Reem and Yara replay the past to re-root themselves within it. In doing so, they reterritorialize displaced heritage and resist the encroachments of contemporary Western pop music culture. As Reem confesses:

> *Wallah,* these days, there is new music with [*draws a repetitive tempo with her hand in the air]* and playing like this [*mockingly mimics gestures on a synth keyboard*] *Wallah!* Now I will show you, you will see, on Facebook.

Dismissing contemporary Arab pop music as "noisy" or "low-culture" [112] was common amongst many musicians I befriended. Recurrent criticism includes the heavy influence of Western instrumentation, the imitation of Euro-American aesthetics, and the insincerity of singers, which signify the loss of tradition. Many regard a fast-paced, relentless rhythmic drive as impoverished, compared to the intricacies of Arab rhythms that grant music a slow, contemplative, and circular sense of time. As a friend described classical Arab music to me, "the music performs itself."

The keyboard (*org)*, a prime symbol of contemporary Arab pop music, is often charged with being inauthentic and 'cheap,' almost synonymous with auditory pollution. Yamaha revolutionized Oriental music in the 1990s with the release of the Korg keyboard, which has a modulation knob bending notes to microtones, and sampled sounds simulating a variety of traditional folk instruments, including the *yarghūl, nāy,* and *mūjwez*, even the *būzūq*. With its integrated digital beats, the need for a traditional *takht* ensemble[113] was replaced by a one-person orchestra, making live wedding music more accessible. Musicians I spoke with often described the *org* as lacking soul (*ruh*), character (*nafs*), and presence (*wūjūd*). Devoid of material sound indices

[112] Criticism of popular culture reflects an Arnoldian bias against "low-brow" culture from the standpoint of "high-brow" culture.
[113] A '*takht'* is an Arab music ensemble often comprised of an *'ūd*, *nāy* (reed flute), *qanūn* (zither), and *riqq* (tambourine).

(Chion 1993), sampled sounds of traditional instruments become an exotic 'flavour,' a cliché-like marker of authenticity amidst a global 'world music' market.

The *org* offers simulacrums (Baudrillard 1981) by reproducing acoustic sounds through electronic mediation. Enlisting these sounds creates "a synthetic soundscape in which natural sounds are becoming increasingly unnatural" (Schafer 1977, 91) with machine-made substitutes providing the alternative.[114] Sound scholar Murray Schafer wrote of 'schizophonia' to refer to "the split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction" (1977, 91) to address the recombination or recontextualization of sounds 'split' from their sources.

The turn to heritage comes partly in response to the rise of these 'inauthentic,' simulated, disconnected and disembodied sounds. Reem's perspective is, increasingly, shared by Syrian musicians around the world who "call for the preservation of the old, "authentic" culture" (Shannon 2006, 24). After all, "the 'authentic' (or 'authentics') can only exist alongside the reproduced, mass-produced, mediated and simulated" (Radano & Bohlman 2001, 33).

Later in the conversation, Reem situates her musical process for me:

> "Honestly, all of the improvisations (*taqsīmāt)* and most of the songs I play, I play from my mind, or from my heart." (*azef min aqli, ao min qalbi*)

Whether playing *taqsīm* or from her repertoire, Reem's mind and heart, together, constitute the source of her creativity. Perhaps her mind (*aql*) points to her musical study and acquired repertoire, while her heart (*qalb)* contributes emotions and fuels her improvisations (*taqsīmāt*).

Taqsīm[115] is a spontaneous technique of improvisation in the course of performance. It is a "free form that is based on the character of the musician, his repertoire, his cultural heritage of musical phrases, or learned techniques" (Alkaei & Küssner 2021, 4). As a practice and aesthetic, *taqsīm* is "a direct embodiment of the *maqām*, as potentially felt, or imagined, or simply improvised" (Racy 2021, 467). Through experimentation and feeling, it seeks to translate one's current state of being. Musicians improvise along the *maqāmāt* they memorized, move fluently from one to another, and introduce elements of surprise that defy expected resolutions. Eventually, the original *maqām* must be restated to offer tonal fixation. As warned by Tawfiq al-Sahbāgh, "As soon as you begin to savor a mode, another one comes and washes away its influence" (1950, 14).

[114] See Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* 1935.
[115] *Taqsīm* (pl. *taqāsīm*, lit. 'division') is a non-metric solo improvisation used in several sonic practices, such as Qur'anic chanting.

Neither fully pre-composed nor spontaneous invention—*taqsīm*, a highly valued skill, is an instant composition.[116] The ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl noted that "in the Middle East, improvisation has the high prestige associated with freedom and unpredictability, while in the West, precomposition has the prestige associated with discipline and predictability" (Nettl 1998, 8). *Taqsīm* provides musicians with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of their instrument and talent as they create their own renditions of known pieces. They are not only interpreters, but also co-composers of the music being played; melodic scales (*maqāmāt*), genres (*ajnas*), melodies (*lahneh*), progressions (*masir*), and the tonal anchor (*qarār*) all offer a basis for inspiration.

Meanwhile, Yara takes up her clarinet and plays a tune. I have heard this melody time and again—it is "*Asmar al-Lon*," a popular traditional Syrian song in *maqām Hijaz* that stems from Northern Syria. It belongs to *al-Qūdūd al-Halabiya,*[117] a genre most associated with Aleppo that resulted from exposure to different cultures, music and oral expressions meeting on the Silk Road. It has been transmitted orally, which accounts for its melodic and textual variations.

During Yara's clarinet solo, the lyrics rush back to my mind.

Hel asmar al-lon[118]
Ya asmarani
Ta'ban ya qalb, kheyo *Oh, brother, my heart is tired…*

Yara plays with a calm assurance, introduces her improvised *taqsīm* between two refrains (*taslīm)*, and brings all the room to attention, alive to the present moment. After playing the clarinet, she seems different—relaxed, at peace, and serene, a different mode of being than her extraverted and zestful social self. It seems as if her 'internal treasure' was embodied in the voice of the clarinet.

After a shared moment of silence, Reem asks her father where the cello is. The question is unexpected, even improbable. "In the room" (*bel ūda),* he replies. There is only one bedroom for this family of eight. He places a plastic chair in the living room; when Reem returns with her cello, I can't help noticing that it is taller than her. An expensive instrument with bourgeois connotations associated with Western European classical music, the cello is a heterotopic sight in a UNHCR

[116] Nettl suggests we "abandon the idea of improvisation as a process separate from composition and adopt the view that all performers improvise to some extent" (1974, 19). To him, improvisation is a form of composition in the course of performance.
[117] The *qūdūd* was inscribed as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The nomination form reads, "to communities in Aleppo, *Qudoud* is part of their history and a symbol of their collective identity, especially when its practitioners come from different religions, sects and ethnicities, yet share a common belonging. The element is a source of pride to its communities, and many lyrics describe Aleppo's world heritage. … Although some of these sites were heavily-damaged in the war, and communities lived years of hardship and displacement, singing these songs was a symbol of their continuity and belonging to home" (2021).
[118] This song is not translatable, as it refers to a local symbolic ecology. In colloquial Syrian, *asmar* refers to a dark featured person. It evokes *amhe*, wheat, or *amhi*, its colour. In Classical Arabic literature, '*asmar'* describes beauty, often a woman with dark hair.

tent. There are "aspects of disruption in images that have the effect of arresting one's ability to impose traditional modes of intelligibility," writes Shapiro (2019, 5). For me, this image of Reem holding the cello in this cramped space, with the family gathered around, was one such moment; somewhat like Barthes' notion of the punctum (1980). In juxtaposing two seemingly contradictory realms that were unthought of, Reem creates a heterotopic space (Foucault 1967).

Ever since Reem first started learning the cello, it has remained her favorite instrument:

> I have been playing the cello since I was 14 years old, and have loved it ever since. I will turn 18 years old, and I still play the cello. Impossible for me to give it up (*abadlo*). I play for concerts on the cello. Even on Tuesday, I have a *hafleh*, I will play the cello. You're coming? At the Sursock Museum [in Beirut].

She takes a seat, tightens her bow, and glides it over the lowest string. She starts an improvisation; the path of her *taqsīm* follows a complex, unexpected progression, and carries great emotional depth and wisdom. There is something transfixing and dramatic about Reem's cello improvisation, which at first glance seems alien to her surroundings. Like her audience, time stands still. The effect of its dark, wistful tones resonates long after her bow leaves the strings. Reem is completely absorbed when she plays, as if transported to another world. As she is moved, she moves us too. Her playing reminds me of Glissant's "pensée du tremblement" (1997); it makes us tremble as she is shaken. In her power to elicit feelings, maybe she produced '*tarab,'* which translates as music's 'affect' and its 'effect' on listeners, measuring its emotive resonance.[119] Kareem, evidently proud of his daughter's gifts, comments, "This is how her heart speaks." Reem admits:

> Nothing could ever take its place because it really brings out my feelings accurately. They call the cello "The Human Instrument" because it truly brings out the notes from the heart. So, when I play the cello, it expresses my feelings in every beat.

In articulating her feelings as 'soaring' from the instrument (*bital'a*), she evokes a Sufi concept of transformation and transcendence. Emotional evocation is central in the classical Arab music aesthetics of *taqsīm,* which must engage the listener emotionally (Racy 2021, 4). In other words, "the affective is the effective" (Taylor 2016, 92). *Taqsīm* conveys what is *there* in that precise moment; it expresses what *must* come out. It offers an outlet to channel and express difficult emotions and turn them into something beautiful. An affective mode of communication, what emerges in *taqsīm* seems to carry the force of sincerity, conveying emotions '*be kul takkeh,'* "at every second." Explaining why the cello is called the 'human instrument,' Reem tells me it is

[119] The concept of *tarab* in Arab music is comparable to *duende* in Andalusian music. See Garcia Lorca 1955.

> because it has four strings (*aotār*) and the long neck gives a distance about an arm's length (*al-zined*); it gives me a lot of range. So, when I pluck it (*bela'b ma' asabe)* or play with the bow *(ao bāzef bel qos*), there are no frets, there are no obstacles (*ma fi znūd, ma fi hawajez*); it allows me to make the sound that I want. (*btemn'ni ana 'amel sot ila biddi ya*)

The cello's tonal range, from bass to soprano, is, indeed, closest to the human voice. Given its sonic properties and size, it is often anthropomorphized. It provides a wider range than the '*ūd* which, though fretless, has a shorter neck and thus a more restrained melodic range. The freedom of tonalities granted by the cello makes it suitable for Oriental music, although the *maqāmāt* must be found again and again; they are not a given, like on the *būzūq*. "Come play the cello. Impossible for it to come to me easily, for the songs that I want to hear to come out directly," she admits. Nonetheless, the instrument's affordances allow Reem to control sonorities as she pleases:

> Because the cello is originally Western, I made it Oriental. But the *būzūq* is originally Oriental. *Truly* Oriental. (*Le eno al-cello qarbi aslo. Ana amalto sharqi. Bas eno hay [al-būzūq] sharqiyeh aslie. Musharq'a*.)[120]

By transposing the rules of the *maqāmāt* to an instrument that was not destined for them, Reem has 'Easternized' the cello, transforming its commonplace use to fit her own aesthetics. "Transcoding or transduction is the manner in which one milieu serves as the basis for another, or conversely is established atop another milieu…. the milieus pass into one another, they are essentially communicating" (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 313). In juxtaposing two seemingly incompatible realms—a timbre connoting Western Classical music with Arab Classical music—Reem created a transposition, in the musical sense of the word.

This dynamic recombination of elements recasts conventional binaries of images (poverty/elegance) and sounds (Oriental/Western)—into a "Third Space" (Bhabha 2004), an ambiguous area that develops when two or more cultures interact. By repurposing a Western instrument to fit Arab musical traditions, Reem makes the cello her own, refiguring authenticity and innovating through hybridisation. In the words of Simon Jargy, who studied the folk music of Syria and Lebanon, she creates "a realm where we cannot tell apart tradition from personal creation, memory from imagination" (Jargy 1971, 105).

Reem goes on to explains the specificity of each instrument she plays.

> The *'ūd*, the cello and the *būzūq* are different from each other—for me, in what I play on these three instruments and how I feel about them. I found refuge (*altaja'et*)

[120] In Arabic, the prefix "mū-" (*madrūb*, 'broken'; *makhlūt,* 'mixed'), means something was done on purpose, to be a certain way. By adding the prefix *mū-* to 'Eastern' (*musharq'a*), Reem signifies that the *būzūq* was *made for* Oriental music.

> in the *ʻūd* and *būzūq* more [than the cello], because they help me play popular music. But they don't translate emotions accurately. Maybe, okay, it's possible that the *būzūq* conveys emotion, and the *ʻūd* too, but they each convey a different emotion. They might not give me the right emotions.

Each instrument fulfills a different need. Perhaps the cello's sombre timbre and commanding presence are suitable for conveying an emotional core, what some might call 'soul.' Its notes come "from the heart, really," and voice her emotions "more accurately." Yet the *ʻūd*'s timeless nature and the *būzūq*'s heritage sound offer her the sense of "refuge"— of feeling comfortable and 'at home'.[121] While Reem's cello practice is more introspective, embodying her 'internal being,' the '*ūd* and *būzūq* are traditional, social instruments, enabling her to remain connected to her homeland and cultural identity through popular music. Each instrument contributes in its own way to create experiences, moments and spaces of belonging, healing and communion amid displacement.

As for the meaning and weight of traditional songs' lyrics, in Reem's opinion:

> In the old days, they would not make songs out of stories. Everything they felt, they would write down. But stories, there were none. Really! Maybe we can tell in what year a song was released—or in what year it was written, that's possible—but stories, there were none. Really! They wouldn't give songs an intention (*hadaf*) in their minds (*bi bālon*).[122] Nowadays, if someone wants to compose, they might have an intention. But in the old days, they didn't. Really, there were no stories.

Implicit in Reem's view is the belief that a true artist creates without a purpose *(bedoon hadaf),* somewhat "out of necessity," to evoke poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1929). While the lyrics of traditional folk songs might not reflect the actual experiences and worldviews of singers and listeners, these texts evoke the cultural and spiritual 'ecology' of their environments. Besides, feelings take precedence over stories; as noted by folklorist Américo Paredes, "folksong expresses group feelings and attitudes that are natural and implicit in their own milieu" (Paredes 1964, 88).

Midway through the film, Reem solemnly addresses the camera. "I will now play *Ala balad al-mahboub* (*To the Country of the Beloved*)," she tells us. From the title and her expression, it seems like she dedicates the song to Syria as a respectful commemoration. In addressing her homeland through a 1935 Classical *tarab* Egyptian song, sung by Ūm Kūlthūm and composed by Riadh al-Sumbati, Reem both underscores and displaces its original meaning. Though a love song for a beloved, the lyrics also seem to express the hope of being reunited with one's lost country.

[121] Musicologist Ali Mostolizadeh writes a refuge is "where a person's comfort zone is and where one feels like home" (2019, 247).
[122] *Hadaf* translates as an intention, goal, or purpose. *Bāl,* the emotional mind, differs from *rās*, the cerebral mind (lit. 'head').

My love, my heart is with you; all night, I stay awake for you.
My eyes long to see you, I share my pains with you and you console me
يا حبيبى ده انا قلبى معاك طول ليلي سهران وياك
تتمنى عينى رؤياك أشـكي لك وأنت تواسين

Prevalent themes in classical Arab music involve the concepts of *shawq*, *hanin* and *ghurba*. *Shawq* means 'longing' or 'yearning,' and extends to "love and remembrance." *Hanīn* refers to missing a place, a person, or a country—"the prime subject of *hanīn* is the homeland" (Racy & Moser 2017, 288). Often translated as 'nostalgia,' *hanīn* is a valued emotional state that carries positive connotations for homesickness or separation. All these symbolic terms convey sentiments about temporal and spatial dislocation, and address displacement, dispossession, and memory.

'Melancholia' has been described as an act of resistance that might have a productive affective claim, given that it sustains an active and open relationship with history (Eng & Kazanjiyan 2002). By keeping the past unresolved, melancholia "facilitates a different type of rewriting—one that does not seek to surmount but merely to revisit and (…) reassess the past since it retains the past as an active ingredient of the present" (Ruti 2005, 646). Svetlana Boym refers to "restorative nostalgia" as the urge "to regain the past, to restore what was lost in conflict, through acts of memorialization that instantiate a future based on a selective reading of the past" (Boym 2001, 50). I suggest that this orientation towards the past can also be enacted towards the future.

Reem asks her older brother to hand her the *'ūd* and begins to play *"Helou Ya Helou"* (*Oh Sweet Sweetness*). This Egyptian popular folk song (*turāth al-sha'bi*) was composed by Said Darwish in the 1950s, a prolific Egyptian composer who trained in Aleppo and found fame in the 1920s. Yara joins in, singing along. Her voice is confident, yet still retains a touch of childlike candor; it draws us in. The song revolves around the dual meaning of *yehjār*; meaning to separate, but also to emigrate. It can be interpreted either as leaving a lover, or as leaving a country. Speaking of the *mahjār* (diaspora; from *hijra*), this song is about exile. It resonates with displaced populations in a new land, reflecting the experiences of refugees, exiles, émigrés and diasporas[123] longing for a return in better circumstances.

I said "it doesn't matter "They said "he could abandon you, قالوا بيهجر قولت وماله
Let him leave, as long as he lives يهجر يهجر بس يعيش
حلو…حلو…حلو…الحلو

[123] In *Reflections on Exile,* Edward Said distinguishes between groups of exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés (2000, 181).

Several minutes into the song, Yara goes silent. Reem scorns her: "You stopped before the song really starts!" While Yara has tired of the song, Reem thinks it has not yet truly begun—she has just had time to introduce the *maqām*. Jokingly, she turns to me and says, "I think I should retire and let her sing alone."[124] Yara has a mischievous air to her; she is performative by nature. She once told me she likes to sing Egyptian songs the most—"they're nicer," and are some of the first ones she learned. The relationships that Reem and Yara sustain with and through Egyptian music raises the question of what is included in the Arab musical canon, or *their* canon; a shared basin that complexifies 'pure' origins.[125] Singing Egyptian songs is, to borrow from Glissant, "an acknowledged form of consciousness both here and elsewhere" (1997, 93).

The sisters can express rootedness through Egyptian songs since Classical Arab music is a common heritage which also speaks to the specificity of Syria. Instead of using the political term 'pan-Arabism,' we could consider that "the archive and the repertoire often work together, although each has its own logic and mechanisms of transmission" (Taylor 2016, 188). Egypt and the Levant—Syria, Lebanon, Palestine—is a region where musicians borrow from a shared vocabulary and aesthetics, including "the *maqām* tradition, a common repertory, and an approach to melody" (Abu Shumays 2013, 235). In particular, the classical urban *tarab* genre has "been viewed as part of the local cultural heritage, or at times of the national image" (Shannon 2006, 191). With Cairo as a cultural capital, Egypt's pan-regional effect[126] shaped "a pan-cultural idiom that came to represent the indigenous musical character of the region." (Shannon 2006, 222).

In the old days, however, Syria was the cultural standard, and the great Egyptian artists Sayyid Darwish, Dāwūd Husni, Muhammad Abd al-Wahhāb, Umm Kulthūm—"not only would perform in Syria but would receive the critical acknowledgment from Syrian connoisseurs that would enable their rise to stardom" (Shannon 2006, 14). The *sammī'ah,* meaning 'those who listen,' were Aleppo's critical listeners who acted as regional arbiters of musical talent.[127] "In this sense, the history of Egyptian music at the same time traces that of Syria" (Jargy 1971, 81).

[124] The French expression « tirer ma révérance" is a closer translation of *'azel. (Ana be rayi, 'atizel)*
[125] Shannon even goes to ask: "Is there a "Syrian" music? If so, how is it different from "Arab music?" (2016, 11).
[126] The 20th century fostered a Pan-Arabism—heightened by the brief, but significant union of Syria and Egypt in the United Arab Republic (1958-61)—that connected peoples of the *Mashriq* region to Cairo through Egyptian media. Cairo's music industry greatly influenced Syrian musicians during the "Golden Age" of tarab music (c. 1925-1975). For long a cultural capital, "[Cairo] became the virtual center of the Arab world for recording and performance artists alike" (Currey 2002, 14).
[127] *Samī'ah* derives from *sama'* (audition). Aleppo's reputation developed cultivated and critical listeners, who held private preview concerts where they offered or denied musicians from the Arab world their seal of approval, making or breaking musicians' careers.

Performing Selves, Performing Others

Yara asks Reem to play *Ruht ala gheit* (*I Went to the Field*), an Egyptian folk song about harvesting okra. Their mother softly objects, but Yara lights up when Reem sketches the melody on the *būzūq*—her smile is contagious. Their younger sisters start giggling, apprehending the lyrics that will follow. The rhythm is lively and their father, Kareem, starts clapping hands. It is a rural folk song with a tinge of eroticism, which probably explains Soraya's reticence. After an instrumental prelude (*doulab*), the song follows an AABBCDAA pattern:

Mrūhsh ala gheit	I didn't go to the field
O al-bamiyeh shawaketni, o ana	And the okra scratched me, yet I…
Abu ya qelli "Ya Shokriya,	My father told me, "Oh, Fekriyah,
Ma terkabish ila al-arabīya	Don't get into the car,
Inti jamilah o sabiyyah"	You are beautiful and young!"
O al-bamiyeh shawaketni, willa	And the okra scratched me, yet I…
Abu ya qelli "Sibek minno"	My father told me, "Cry over him,
Ajawazek ahsan minno	I will find you a better husband,
Mrūhsh ala gheit	I didn't go to the field
O al-bamiyeh shawaketni, o ana	And the okra scratched me, yet I…

Most often sung by elderly rural Egyptian women, this song serves as a medium through which to reference desires and longings that are otherwise cordoned off, or "taboo" in everyday speech in the context of conservative Muslim societies. In other words, music allows for other kinds of relationality and thoughts to be expressed that might otherwise fall under religious or social sanction. This is helped by Yara's liminality who, in-between girlhood and womanhood, can still 'pass' as blissfully innocent in singing an erotic rural folk song.

When I first met Reem, Yara, and Kareem Wardan, the family had recently moved from another refugee camp in the Beqaa valley. Their previous neighbours considered it *haram* (forbidden) for young girls to play music and sing. Although rare, some fundamentalists think of *sha'bi* (popular) music as profane, and women's singing voices as shameful (*a'eb)*. Reem tells me she had to smuggle her cello into the previous camp where they used to live, hiding it from disapproving neighbours; a formidable challenge given its human size. The effects of multiple displacement, and the isolation resulting from the new camp's remote location, have been difficult for all family members; "but those most dramatically affected are women. (…) With the moral

value of modesty still in force, these women who live in new circumstances [and] communities, where they are surrounded by neighbors most of whom are nonkin, must be *more* secluded, more often veiled, and less free to move around" (Abu-Lughod 1986, 127).

In *Veiled Sentiments* (1986), anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod studies the politics of honour and poetry in a sedentarized Bedouin community in Egypt. Though she wrote of a different context, I find her works resonates with the experiences of Reem and Yara, who break many boundaries as Syrian female musicians displaced in Lebanon's refugee camps. I draw on feminist anthropology and gender studies to analyse Yara's performance of *Ruht 'ala Gheit.*

While double patriarchy refers to the combination of authoritarian powers and patriarchal society, inflicting a double pressure and restriction upon women, in refugeehood, Reem and Yara have resisted triple-otherization: as "the second sex" (de Beauvoir 1949); as 'strangers' to Lebanese society and to the international community; and as musicians, to some members of their provisional communities. Dunya Habash notes that on top of structural difficulties, forced migrants must also fight against their own cultural taboos; "agency, resistance and resilience can also be an unspoken inward negotiation as cultural taboos are overcome" (Habash 2021, 2).

Music has an ambiguous status in Islam,[128] "at once intimately involved in some spiritual practices and reviled by some as unorthodox or dangerous" (Shannon 2006, 11). According to a Prophetic saying (*hadith*), only the human voice (*sawt*) and the frame drum (*daff*) are permissible (*halal*).[129] From a conservative perspective, being a musician is not a noble profession and no respectable woman should attempt this path. "It is generally believed that women pursuing music professionally is an endeavor incompatible with private family life and with the established norms of society" (Abu-Lughod 1986, 117). In writing of the importance of modesty in traditional Arab society, she writes, "women are expected to demonstrate the virtue of *iasham* (*shūm*, being ashamed) or propriety as a voluntary gesture that earns them respect and raises their position in a male dominated society" (Abu-Lughod 1990, 103). To ensure modesty, bodies should not be used as instruments of self-expression. Yet musical performance is a "technique of the body" (Mauss 1934)—its material functions (voice, breath, movement) are summoned in the bodily praxis of performance. Stigmatization has prompted women performers to neutralize and redefine the

[128] 12th century jurist al-Ghazzali, in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (1901), sought evidence of prohibition of song and dance in Islam. He argued they are permitted if leading the participant to serve Allah, forbidden if they only excite carnal desires.
[129] See the Qūr'ān and Al-Ghazzali, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, 12th century.

femininity of their bodies. The celebrated Umm Kulthūm was able to navigate such norms and gather unequivocal respect as a religious singer (*munshida*) trained in Qurānic recitation (*tajwid*).

In another respect, music's experiential quality and its very performativity has allowed musicians to cross social and gender boundaries, which "may be protested, mediated, reversed, transformed, or confirmed through various social/musical strategies" (Koskoff 1987, 10). A well anchored tradition in Arab song consists in addressing the beloved in the masculine form, even when sung by male vocalists. Lamia Ziadé describes this as "a convention of modesty that allows one to make, in all innocence, audacious declarations that would be indecent if they were addressed to a woman" (Ziadé 2015, 386).[130]

Songs form a moment outside reality, a fiction of sorts. Musical performances "are contexts for the presentation of the self, understood performatively" (Crapanzano 1992). A performative, symbolic, and embodied practice, music can emulate and transcend established social conventions, and be "used to solidify, analyze, or challenge structures of power" (Taylor 2016, 202). A singer can adopt multiple identities and use different song styles to achieve its effect.

To Yara, performing 'Egyptianness' and womanhood is a playful game that she visibly takes great pleasure in. Her theatrical gestures and varied facial expressions are all ways that she engages with the song's story and character. By taking on a voice other than her own—the narrative's character and the Egyptian colloquial dialect—Yara becomes *other* through song—she is "becoming-woman" (Deleuze 1980).[131] The performative power of voice (Allan 2022), which allows the performance of selves and others in song, may carve a space of freedom.

If the intimacy of the family usually allows Reem and Yara to play this song, their mother's quiet objection seeks to protect her daughters from exterior judgment and threat—amplified by the presence of non-kin, and especially the camera. It could also be out of shyness in having to explain why this song might not be a good choice. In making this song permissible, Yara suspends taboos and societal norms dissipate, albeit for a moment.

[130] In French, Ziadé writes, « une convention de pudeur qui permettrait de faire en toute innocence des déclarations audacieuses qui seraient indécentes si elles étaient ouvertement adressées à une femme. … Autre explication : les chansons d'amour (même physique) étant initialement et principalement adressées au prophète ou à Dieu, elles sont au masculin » (2015, 286).
[131] On mimesis and becoming, Deleuze wrote « devenir-homme, devenir-femme, devenir-enfant, devenir oiseau » (1980, 338).

Parenting Through Music

The Wardan family created a safe space for their children in their provisional home amid unsafe conditions. Musically-inclined guardians offer a listening disposition to their children's self-expression, countering their experiences in public space. With the "mutual tuning-in relationship" (Schutz 1977, 115) that music-making involves, parents gain emotional awareness on the internal states that their children are experiencing, without them speaking. In Kareem's view of music:

> That's a language. They speak through it (*falako fiha)*. It means for me, without my daughter speaking, if she plays a sad melody, I say, "Oh, God! She delivered feelings to me, I should feel that she is sad." When she plays a happy and joyous melody, I feel that my daughter has joy.

In Arabic, "the verb *yaqūl*, "to say," is sometimes used to express "to sing" and by extension "to play" a melodic instrument, in a sense to "utter" the vocal material instrumentally" (Racy 2003, 79). Music permits a more attuned form of parenting, heightening awareness to a child's emotional state. This is particularly accurate within the Arab music tradition of emotive codification of the *maqāmāt*, where each scale is associated with a set of moods and feelings. Reem and Yara's *taqsīm* improvisations, choice of songs and of *maqām*, all carry affective connotations that help their parents understand their feelings.

Plucking on the cello's strings, Reem quietly strums a melody. It is a "*Scabba*," a song from Homs bringing "tears to shed from the eyes;" a very sad tune. Her mother, Soraya, says, "Now you are sad!" (*halla inti hazineh*!) Reem lifts her eyebrows, saying "no" without words. In a culture where each bears the responsibility of the group's well-being, where keeping the family's morale in high spirits is part of a relational ethics, music offers a much-needed outlet for emotional relief. It gives form to emotions that might otherwise be hard to communicate, as suggested by Kareem's observation that it is through music that he learns whether his daughter is happy or sad.

According to Bruno Nettl, music also has an enculturative function. "It can be used to distill and abstract concepts that govern many aspects of the culture [and] transmit important if not easily verbalized values of society" (1987, 70). In his view, if music "does not directly teach the student his own culture, it reinforces many of the values that he has learned elsewhere" (Nettl 1987, 71).

By defining the core qualities of 'good' music as honesty (*mosdaghiye*), truthfulness (*haqiqa*), and emotional sincerity (*siqd),*[132] Kareem instilled important values in his daughters:

> We chose for you to become musicians for one reason: to speak to the whole world in all its differences, in your language and your pain (*waj'a*) that you must deliver. Whether it was joy or sadness. We wish our daughters study the science of music (*elm al-mūsiqa*) to deliver our message fully—the message of all [our] people, to all other peoples, in full honesty (*be kūl mosdaghiyeh*). And this honesty—is the language of music.

By valuing authentic feeling and emotional transparency, Kareem encourages his daughters' creative self-expression, not just their technical renditions. To him, music can convey the joys and pains of the Syrian people better than any words could, and bears the responsibility to deliver the message and heritage of the Syrian people "to all other peoples." Music, as a language, is perhaps more truthful in its emotional transparency, and more effective given its capacity to carry a message universally, without translation. Kareem wishes for his daughters to carry their message across borders, through the universal language of music:

> The most important base my daughters got from me is this instrument. And this instrument, like all instruments, is defined as a mindless tool. It only gains intelligence (*yekmo taqaha*) with its user. The intelligence of the player is that which delivers truth (*haqiqi*)—whether it was sound, knowledge (*elm*), sadness, or joy—through the player's intelligence."

Kareem differentiates between the instrument, a mindless tool, and the musician, whose body and mind are endowed with intelligence. Though he gave his daughters the tools to pursue music by gifting them instruments, the brilliance required to play is theirs alone. He continues:

> My children, my daughters, chose a path that I saw as very great, but it became simple. When I saw my daughters as professional musicians, walking the musical path—I didn't choose for them but *they* chose, and *they* deliver, god willing, to the level of creativity. In their own choosing. We wish for a future, God (*inshallah*), that will bring them wealth, goodness and blessings.

Meanwhile, their mother, Soraya, is busy in the kitchen cooking for eight. In taking on most domestic tasks alone, she is also gifting her daughters the time to study and practice music, to help them build a different future for themselves. In *Mothers Gather*, Diana Allan departs from

[132] One essential ingredient that can make or break an Arab song is emotional sincerity (*sidq*). Sharing roots with *sadiq* (friend), and *sādeq* (honest or sincere), *sidq* implies genuine feeling and lack of artifice. *Sidq* implies that the vocalist understands the true meaning of the words of the song and is able to express their meaning to listeners by translating them through his own feelings.

the Arabic idiom '*al-umm bitlim'* to explore "what it means to sustain and care for children *in* and *through* and *against* conditions of protracted displacement and crisis" (2020, 369). In her sense, "[t]o 'gather' is, implicitly, to create orderly relations in a context of dispersion and disorder" (2020, 377).[133] In these families, "it is mothers, above all, who are tasked with managing survival and building futures for their children" (Allan 2020, 369).

The youngest of the family, Bilal, is a prodigal singer who supports his family with his talent, despite his very young age. At six years old, astonishingly, he is the main provider for the household. Bilal's crystalline voice has been sought by Islamic charities around the world.[134] He is sponsored by an association (*kafil*) that organizes trips and concerts with other refugee children to perform for foreign dignitaries. The only family member with a travel document, he recently travelled to South Africa to perform for Saudi *sheikhs*. These children's vulnerability, travelling unaccompanied, puts them at great risk of abuse. What is expected of them—to perform refugeehood for foreign benevolent audiences—amounts to child labour. Though parents agree to a 'sponsorship,' the power relation is such that one cannot say "no."

After sharing *fassoulieh be banadūra*, a delicious meal with rice, tomatoes and beans that Soraya prepared for us all, sitting around the *sofrah* (floor spread) in their cramped yet cozy home, Kareem restates:

> "We say it again; the language of music, and the language of our heritage (*turāth*), is what we will deliver to the other world (*al-aalam al-thani*). How will we deliver it? As much as we speak in words, it will not be conveyed unless it's music."

[133] Allan writes, "the mother is the existential address – the conductor and charge of experience and memory" (2020, 367). In her words, "life betrays the gatherer, and new forms of physical and emotional labour are requisitioned from mothers. Mothering demands contradictory impulses – both gathering and letting go, holding and holding back" (2020, 377).

[134] Due to the hostility towards female bodies and voices in Islam, boys' voices have been sought in song and *adhan* (call to prayer). The appeal of boys' clear, high pitched, soft and endearing voices have in some ways come to replace those of women.

Chapter Three
Urban Trajectories of Syrian Music

Freedom of Expression

Beirut has historically hosted a vibrant artistic and cultural life, "partly as a result of its self-constructed role as a cultural broker between East and West, and partly due to historical political-economic circumstances" (Shannon 2006, 13). For young Syrian musicians, Beirut was for long a source of inspiration as a cultural center whose progressive musical scene and nostalgic pop melodies both marked their upbringings. At the start of the Syrian Revolution, in 2011, 28 per cent of the population was aged between 15 and 29 years old. Many young Syrian artists were initially involved in pacifist protests before seeking refuge from war. As hope turned into tragedy, these artists began to depart Syria, one after the other. Only a four-hour drive away, "Beirut was naturally their first stop; though not only because it was the beloved neighbor. To them, Beirut was the capital of culture, art, and freedom of expression" (Salam Wa Kalam 2015, 1).

Despite the many limitations that Syrians face in Lebanon, Beirut offered them a new space for expression. Distance from families and social anonymity induced by exile also made possible a wider variety of lifestyle choices for young adults. Freedom of expression, unknown to them in Syria, was the greatest gain of them all. It allowed Syrian musicians to write political songs and to summon the audacity to subvert tradition. In her study of post-revolution Syrian arts, Miriam Cooke notes that "communities of Syrian refugee artists scattered around the world are negotiating new spaces of freedom and connection previously denied to them" (Cooke 2018, 440).

According to the Lebanese music producer Raed al-Khazen, "it's much freer here [in Beirut], easier to be innovative, creative, to cross boundaries. There's no industry and hence a nonchalance. People are willing to try things because there's no consequences" (Mounzer 2016, 22). Beirut's tenacious underground arts scene is entirely DIY; in the absence of government support and aside of the industry, it relies on improvised venues, musicians exchanging favors, producers lending out their studios, and friends offering support and their networks. An alchemy of creativity and adversity, "it is much like everything in Beirut: a loose, self-made, often chaotic and collaborative solution to a structural problem." (Mounzer 2016, 21). In flux and constantly becoming, Beirut routinely see its inhabitants subvert and recreate urban realities. Music offers an alternative means of accessing and portraying urban refugee life—it "opens up questions of cities – and their social relations – that other kinds of investigations might not" (Lashua et al. 2014, 3).

Place-Making in Beirut

Forced displacement thus does not only entail the loss of community; it also brings about new practices of place-making.[135] As Lisa Malkki notably argued, "emplacement is the flipside of displacement" (1996, 517). In Beirut's alternative scene, inclusive spaces made *by* and *for* 'outsiders' remake the city. *Riwaq*, a Syrian-owned café and concert space, became a hub for intercultural encounters—here, Syrian, Sudanese, Palestinian, Armenian, Ethiopian, Lebanese, European musicians gather. Building on Lefebvre's conception of space as a social construction,[136] Christopher Tilley argued that "space has no substantial essence in itself, but only has a relational significance, created through relations between peoples and places" (1994, 11). Alternative spaces are a condition for the possibility of community; creating safe spaces opens up new possibilities.

At Riwaq's weekly open mic nights, everyone is welcome to take center stage to speak up, sing, or dance. I remember one performer, a young Syrian man dressed in a pink button-up shirt, who stepped on stage and ran an instrumental playback. The "Jesus loves you" sticker on his laptop announced what he began to sing, in English and an uneven voice. What struck me was the audience's warm reaction, smiling and waving lighters in the air. This moment was telling of the space's political subculture founded in anti-oppression, antiracism, and a "no discrimination" policy. Here, "the music does the political by reaching across a divide to initiate a thinking together that becomes a moment of being together" (Shapiro 2019, 21). It reminds me that, in asking to be heard and listened to, music shapes audiences in processes of "paying attention" (Dayan 2005).

On the left, the stage in Riwaq's basement shows a poster reading "*al-hūriyya*" (*freedom*). At its café, an early world map of Al-Idrisi, with the Levant at its center, hangs next to a graphic representation of Beirut, drawn as a labyrinthic concrete spiral.

[135] In social geography, "place-making" (Massey 2005) is a social process of human construction within a nexus of power.
[136] Lefebvre thought spaces are made productive through social practices, their making imbued with a political character (1974).

Spaces like *Riwaq* offer a refuge to "groups of deterritorialized persons who imagine and feel things together" (Appadurai 1996, 8). Offering artistic urban disruptions (Shapiro 2019), what Rancière calls "aesthetic breaks" (2004), the alternative-music scene leads to the formation of new communities in the capital, "collectivity shaped by some common feeling, [offering] a frame of visibility and intelligibility" (Rancière 2004, 31).[137] In this case, "home is not so much a physical space but a concept of mind, and, perhaps, a community in which one is at ease, a concept or community that we must forge for ourselves—no one else can create it for us" (Bell 1991, 226).

This kind of possibility for musical and social relation is unique to Beirut. In Tripoli and Saida, Palestinian-Syrian friends deplore that "the city is dead at night; there is nothing to do, nowhere to go." Like these friends, Reem and Yara associate great memories with Beirut—it means travelling to perform in crowded venues or to record in a studio. For musicians in other Lebanese cities, performing in Beirut means "you made it." While music is well alive in their homes, they must travel to their audiences.

The cosmopolitan capital attracts many foreigners and talented musicians, who each bring their own set of influences, periodically reordering urban spaces. **The sociocultural makeup of** Beirut's indie audiences, like refugee and migrant communities, is intertwined with that of Western foreigners (*ajnab*), giving way to cross-cultural collaborations between musicians of diverse origins. By engaging with artists from diverse backgrounds, Syrian musicians in Beirut develop a wide social habitus enriched by various cultural influences. These heterogenous networks come to compose musical and 'urban assemblages' (Farias & Bender 2010).

When I jammed with two friends – a Syrian trumpetist and an Ethiopian singer –we mixed Western chords with Oriental melodies and Amharic singing. "Only in Beirut," I thought. Through their encounters and musical exchanges, armed with a "spirit of synthesis" (Kassir, 2006, 61) that can recombine heterotopic spaces (Foucault 1986), minorities may at times come to feel they belong to Beirut. "Vernacular cosmopolitanism" (Bhabha 1996) is the concept that best describes this experience, and is what leads to new aesthetic and political communities of sense.

[137] To Jacques Rancière, an "oppositional community" is articulated "in oppositional modes of aural intelligibility" (2004).

"We Were Disbanded"

Issa and I first met at *Riwaq* through common friends. As we sit for coffee on the sidewalk that became the heart of the alternative music scene in the Geitawi neighbourhood, he tells me about his musical journey, which was first and foremost a family history. Issa hails from a lineage of formally-trained musicians and grew up in Damascus, where he studied classical percussion at the Higher Institute for Music while he formed a metal band. When two of the members found out their fathers used to be part of the same band in the 70's, they thought it must be destiny.

With his bandmates, a guitarist and lead vocalist**,** he migrated to Beirut in 2011. The trio has since established itself as one of the most respected bands in the city. Their band's name, *Tangeret Daghet*, translates to 'pressure pot'; it symbolizes their sound, and unintentionally the region they are from. Now aged 37 years old, Issa is an accomplished drummer who performs regularly with his band and as part of various indie and jazz ensembles. As he recounts his migration to Beirut, he captures the displacement of the Damascene music scene:

> When I first arrived in Beirut in 2011, I didn't feel I had left Damascus. I would say hello to every other person walking on Hamra street, they were all my friends from Damascus; it felt like we had never left.

Seeking refuge in Beirut, groups of friends found each other exiled on the same street. These young Syrian artists went on living as part of the same communities, yet in Hamra, downtown Beirut. From 2012 to 2014, Syrian bands emerged in Beirut's music scene, among which Issa's band, Khebez Dawle (lit. 'bread of the country', rock), As-Saaleed (Latino-Oriental fusion), Latlateh (hip-hop), Abo Gabi (Palestinian-Syrian rapper), Hello Psychaleppo (electro-tarab), and others. Beirut audiences quickly fell in love with Syrian musical projects that broke boundaries and covered a wide range of genres. What attracted Lebanese audiences and producers to their work?

First, most alternative musical projects in Lebanon at the time of the Syrian Revolution and the Arab Spring were devoid of any content that reflected the social reality of the many upheavals happening in the region, with the exception of hip hop. Second, Higher Institute of Music in Damascus, despite its harsh, classical methods of music instruction – according to its students - helped them develop their individual talents and technical skills. In the perspective of Lebanese producer Jana Saleh, "Syrian musicians brought strong, academic musical know-how to the scene. They have an education in Arabic music through their conservatory that we don't even have access to here, and they're also culturally more in touch with those roots" (Mounzer 2016, 22). Third, with their musicianship and relentless hard work, Syrian artists have infused Lebanese music with

vitality and passion—the result of an ebullient revolution turned to fragments, a newly-found freedom after prolonged restricted self-expression, and a strong need to create meaningful music to process the tragedy of a blazing war. A new start began, one that they desperately needed to ventilate. The circumstances they endured provoked unleashed creativity and explosive sounds.

Not having known Beirut prior to the 2019 crisis, nor at the height of its Syrian music scene from 2012 to 2014, I ask Issa if Hamra was the most welcoming neighbourhood. He explained,

> Yes, it was. But it changed a lot. Hamra street is not what it used to be. 2012 was the height. Bands had moved together. I was living with my bandmates in a small apartment. There was another apartment in Hamra where three bands were living together. It was crazy!

He recalls the discrimination they faced in accessing accommodation, and the challenges of sharing a small room with three bandmates. The beginning was rough—the cost of living in Beirut was so high that even the Lebanese tried living elsewhere. Covering the annual residence permit fee to remain in the country with a large part of their modest earnings, having to secure a local sponsor to renew that permit, on top of obtaining papers and permits to be allowed to work in the first place, are some of the difficulties they had to surmount and must still navigate.

The Arabic term for 'bandmate,' *adha al-fera'*[138] is composed of 'band' (*fera'*) and *adha,* which refers to the organs or members of a body. This etymology implies that band members are all indispensable to the functioning of a whole. Bands were turned into families, sharing everyday lives and helping each other make ends meet by performing in Beirut's then numerous active venues. Issa tells me that they performed at any available occasion, including weddings, in order to keep up but also save up, to be able to support their friends and relatives spread across the globe.

Reflecting on the ways in which Syrian music has been liberated in exile, Issa tells me:

> In Syria, young people didn't organize festivals; they were always organized by the government. So, coming to Beirut, this gave more initiative to young people to start their own projects.

In Beirut, self-organized concerts (*haflat*) and festivals (*mahrajanat*) became a possibility, with plenty of venues waiting for musicians and audiences thirsting for new underground music. For a few years, two venues in Mar Mikhael and Hamra hosted Syrian musicians on a regular basis: Radio Beirut and Metro Al-Madina. Syrian musicians attracted the attention of Lebanese producers

[138] Alternatively, although less used, the term *sheraka al musiqa* refers to "the one who shares, or partakes in, music."

and gained access to resources such as recording studios and equipment to produce independent albums. Many also seized opportunities to reach the European cultural scene.

Issa's band quickly found its way into Beirut's indie music scene. Their rehearsal space happened to be right next door to El-Khazen, producer at Hamra Street studio. He was so impressed with what he heard through the walls, that when they approached him, he agreed to produce them. They released their first album, 180°, in 2013. Their second album, Mareed (Sick), is "a heady mix of hard-edged rock with ferocious guitar solos, raucous drums and vocalizations that veer eclectically between boisterous rock-n-roll and soulful mawwal-type chanting." (Mounzer 2016, 23) Their third album is in-the-making. Categorizing themselves as 'new age Arabic alternative rock', their musical influences range from Nirvana, Radiohead and Pink Floyd, to Arab roots such as Um Kalthoum and Sheikh Mohamad Omran, and modern electronic rock groups.

Wondering if, sometimes, heritage pays, I ask Issa about the Syrian music market in Lebanon and the opportunities offered to traditional, versus 'Oriental fusion' and jazz musicians:

> You are right, there are two streams. Traditional music still has an audience. For weddings, and other occasions. And then there is contemporary (*mo'aser*).

Syrian musicians in Lebanon have incentives to cultivate their musical heritage. Traditional musicians are summoned to perform at weddings, festivities, and other social events within the community. This audience forms a particular patron economy, where Syrians help other Syrians.

On the other hand, in the cosmopolitan capital, regional aesthetics meet transnational artistic markets and circuits. Music and cities, as sites of globalization, consumption, and hybridization, encourage musicians to widen and re-actualize their repertoires. Stepping into a record shop in Beirut, LPs of Bon Jovi and 80s American rock fill the shelves. When I ask the Armenian owner of this 40 year-old institution for Umm Kūlthūm, Abdelwahab, or Sabah Fakhri,[139] he smirks and replies, "I specialize in Western music." Did Syrian musicians have to adapt to Lebanon in terms of genres and repertoires performed, or was Syrian music recognized and preserved as such? I posed this question to Issa.

> Well, it depends. If you are talking about traditional music, like the *qūdūd [halabi]* for example, that doesn't change—you can't mess with that! [*laughs*] I wouldn't say so much *adapt*, but rather *influence*. Beirut is more Westernized than Damascus. There are many foreigners coming and going, and through encounters, you are influenced. One hears new types of music and meets new people, so of course, young musicians became more open to experiment or try new genres.

[139] Classics of the Golden Age of *Tarab* music, these Egyptian and Syrian vocalists are the era's most famous and remarkable.

While Issa reminds us that some traditions, like the *qūdūd halabi*, "cannot be messed with," integrating Western influences can be a way to (re)position themselves in the world, and to (re)orient themselves for a future in exile. Although "multiculturalism was not a new terrain for Syrian musicians, many of whom had strategically negotiated the politics of musical diversity during their performing careers in Syria" (Sprengel & Silverstein 2021, 5),[140] Beirut exposed them to a wider range of styles such as electronic, funk, rap,[141] and experimental music (*mūsiqa tajrobi*).[142] Their repertoires have grown to include Western and Arab regional traditions, in particular Palestinian and Lebanese. The prevalence of Western instruments (guitar, drum kit, piano) and new performance contexts (jazz clubs, bars) have also influenced their musical practices. In turn, Syrian musicians have equally impacted Beirut's music scene. In Issa's words,

> Syrian musicians also influenced the local music scene. Lebanese friends told me: "When you guys came, we could really feel it. [*nervous laugh*][143] It re-energized the Beirut music scene, gave it a new breath."

Syrian musicians have contributed new skills, songs, styles, and much talent - revitalizing Beirut's music scene. Some play traditional instruments that are shared with Lebanon, such as the *'ūd*, *qanūn* or *būzūq*, while others were trained in Western instruments in Syria. All brought their personal repertoires, including classical Arab and European music, jazz, urban or rural folk genres. Drawing on their sonic biographies, Syrian musicians infuse Beirut's sound with "those formidable contagions to which speakers or creators from elsewhere are likely to subject it" (Glissant 1997, 98). Through an assemblage of sources that resonate with their lifeworlds and experiences, they create music that is theirs alone, transforming a generation's sound.

When I asked if this effervescent Syrian musical community was lasting, Issa's tone shifted:

> "Many people left, to Germany, France, Canada… We were *disbanded*."

[140] A variety of musical genres flourished in Syria. From 2007 to 2010, a yearly 'Syrian Jazz Festival' was held in Damascus. In addition, "the Syrian state actively promoted cultural diversity and tolerance through increased arts programming in the late 2000s. From folk festivals that celebrate internal differences in the name of national unity, to the invocation of the "mosaic" as a metaphor for cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity across the Syrian nation, national imaginaries have historically been premised on the recognition of religious, ethnic, and geo-cultural heterogeneity within Syria's boundaries. … Like elsewhere, Syrian policies of multiculturalism tend to mask discrimination, which more often than not occurs along sectarian lines" (Silverstein 2021, 6).

[141] It must be noted that rap gained popularity in Syria as of 2012 as an important tool for political dissent during the revolution.

[142] Experimental music, on the rise in Beirut, often refigures traditional music and instruments. At one performance in an underground bar, a musician had connected her *būzūq* to synthesizers; when she hit the būzūq's rim, it sounded like a *darbūka*.

[143] Issa's nervous laugh points to a tension. Referring to the arrival of Syrians in Lebanon is a thorny topic. While Foucault sought to move beyond what is *said* in discourse "to what discourse is, what it does, and what forms it," Abu-Lughod suggests to pay "close attention to the place in social and political life of what is said." (1986, 122) Though the content (*énoncé*) articulates a progressive counter-discourse and demonstrates an appreciative view, it cannot escape its context, echoing pejorative views.

While Syrian music bands initially survived displacement by reuniting in Beirut, despite their efforts to stay together, they were eventually 'disbanded' by the migratory trajectories of their members. Their fate is telling of the unsustainability of communities amid displacement.

As the years went by, dire conditions, precarious statuses, xenophobic attitudes and hefty restrictions forced most to flee. One by one, musicians left again, this time to Europe, where the opportunities were supposed to be better and where some have found success.[144] Around 2016, hundreds of Syrian musicians migrated from Beirut to Berlin, transposing and recreating their artistic communities in yet another locale. Among Syrian artists, Berlin is called "*al-asamat al-minfa*"— "the capital of exile." As Berlin became the new Beirut, the exodus affected those who stayed behind, who have since integrated Lebanese music projects, in some ways more sustainable. Issa's band, however, takes a different stand; "at a time when many artists from their homeland have used the Syrian struggle to relocate to greener pastures, the group instead decided to stay close to home and let their music take them to where they deserve to be." (Tanjaret Daghet, 2024). These days, another 'transposition' is taking place; I am told by Syrian artists exiled in Europe that "Marseille is now the new Berlin."

Beirut has provided Issa with a space for expression and introduced him to a wide array of musicians. Though the limitations imposed by Lebanese laws are stressful and restrictive, he has learned to 'make do'. He enjoys the musical diversity that Beirut brings to his life and is grateful to make a living with his band. When I filmed one of their concerts, the sound had clipped. "Of course," I thought, at once disappointed and amused; the music was so loud and the cymbal crashes so intense, did I really think that my small microphone could withstand these decibels?

* * *

Accents in Song

A year later, I meet Issa a monthly jam night open to all in a cultural venue near Hamra, where we play together with several other musicians. As we step out to the garden to catch up and talk about music, I ask him if Syrian vocalists have had to adapt their accent (*lahjah*) to perform in Lebanon.

> Regarding *lahjah* (accent), well… Singers from all the Arab world used to sing in Egyptian Arabic, regardless of where they were from. That was the tradition. Until…
> - *Until the 70's?*

[144] In Germany, electronic musician Shkoon; in France, the female vocalists Lynn Adib and Rasha Rizq, to name a few.

> - No, even earlier. My grandfather, whom I told you about, was one of the first singers to sing in the *Shāmi lahjah* [Damascus accent], in the 50's. But for Lebanon, yes, you are right, it started in the 70's with Lebanese pop music and the *org* (synthesiser) [*laughs*].

Mediating the variety of linguistic forms in the Arab world, singing in *Mesri* (Egyptian Arabic) was the standard[145] until colloquial variants ('*amiyye*) and regional accents (*lahjat*) established themselves as acceptable registers for the singing voice. Egypt's historical dominance in classical Arab music created this standard that went uncontested for decades, until singers started breaking with convention in the 1950s. Issa's grandfather, the late Rafiq Shukri, was one of the first Syrian vocalists to sing in colloquial *Shāmi* (Damascene),[146] garnering much respect for his dissidence. This linguistic and aesthetic break with tradition gave way to the *aghānī baladiyya*, a neo-popular genre of local songs. In his study of folk music in Syria and Lebanon, Jargy notes that "the return of folklore is also true for linguistic forms" (1971, 99). Singing in the living languages and spoken tongues of each region became a preferred means to express the lived registers of daily experience.

An interesting aspect of authenticity is the putting on of certain accents to sing songs, such as the frequently used *Saheli* (coastal) and *Halabi* (Aleppine) accents. Although an urbanite, Samira Tawfiq, a Syrian-Lebanese singer, is known for emulating a Syrian *Bedū* (Bedouin) accent in her songs to grant them a more 'authentic' character. Accents but also tones of voices are associated with particular locales—Fahed Ballan, a South Syrian vocalist from Sūeida, sings in a '*jabali'* (mountain) voice and with a '*Bedū'* (Bedouin) accent. Some accents are rarely spoken and mostly sung, such as the *lahjeh beida* (urbanite *lingua franca*), which is used to reach a wider audience, as it is understood all across the Levant. In their research on Syrio-Lebanese musicians in Brazil, Racy and Moser noted the "singers' use of quaint Lebanese expressions and references that would have reminded immigrants of the village parlance back home" (2017, 292).

It is thus not only the songs sung but also the accented voice—its inflexions, pitch, timbre, tonic accents, resonance and densities—that demarcate a cultural identity. Today, Syrian vocalists in Lebanon must learn to emulate the 'softer' Lebanese accent and erase their own in order to perform. This makes it easier for instrumentalists to succeed, as they camouflage their Syrianness with greater ease. By emulating the Lebanese vernacular, Syrian singers gain opportunities in a reborn localism.

[145] To some extent, this also applies to the Classical written and 'Standard' Arabic, closely derived from Egyptian Arabic (*Mesri*).
[146] *Shāmi* can both refer to the specifically Damascene colloquial, or to the wider regional Levantine Arabic.

Sonic Cosmopolitanism in Beirut

Beirut's signature aesthetic uniquely blends traditions using the remix as method, transposing jazz progressions to *maqāmāt* scales, juxtaposing Oriental melodies to Western rhythms, merging and melding disparate elements. It is tempting to describe a lot of the music coming out of Beirut as a type of fusion between "Western" and "Arab/Oriental" sounds; but this might be a lazy shortcut that maintains rather than questions binaries.

In situational comings-together of transitory communities in cities such as Beirut, sound has the capacity to "weave an individual into a wider social fabric" (Labelle 2010, xxi), creating sites of connection and affective exchange. The resulting composition has unique traits, echoing what Edward Said calls '*the voyage in;*' it is the "conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories" (Said 1993, 97). Perhaps, instead of naming this music as "fusion", we should see it as emerging from knowledge of several cultures. Musicians make conscious choices about how they mix elements from the various cultures they identify with.

The social habitus of Beirut has encouraged musicians from different cultural backgrounds to perform together. In a city where Western influences have long been part of the social fabric, classical Arab music blends seamlessly to electronic sampling layered behind singing voices. "The musical and social experiencing of intercultural soundscapes yields reverberations of cultural political contestations and negotiations—of Occidentalisms and Orientalisms, exoticisms and popularisations, appropriations and counter-appropriations" (Tan 2012, 27). Beirut's musical cosmopolitanism carries the potential to redefine fixed categories. The city and its musicians help us reimagine a layered composition that gathers a multiplicity of forces recombining into new wholes, where "shared musical idioms punctuate the entire city" (Shapiro 2019, 65).

I understand musical cosmopolitanism as an active process in the making of worlds and a way of imagining musical belonging within various musical spheres of exchange and circulation, rather than as a product of increasingly globalized frameworks.[147] In contrast with globalization, cosmopolitanism happens within individuals, shifting established boundaries of identity.

Cultural practices are flexible, adaptive, and amenable to change. Erika Friedl writes that "people hold in their cultural repertoires a variety of choices … based on old traditions as well as

[147]Anthropologist Anna Tsing offered an important critique of the term cosmopolitan; 'Poor migrants need to fit in the worlds of others; cosmopolitans want more of the world to be theirs' (2000, 343).

modern ideas" (1975, 21). She terms 'gnostic realism' and 'vernacular logic' to describe the process of melding several traditions, which reaffirm one's history and reimagine one's identity.

Personal rendition and joint improvisation, brought about by the practice of *taqsīm,* give way to a form of live composition anchored in tradition. As Steven Feld writes, "every performance has a biography and a history" (1994, 89). *Taqasīm* involve a "*wasla*, which means a connection, a tie that implies a continuity between the past performances and those yet to come" (Shannon 2006, 149). This echoes Michael Gallope's 'paradox of the vernacular', a concept he developed in *Deep Refrains*. He posits that no matter how creative an endeavor, "one cannot write without a historicity, without a form, without an adoption of the past" (Gallope 2017, 256).

In the view of musicologists Gilbert & Lo (2007), aesthetic cosmopolitanism is an 'allusive category' that involves a simultaneous openness to exploring musical influences and the evocation of one's biography. In other words, it "calls for the sense of recognition of the Self in the Other" (Scott 2015, 3). In recognizing oneself in the workings of another culture, cosmopolitanism challenges conceptions of the local, national, and foreign. In "Beirut Sounds Like This", an article describing the height of Syrian music scene, Lina Mounzer reflects on the capital's sonic identity.

> "Beirut, port city, always a mix of everything, stubbornly and proudly undefined and indefinable, also has its private yearning, for a sound, for an identity, for a persona it can call its own, … without a trace of "foreignness." That interplay, ongoing and endless, is in perpetuity the sound of Beirut." (Mounzer 2016, 25).

The growing experimental, fluid, and communal performance contexts in Beirut have given improvisation further importance as a cross-cultural musical language. Édouard Glissant suggests that "in order to cope with or express confluences, every individual, every community, forms its own *échos-monde*," (1997, 93) that is, its own spoken language. Music offers a different language to cope with confluences and speak with new audiences. It constitutes a potent alternative means of expression to reformulate selves and communicate at a crossroads of influences.

"*You Can Play Anything That Comes To Your Mind*"

I meet Amir, his wife, Nawal, and their daughter Samah, at their apartment in Chiyah near Tariq al-Jdideh, Beirut's bustling working-class neighbourhood. Amir and Nawal come from Dara'a, a lush grassland along the Yarmouk river near Jordan, known as the rural region that birthed the Syrian revolution. They migrated to Beirut in 2013. Though both work—Nawal as a nurse, Amir as a lighting technician—they don't always have enough money to send their seven year-old daughter to school. Born in Beirut, Samah's schooling has been interrupted several times due to financial struggles, discrimination in securing a place in schools, and ongoing migration.

It is the final night of the football World Cup, and the neighbourhood is rooting for Morocco. Fireworks are cracking in the streets—"*'adi*," Amir comments. "As usual." When I step out to buy some sweets and snacks, Samah wants to come along. Thinking I am the adult accompanying her, I quickly realize it is the other way around; she deals with shop-owners with such an assurance and defiance, with measured arrogance and lots of wit, mocking men thirty years her senior. In her, I see Nawal's strength in raising such a strong-headed daughter. If she happens to insult men, they are so taken aback and somewhat impressed that they react with a smile, bewildered by this little girl's confidence. Nawal and Amir are proud of her, knowing that she can stand up for herself in a patriarchal society—what one does not learn in school, I think to myself.

As we race back up the stairs, jumping two flights of steps at a time, a rat runs just past us. She screams and jumps in my arms as we cower along the opposite wall, and we both burst in laughter. What a coincidence, I think, as Amir had just brought home to dry *papier-mâché* rats that he had made out of plastic bottles and newspaper scraps for a weekly children's play at the theatre.

In the living room, a printout of the main *maqāmāt* rests against the wall, alongside delicate handwoven cases keeping Amir's most precious *nāys* hanging like pendants. Next to them, a Sūrāt from the Qūr'ān blessing their home, a golden medallion that reads "Canada," an old photograph of Amir posing next to a white horse in Dara'a, and some memorabilia from Syria.

We spend a *sahrah*, a night filled with music and conversation. A cloud of cigarette smoke builds in the room as the night progresses. Every time Nawal goes to the kitchen, she returns with

bouchar (popcorn) and cups of yerba mate,[148] cardamom coffee, or sweetened black tea perfumed with mint or sage, keeping everyone going.

Photographs of Nawal in the kitchen, taken by Samah.

A *sahra,* a nocturnal and often spontaneous gathering, playing and listening to music gives more energy than tit takes. Given Amir and Nawal's pace of life in Beirut—with day jobs starting early, night gigs ending late, and a child to provide and care for—the night is the only time left to play music and gather socially. Both are prioritized, despite the resulting lack of sleep. We stay up late, talking, listening to and playing music. Slowly, time becomes relation; "rhythm is built into the way people relate to each other" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 108), leading us to forget the passage of time.[149] Held in homes, *sahrat* require closeness and intimacy. They enable individuals "momentarily to shed their quotidian concerns and to be their own emotional selves. As a somewhat ritualized occurrence, (music) performance also has a transformative orientation" (Shannon 2006, 194).

Amir comes from a family of informally-trained musicians. His sister, an accordionist, teaches music in Syria. One of his brothers is a keyboardist in Jordan, mostly performing for weddings; his other brother, now in Spain, plays Andalusian guitar. Their mother, Mūnia, sings many folk songs. Amir's journey on the *nāy* started in his childhood village. In his words, it is thanks to music that he was able to flee. "*If it wasn't for the nāy…"* He once told me the story of how he made his first *nāy* as a child, stealing his uncle's TV antenna. "It was the countryside; we didn't have everything we wished for:"

> There's something that's always on my mind, a childhood memory that never leaves me. It happened long ago (*be zamanat*), when I was 11 or 12 years old. In our traditional

[148] Yerba mate became popular in Syria during the war as it is cheaper than coffee, although it was present and consumed since its introduction by Syrian diasporas from Argentina (who emigrated since the early 1900's), who have imported the product since the 1960's.

[149] "You could easily sing or play from nine o'clock in the evening to nine o'clock in the morning. Time passes and you don't feel it" (al-Aqqād in Shannon 2006, 88).

> weddings, they used to play flutes. Now, I didn't own a flute, so I decided to make one by hand, as many people did. I asked myself, where could I get this piece? My uncle's home, there is a television… We are in 1993, or 1994. An Arab house—and on the rooftop, there was this thing—back then, there was no such thing as satellite; there were normal TV networks, with small aluminium antennas. We used to live in a village, so really I didn't have any money to buy that flute. I didn't have 10$ in my pocket, I'm a kid from the village (*da'iya*)… Poor, really. (*anjad faghr*) We come from a family where everyone is educated and cultured, but we were living in the village, so really, there was poverty—careful, poor in money, not poor in terms of children's education, nor poor in food (*faqr al-banoon ao al-taam*). No, just in money (*al-maal*). I wanted to break that antenna, although it is really expensive… But I had an ambition that I wanted to achieve (*tomūh be rāsi biddi b'amalo*). I decided to break a piece of it—really, I went there at night, I stole it, cut it, took it, returned home—to turn it into a flute. Not exactly a flute at 100%, but not too bad (*mush al hal*), it can be played. Later, my uncle realized I did this. That became known, but I wanted to do what I had in mind. So that's how it went. Now, I'm telling this story because this story made me realize something (*wasaletni le shi*). This story reminds me of why I went towards the *nāy*. Because this moment, stealing this aluminium pipe, carving it, and making it a *nāy*, is the most beautiful thing in my life that also brought me here. If I didn't do that, If I didn't steal this thing, nothing would have brought me here, honestly. This is one of the rare memories that stayed with me. I still have that flute, by the way. I used it for about 5 years. Then I started making the same out of wood, the popular flute (*nāy shaabiyeh*), in general. Now it's become part of my job, I mean… That's how the story began.

Coming from a rural region of South Syria, Amir lacked the social connections to migrate to Beirut, but his talent as a *nāy* player got him the support of a Lebanese *kafîl* (sponsor) working in the arts in the capital. In the absence of social capital, his musical talent allowed him to escape Syria.

Amir keeps his large collection of *nāys* in a wooden case, his box of treasures. They are of different lengths, types, materials and tunings.[150] Those hanging on the wall are the most precious of them all. Their decorated woven cases, he says, "I made especially myself, on the sewing machine." His favorite is the *nāy Farsi.* It emits a particular sound of lament that has an unequivocal sadness to its tone. He has many *nāys*, "all the octaves. They differ from the *'ūd*, because you can play all the octaves with these. All the *maqāmāt*." Amir explains:

> This one, for example, can play in *maqām Sab'a*, just in the lower octaves. It can play in *maqām* Kurd, too. On this one, you can play fourteen notes in one second, two seconds almost. On that *nāy*, you can't do this. That's how they differ. [*He*

[150] The nāy comes in a variety of sizes and styles, so a musician switches instruments according to the maqām and desired octave. Folk versions of the nāy can produce several using breathing and fingering techniques. Since folk music uses fewer maqāmāt, a single folk nāy may produce all the tones required to play many songs.

> *picks up the nāy Farsi*]. This one is noticeably Oriental (*mbeine sharqiye*). You can play anything you want with it —anything that comes to your mind.

Played in Near Eastern and Central Asian popular folk heritage and classical traditions, including Sufi music, the *nāy*[151] is an ancient flute whose association with grief, sorrow and loss are traced to early Sufi poetry.[152] It has been likened to the human soul (*rūh*) since its reed is an empty husk, or as a body (*jesm*) that only comes to life once filled with breath (*nafas*). The etymological proximity of *nafas* (breath), *nafs* (self) and *nafsiyyah* (psyche), all deriving from the same root, also contribute metaphorical meaning. The *nāy* exemplifies how an instrument can acquire symbolic meaning for its musical qualities and its literary and spiritual imagery, carrying much cultural depth. Amir plays a melody:

> I like this melody (*ataa*) a lot. Now, this *nāy* is Persian, so it should be played in a particular way. The Arab *nāy*, another way. But I love the sound of this instrument. It is very sad, and it has a lot of passion… And honestly, when I play it, it brings me back to many memories. I can't say what they are, but… There is something that allows me… to remember things… I don't know… If there is a sound that sounds like home, it's the *nāy*."

Amir associates the sound of the *nāy* to his home; it is his oldest friend that stayed with him despite war, loss, migration, and separation. Music, as a site of memory (Nora 1989), is reminiscent and resurgent. It is a form of communication with a previous place and time, a recurrent tune. Edmund Husserl thought of history as a "thickened present" filled with traces of different moments and temporalities. He refers to the "comet's tail" to describe "retentions" maintained long after the event has passed (Husserl 1991, 477), like notes on a musical score. Like memory, music "seeks to search for its fragments and, at the same time, to create itself" (Risset 2007). Gaston Bachelard thought of the psychic 'corners of one's being' (*les racoins de son être*) through the metaphor of the 'attic' (1957). In the attic, the contents of one's "memory palace are occasionally rearranged, like treasured objects that can be dusted off and moved to different spots, re-establishing new relationships with each other and with the structure they inhabit" (Shelemay 2001, 19).

[151] Also called the *salmiye*, *qasbeh* or *shabbabeh,* the *nāy* is played in the Near East to accompany rituals, in particular funerals.
[152] The Persian poet Rumi (*Mollānā*) opened his masterwork, the *Masnavi*, with the line "*Listen to the reed*!" He recounts that the nāy grew up in a reed bed, tightly packed among its brothers, until it was carved into a flute. Thrust into this material world to live life alone, trapped in a corporeal form, it endured painful solitude, longing for a return to its home in the reed bed. This story would explain the *nāy*'s sad and mournful sound; it also echoes the conditions of displacement, refugeehood and exile.

Amir takes up another *nāy* and plays a melody by Yasan Sabagh. I ask Amir what is the difference between two musicians who play the same notes and song:

> *Tahlie* is how you play. *Tahlie* is from the heart. On the same song, on the same notes, this is the difference between a musician and another (*bein aazef o aazef*). I will say it the way my heart says, and [she] will say it the way her heart says.

Tahlie stems from *helū* (sweet), meaning 'to make something sweet.' He tells me the *nāy* allows him "to speak of those things that can only be expressed through it." *(ashiya b'aber m'a)*. Playing earnestly is another way to say that musicians must be emotionally expressive, sensitive and intuitive.[153] Playing "from one's heart" is the secret to impactful music, and that which makes one's sound unique. While the heart grants genuine emotion, each instrument conveys different feelings, and thus serves a different purpose.

> That's why we move from instrument to instrument. Take *Raqsat Sitti (*'My Grandmother's Dance'), for example—on the *nāy*, or *dūdūk*, or clarinet, it won't come out. (*ma btetl'a*) So, we got an *'ūd*, because I want to deliver it.

Raqsat Sitti is a traditional Syrian folk song composed by Omar Naqshbandi in the late 1940s. Its vitality and melodic intricacy made it a great classic of Arab songs. Though its energetic rhythm is appropriate for *dabkeh* popular dance, the song is in *maqām Sabā,'* an emotionally moving and melancholic mode known as the saddest of all the *maqāmāt.*[154] In Amir's words,

"Sabā' is a sad scale. That's why we, Syrians, like it. It describes our feelings best."

The song takes us on a journey by traversing many emotions and moods. It creates many images in the minds of listeners, like a timeless form of folk storytelling. In Classical Arab music, time is more circular than linear, and songs can go on for hours on end.[155] Amir, however, prefers to cut it short. He tells me, "I like to play it like this. I don't like to continue 'till the end, end, end…"

He plays another air; it is *Nasim aleyna al-hawa* (*The Breeze Blew Upon Us*)—"a song by Fayrūz, in *maqām Kurd*." His young daughter Samah sings along for one stanza. Composed by the Rahbani brothers in 1968, in this song, Fayrūz expresses how much she misses her country, so

[153] In a 1990 interview, Syrian vocalist Sabāh Fakhri said: "Feeling is born with musicians when they are born. Those who have musical feeling, those are the ones from whom genius can come out. Those who have no feeling (*hiss*) are just ordinary."
[154] Al-Sabbāgh writes of *maqām* Sabā, "it is impossible for any mode whatsoever to influence the soul as much as this one".
[155] It has been noted that "until the end of the twentieth century, the songs thankfully never shrunk anywhere near the Western three-minute standard, even though 45s did in practice lead to some cutting" (Kassir 2004, 60).

much that she misses the breeze that smells like home. Although derived from a Russian melody, this song is considered popular folk heritage (*turāth sha'bi)*.[156]

In *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*, Christopher Stone (2007) retraces Fayrūz' rise to stardom and her instrumental role in the making of the new Lebanese nation.[157] A Lebanese Christian, Fayrūz became the symbol of a new Arab identity, marking the beginning of a new pop era across the Arab world. Her songs have been adopted, even venerated, by Syrians.[158] The Syrian cultural theorist Hanan Kassab-Hassan writes, "I fear, when I talk about Fairouz, that I might slip into a nostalgic mode, or slip unwittingly into that translucid spot where childhood images mesh with the scents and sounds of cities, and that I might begin my discourse about Fairouz and end up by confounding Beirut with Damascus" (2008, 48). To this day, her catchy melodies resonate across homes—but only in the morning. For over forty years, one of the two Syrian radio channels broadcasted Fayrūz in the morning and Umm Kūlthūm in the evening, a listening habit which remained well-ingrained after radio's heyday. While Fayrūz is a popular star, Umm Kulthūm, an Egyptian *mūnshida* trained in Quranic recitation, is considered a master of the classical *tarab* register and repertoire. Both singers demonstrate music's potential to shape and cross borders, and have brilliantly challenged aesthetic, religious, social, and gender norms.

Amir takes out a *mūjwez*, a double-reed flute. "This is a very popular instrument (*sha'biye ktir).* It is made of aluminum and palm tree," he tells me. He adjusts its tuning before testing its sound. He points to the *banaat*, the small indents in the mouthpiece; "here, and here… This determines the tuning the most. I do it very slowly so it won't break. I don't have another one." The *mūjwez*[159] requires a circular breathing technique to produce its characteristic continuous sound, whose resonance creates a drone (*zann*) effect. Amir warns me that "it needs breath, and I mean real breath!" As he catches his breath, the buzzing effect of the *mūjwez* still resonates. He adds, "This is traditional Palestinian folk (*tūrath Falestini)*, by the way.*"*

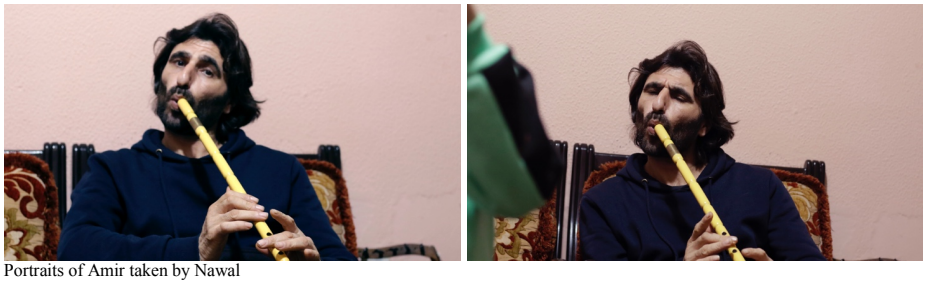
Returning to the *nāy*, Amir plays *Mawtini (My Homeland)*, a song from the 1920s written by the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Tūqan. It was Palestine's former national anthem,[160] adopted in

[156] Musicians often begin by learning Fayruz. Known by all, most of her songs are in *maqām Hijaz*, considered an easy scale.
[157] Stone argues that Fayruz (and the Rahbani Brothers) was crucial in shaping the voice of the Lebanese nation. Following Charles de Gaulle's invitation to perform 'Lebanese folklore' at the Baalbek festival in 1957, "this project played a central, powerful, and sometimes problematic role in providing citizens of this nascent state with their new "Lebanese" identity" (Stone 2007, 11).
[158] Fayrūz collaborated with Syrian composer Said Aql, and sung about Damascus and Syria in the 50's-60's.
[159] The *mūjwez* is a double-reed flute associated to the mountains, to *Bedū* (Bedouin) traditions, and to transhumance *(ra'i*). Its loud, festive sound, is reserved for folk genres and happy social occasions such as weddings..
[160] *Mowteni* was succeeded by *Faida'i* as Palestine's national anthem, composed in 1965 and adopted in 1996.

1936. A patriotic song that creates strong identification and feelings of belonging across the Levant, it was later reinterpreted by the Lebanese composer Mohammad Fleyfel. In 2004, after the fall of Saddam, it became Iraq's national anthem.

By performing a repertoire rooted in a shared cultural heritage of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, relating to neighbouring nations through shared symbols and references, Amir breaks my expectations of a Syrian ethos. Despite very different courses of history, a pool of shared melodies sound similar joys and pains. Traditional Arab music reveals a territory that cuts across contemporary nation-state borders and thus defies methodological nationalism.

Amir closes the *sahrah* with *Dha'eya Dhae'ya* (The Lost Village), a folk song from Palestinian-Syrian composer, Taher Mamelli. Usually sung in the coastal accent (*lahjeh saheliyeh*), arranged with *qanūn* and *būzūq*, the song displays clear Ottoman and Anatolian influences. "There is a song I like a lot, in *maqām Bayāt*. A little similar to classical," he concludes; "This music, in my opinion, is very valuable (*shaqla*)."



Portraits of Amir taken by Nawal

A closer look at the song's history reveals it is in fact a popular urban song stemming from the North-Western Syrian coast that recuperates folkloric forms and plays with rural and regional musical tropes to evoke a distant past and unspoilt countryside. Glissant acutely noted that folklore is "sometimes wrongly considered to be bearers of truth or authenticity" (1997, 162). By retracing a song's history and the migration of sounds, the fiction of the 'authentic' is easily contested.

Foucault described the 'popular' as "the elusive referent to a 'place'" (Foucault 1967, 105). Just like the *būzūq* automatically grants the 'folk' label to any music in which it figures, this song instrumentalizes specific melodic scales, rhythms, and singing accents to signify authenticity. Shannon noted that "Syrian artists tend to identify authentic culture with specific locales and geographical places" (2006, 84). This process of 'recuperation' (Lefebvre 1974) "might create the

association of "rurality" or "pastures" among urbanites, even if it is not the same music with which the association was originally created" (Nercessian 2002, 121).

On my way out at the end of the *sahrah*, Nawal reminds Amir that he has forgotten something—he rushes to the door and hands me a *daf*, the one he had offered me twice before at the theatre. He insists, saying he has many and that he would really like for me to have it. As it is the third time, in the polite dance and art of *takalof*, I accept. In gifting me a *daf,* he gifted me a part of my culture.

Painting of a *dāf* player in Amir's studio at the theatre

Debates on Authenticity & Tradition

In displacement, "the positive characteristics of Syrian society and culture are shifted to the past and located in particularly 'authentic' sites" (Shannon 2006, 198), making these time-spaces seem more resonant than the present-day Syria, which is a time-space or place of decline, loss, and decay.[161] Authenticity shows "a concern for roots and expresses the desire to validate historically dynamic and evolving traditions" (Feld & Keil 1994, 271). Syrian historian Aziz al-'Azmeh warns that "like Orientalism, modern discourses of authenticity essentialize Arab culture and society as self-sufficient and unchanging" (al-'Azmeh 1992, 31); yet change is not antithetical to 'tradition' or 'authenticity;' "it remains fundamental to music itself" (Krausz 1993, 199).

Resonating with home like no other medium, traditional music still evokes pre-war Syria. At times, the Syrian *tūrāth* emphasizes a pan-regional vernacularism which encompasses all the Levant. While positive attributes are thought to emanate from the past, playing traditional folk is far from atavistic; practicing heritage is a forward-oriented act that may help people envision the future, and carry a group forward on solid footing. Steven Feld describes a form of expressivity that "looks back" not in nostalgia, but as a way to see the "now" in dialogue with the "past", as being "in-synchrony while out-of-phase" (Feld 1988, 82).

Aesthetics of authenticity are that through which collective memories and understandings of the past are harnessed. Far from constituting fully preserved survivals of old times, the arts we consider today as traditional are rather "the products of multiple contacts and events, of convergent

[161] To 19th century Arab Renaissance (*nahda*) philosophers, history is understood as consisting of the alternating stages of internal purity and corruption by external agents, of ascendant authenticity and vulgar decline (al-'Azmeh 1992, 17). To Syrian historian 'Aziz al-'Azmeh, "modernity is the root of authenticity" (1992, 13).

influences whose fusion was achieved through long periods of assimilation" (Aubert 2007, 20). They express "complex and at times contradictory characterizations of self, the emotions, and social relations" (Shannon 2006, 193), counterpoints that find expression in music. As a result, I follow the archaeologist Laurajane Smith in considering heritage as a "process or a performance in which certain cultural and social meanings and values are able to be identified, (re)constructed, remembered (and forgotten), negotiated, embraced, or rejected" (Smith 2004, 69).

The Ruralisation of Urban Musical Aesthetics

The correlation between traditional folk music and rurality—and likewise, of Westernized music with urbanity—is not clear-cut. Turning to emic ontologies breaks Western dichotomies, as the Syrian *turāth* encompasses urban, rural, folk and classical forms whose distinctions are increasingly fluid. In his study of pre-war Syrian music, the musicologist Jonathan Shannon noted that "the familiar geographical and political delineations appear more blurred while the various urban and rural areas seem to be merging into one large continuum" (2006, 222).

The Syrian historian Samir 'Abduh argued in his book *Ruralising the city and urbanising the countryside* that "the influx of rural people into cities does not necessarily only mean that people were urbanised, but also that the cities, or certain quarters of it, were to a certain extent ruralised" ('Abduh 1989, 7). Though he addresses the period of rapid modernization in Syria during the 1950's and 1960's, from 2011 onwards, the largest forced migration in history, caused by the Syrian war, also remapped patterns of rurality and urbanity.

Before the war, Classical Arab traditional music was typically found in Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. *Tarab*, in particular, as a music of the urban elite, was considered to be the preserve of 'high culture,' representing "the best that is thought and known" (Arnold 1994). Genres that once constituted markers of privilege in Syria have become popular (*sha'bi*) heritage that all belong and relate to in exile. The recuperation of an elitist aesthetic turned popular in displacement is one of the most profound transformations I have witnessed.

With the migration of Syrian artists to cities worldwide, and the longing for roots induced by exile, urban sonic aesthetics are undergoing a process of "ruralisation." Cities increasingly produce and consume traditional folk genres such as *baladi* (rural folk), *sha'bi* (popular) and *taqlīdi* (traditional). By appropriating the popular, urban musicians raise the prestige of rural repertoires, contributing to the "classicization of tradition" (Chatterjee 1993). I interpret the

appetite for rural and regional music across Syrian diasporas not as an exotic consumption of difference, but rather as the a quest to find and keep one's roots.

These tunes connote 'authenticity' and a sense of belonging, and thus represent an affectively potent means for an exiled community to reconnect with a home that was ravaged. With an urge to reclaim what they feel is being lost—or what they did not have time to learn—exiled Syrian musicians display a growing interest in their folk heritage. This is also true in Europe, where musicians trained in the Western classical tradition in Damascus or Aleppo have, redirected their musical practice to Oriental music (*musiqa sharqiye*), learning traditional instruments (*'ūd, daf*) and repertoires once exiled. This renewed appreciation for heritage and active participation in its preservation is telling of an exilic identity which values roots and reconnecting with its origins.

As a communal aesthetic and practice, traditional music (*musiqa turāthiyeh*) evokes the homeland like no other medium. Increasingly, Syrians worldwide draw on the "operational use of music as an affective tool for momentary recreations of a lost homeland... faced with the near certainty that [they] will never return home" (Shannon 2019, 2175). Music offers an accessible way to reconnect with their country when they can no longer return. Old songs (*aqāni qadīm*) became the sound of a generation who is still mourning its youth. Exiled Syrians find comfort and belonging in these sounds. In the aim to remember and make their heritage thrive, they seek to exalt what Syria was, what it could have been, and what remains.

Mirroring this situation, musicians living in rural peripheries and "those who play a form of traditional music might seek to modernize or hybridize it for a broader audience, or to transfigure it into forms of jazz and electronic dance music" (Gallope 2017, 250), blending traditional sounds and Western rhythms, or playing folk music on a synthesiser keyboard. Perhaps, as the Moroccan philosopher Muhamad al-Jabri believed, heritage (*turāth*) is best understood as "an attitude or stance (*mawqif*), a set of ideas and ways of thinking… not so much the tangible products of these ideas" (Al-Jabri 1991, 24). The *tūrath,* after all, constitutes a 'tradition'— as "a process of cultural selection and memory that implies modes of reasoning about the past, conceptions of selfhood and social identity, and attitudes toward the future" (Macintyre 1984, 78).

Conclusion & Openings

Cognitive Dissonance

Amir once told me, while laughing, "We Syrians, our lives are tragedies. We love sad music." Losing one's homeland is a profound wound of self-estrangement and alienation, what Edward Said described as "the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surrounded" (Said 2000, 173). When I asked Amir about joy, he took his time to think. A few weeks later, he brought up my question, admitting,

> You asked me a very honest question. No, I swear to God, we don't have joy. I will tell you in all honesty. Maybe my daughter, who is 7 years old, is happy, because she doesn't know anything. But are we happy? No, really, we're not happy. Of course we're not happy we had to leave our country 10 years ago. Of course we're not happy we cannot see our families—no brothers, no siblings, no one… We cannot see them. Of course we're not happy in these conditions. Now, if we laugh, trust me, we only laugh from *here* to *here* [*gestures from the throat up*]. Only. Just to make people laugh, and pretend that we're comfortable. But that's not the truth.

"So this is daily play?" I ask.

> Listen… Maybe 5-6 years ago, I used to be happy with everything I do. Theatre, music, playing *'ūd*… But today, I can say that from 2018 until now, 2023, there is no kind of joy, no kind of happiness, honestly. I mean… I thought that I would reach a point that I was unable to reach. There is failure (*fî fashl*), always, I don't know why… Maybe there is no failure, but that's how I feel. And these days, honestly, even if you see me laughing a little, really, I am only smiling from here [*points to his mouth*]. Here [*hand on his heart*], I am crying. From here onwards [*gestures from his heart downwards*], there is nothing—it is blocked completely."

The historian Henry Harootunian thought that when groups experience misfortune, "they must define the present by historicizing and temporalizing the asymmetrical interplay between the past and the current situation," arguing that "a habitus of a haunted house" is where the ghosts of the past comingle daily with the living" (2004, 478). Behind Amir's laughter and smiles hides a cognitive dissonance that seeks to harmonize unspeakable pain and the social pressure to perform normalcy and to make others happy, starting with his daughter.

When the past is unredeemable and the future looms indeterminate, a 'presentist' disposition might be a better guide than utopian pasts and imaginary futures. Experience, a "future made present" (Koselleck 2004, 272), is oriented towards a 'not yet'. Amir often spoke to me of his dream and struggle to leave Lebanon.

> Why? There are several reasons. The first reason is the economic situation here. Nobody tell me it's normal—when we say the dollar is eighty thousand—no, this situation is not normal. Every day, I open a million bill, by noon it is finished. Sorry to be talking about these things. The kilo of onions is 80,000 Lebanese Lira. This is the first reason—the economic reason. Then, there is struggle at work. Everything… It's enough, I'm done… Second, I am a person who loves music and plays several musical instruments. I want to live in a place where this is recognized.

Playing music allows to project oneself in a different future. Amir's hope of finding refuge in the West is tied to his dream of musical accomplishment. I am aware of the hard limits of agency, of emancipation and of the transformational potential of music and voices in a context where people are restricted – bound or ground down – by restrictive laws, exclusion, hardship, and prejudice. As one informant told me, "Syrians in Lebanon can barely speak, let alone sing."

While musical practice might help release the pressures of daily life, it does not relieve the burdens of refugeehood. "Evidence of music's power to meet and contain the unspeakable suffering of refugee communities [must be] balanced with awareness of socio-political instability and vulnerability" (Parker & Mufti 2016, 1). Adding nuance to the debate on music and agency with an awareness of its limits in the context of displacement, I suggest that musical practice provides tools for self-sufficiency and for building communities, manifests a strong directed will, and entails working concretely towards a different future, thus signaling agency.

The Virtual Voyages of Sounds

After seeking exile in Beirut, the displacement of large numbers of Syrian musicians to Europe, North America, the Arab Gulf and Australia produced networks of creative exchanges that have internationalized Syrian music and integrated it in virtual space. Syrian musicians now operate "in a composite global geography" (Kassir 2006, 90); they are engaged "in a transnational field that interconnect places of origin and places of settlement, and extend globally across multiple borders and boundaries" (Schiller & Meinhof 2011, 4). Their careers are intertwined with the economic networks, technological media, and modes of consumption of their transnational communities, as Syrian music now mostly circulates "through the channel of diasporic networks or cosmopolitan social formations, through mass mediation and the internet" (Nooshin 2009, 14).

When unable to move and roam, one can travel through music, reaching farther than one's physical lifeworld. A spatiotemporal phenomenon that is radically transient (Tan 2012, 35), sound parallels displacement. Sound waves travel through space and time; low frequencies traverse walls and non-porous borders. As sounds travel while bodies cannot, musical experience is becoming increasingly mediated. Technologies allow musicians to collaborate across countries, recreating traditional *takht* ensembles through digital mixing. In Beirut, a growing number of Syrian musicians equip themselves to partake in recording initiatives with collaborators, often in Europe.

The development of "multiple and spatially dislocated audiences" (Appadurai 1996), "publics and counterpublics" (Warner 2002), and other networking strategies open horizons for Syrian musicians and come to form 'transcultural capital,' a potent resource that creatively links different social networks. In turn, these musicians' "transnational social, economic and symbolic activities affect their identity and cultural renegotiation processes" (Salih 2003, 2). In close contact with distant musics, they "are shaped by the impact of this contact, which can [also] reflect the nature of cultural change locally" (Nercessian 2002, 23). In developing multiple identifications and belongings, Syrian musicians in Lebanon redefine 'Syrianness' and defy strategic essentialism (Spivak 1985).à While musical "brokering" usually addresses the digital musician, it also applies to the displaced Syrian musician who "travels *through* as well as *between* communities, transferring ideas, styles and interests from one practice to another" (Scott 2015, 9).

The virtual voyages of sounds create multiple, overlapping lifeworlds. Deleuze and Guattari wrote that "the melodic landscape is no longer a melody associated with a landscape, the melody itself is a sonorous landscape in counterpoint to a virtual landscape"[162] (1980, 318). What does the virtual soundscape of these musicians tell us about the worlds they inhabit?

Musicians assemble a digital collection of links and files saved to cellphones, curating their own archives and repertoires. The songs that participants find and share "serve to maintain a connection with others, but also with a part of themselves" (Boswall & Al Akash 2017, 179). Their listening habits reveal new sonic cultures that flourish through social media and online platforms, bringing them to discover otherwise unknown musicians. Amir uses Youtube, Instagram and Tik Tok to find popular (*sha'bi*) musicians in Syria, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf, from whom he derives

[162] The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai suggests to apply the suffix '-scape' to contemporary global flows to contemplate the immaterial landscapes we inhabit: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes. He writes, "The world we live in now seems rhizomic, even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups, on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other" (1990, 2).

inspiration. After we exchange *mahali* (local) *Khaliji* songs from both shores of the Gulf, he sends me a text, saying "I love different cultures." By resituating "local" music as "globally" accessible, virtual distribution counters assimilation within globalization, despite utilizing its affordances.

It has been shown that "communication technologies maintain refugees' link to familiarity and a sense of security" (Mayo 2018, 3). Under restricted movement and isolation, Syrian adolescents in the refugee camps of the Beqaa Valley "create communities - based on shared experiences of displacement - spread globally through online communication" (Y Nagi et al. 2021, 3). To Reem and Yara, Facebook and Instagram are a lifeline; they use social media to connect with friends who left to faraway places, watch videos of concerts in Beirut, find folk music from Syria and Egypt, and follow female Arab musicians they admire and look up to. They partake in an effervescent virtual space to establish a sense of '*communitas'* (Turner 1974). These platforms also offer them a space where they can exist "in public"—by posting videos of their own concerts, they gain strength and encouragement that is not readily available in their social environments.

The same channels that are used to discover and share music are used to connect displaced and atomized families and friends. Until reunited, family relations are maintained via digital communication—texts, calls, and forwarded motivational messages, sharing blessings for the day ahead. New family members are also introduced virtually—spouses and newborns come to know grandparents through mediated images and sounds. Developing new friendships virtually has become normal to them, and to me, too. My own connection with these friends is sustained from afar through the exchange of voice notes, photos, songs, and recordings of last night's *sahrah*.

As the social fabric turned into a network, the virtual connectivity of transnational communities forms a disembodied globalization, where social relations are sustained through the movement of immaterial things—data, encoded capital, and sounds. These exchanges led to the globalization of kinship and network ties, the growth of remittances, and the possibility of partaking in multiple localities. Lipsitz thought that the movement of "images, technology, capital, and ideologies … allows us all to inhabit many different "places" at once" (Lipsitz 1994, 5). As a Palestinian-Iraqi friend, born in Damascus' Yarmouk refugee camp, explained it to me:

> For us [Syrians], Facebook is something very valuable (*shi ktir hababeh*); when the revolution happened, in 2011, to be able to reconnect with friends we lost to the chaos of exile, this was inestimable. Some people still live in Syria—through Facebook. Really, it's another world (*qawqab tani*). They

> live in the "virtual world" (*al-'ālam al-efterādhi*[163]), and on the side, they live in… in their reality, wherever they are.

Not only do smartphones allow Syrians to connect with dispersed family members, they also "enable a participatory connection to their country and its present pain, through images, video, text and sound, but in particular, through song" (Boswall & Al Akash 2017, 179). In the Fall of 2023, pacific demonstrations took over the streets of Sūeīda, South Syria. Videos and audio recordings of the protests circulated worldwide within the transnational Syrian refugee community and its virtual solidarity networks. Citizen journalism recordings showed women and youth chanting loud and proud for the regime to step-down. A new generation, who were too young to participate in the 2011 revolution, is now chanting in the streets.

Using popular music (*musiqa sha'biyye*) as a form of resistance, protesters uncovered long-forgotten folk songs, recuperating their melodies and rewriting their lyrics to politicise them anew.[164] In something of a feedback loop, the same sounds resonate with meaning transformed in different times and locales - what Deleuze and Guattari call a "ritournelle" (1980). Listened to from afar, they also provide exiled Syrians worldwide "a continued participatory involvement in resistance and protest, serving as portals for to the world they left behind" (Boswall & Al Akash 2017, 177). The power of music might succeed in long-term change. In the meantime, it allows for Syrian refugees and exiles across the various sites of their displacement—like those I have described here—to reconnect to their struggle, history, and identity.

[163] It is interesting to note that e*fterādh* ('virtual') literally translates as 'hypothetical'.
[164] One of these chants adapts the traditional song "Jana Jana" by transforming its refrain, "Heaven, Heaven" into "*Revolt, revolt",* while keeping *"Dera'a you are a candle to our darkness".*

Summary & Discussion

Throughout this text, I have attempted to demonstrate how Syrian musicians in Lebanon surmount their 'otherness' through their musical practices, thus challenging politics of inclusion and exclusion. I did this by theorizing the discourses of my interlocuters and foregrounding their responses to expected performances. I hope that this research can carry the sound of its participants further, shed light on their concerns and dreams, and revalue sonic memory and Syrian futures.

I tried to shape a polyvocal research that represents two seemingly opposite tendencies in emergent Syrian music in Lebanon, forming a heterophonic narrative on the preservation and transformation of the Syrian musical heritage (*al-tūrath al-musiqi al-Sūri*) in displacement. I have sought to understand how cultural identities are reshaped by displacement, and how musical traditions are safekept and revived in exile. I uncovered the affective and moral associations that Syrian musicians retain with traditional and contemporary music to show how aesthetics participate in the construction of subjectivities amidst displacement.

Musical aesthetics reveal how displaced Syrian musicians strategically position themselves within their own families and communities, their broader global virtual networks, and Lebanese cultural politics. By curating and expanding their repertoires, Syrian musicians in Lebanon "find themselves in a constant state of negotiation, seeking continuity between their past and present experience, between their professional skills and the expectations of the new audiences, and between their habitual artistic *langue* and a new creative *parole*" (Meerzon 2012, 13).

Whether learning their musical heritage or embracing cosmopolitan aesthetics to re-root, the practices of the musicians in this study reflect a counterpoint. In the musical sense, a counterpoint is when one or several voices depend on one another harmonically, while remaining independent in the sense of melody and rhythm. Likewise, the varied practices of these musicians rely on each other, like a call and response (*sowal o jawab)*, while remaining independent in their voices, creativity, and sources of inspiration. Drawing from one's heritage goes hand in hand with developing unique sonic aesthetics. Music is a powerful means to make sense of one's past, current situation, and influences; it provides the possibility to "come to the bottom of all confluences to mark more strongly your inspirations" (Glissant 1997, 93).

At once retaining traditions and developing new aesthetic sensibilities, music has the potential to articulate favoured modes of belonging in a non-logocentric mode. It makes audible "an anxiety-ridden quest for lost difference, following a logic from which difference is banished"

(Attali 1984, 5). Instead of arguing for the contestation of a fixed cultural identity, I interrogate the complexity of identity-making in refugeehood. The musicians I met consistently eschewed the nationalist ethos of a 'purely' Syrian repertoire. Rather, they emphasized regional musical traditions, including Palestinian, Egyptian and Lebanese, what I interpret as a post-nationalist regionalism that I have come to describe as "cosmopolitan vernacularism". I explored how Syrian identities are reshaped by displacement through zones of contact and transnational networks—real, imagined, and virtual—acquiring new artistic, speaking, singing, and collective voices.

Over the course of a decade in limbo, waiting for their next departure to a place of asylum, Syrian refugees have carved new musical and linguistic identities in Lebanon. Being stuck in this in-between transitory space (*mawqif*), not a point of arrival, has granted a particular openness to Syrian artists in Lebanon. Syrian musicians skillfully use their cultural proximity and shared referents with Lebanon to integrate its cultural sphere, while turning to the world for inspiration.

Emic ontologies of belonging based on 'root' (*asl*) identity display a localism that defies strategic essentialism (Spivak 1985) and methodological nationalism. By provincializing history (Chakrabarty 2000), we can consider the ways in which many local traditions form a larger cultural continuum across the Levant, akin to how language continuums form a gradient of vernacular tongues, as is particularly true for Arabic. The many '*amiyeh* (vernaculars) and *lahjat* (accents) in the Levant—*Jabali* (mountainous), *Saheli* (coastal), *Shami* (Damascene), *Halabi* (Aleppine)—reflect distinct environments that carry specific connotations. Coupled with an ethnographic approach, linguistic anthropology allows us to listen to the wisdoms of the people at its center.

I have come to coin the term "audible others" to describe minorities that are recognized audibly in a sectarian society where difference is coded by phenotype, not race. Syrian voices reveal their 'otherness' in Lebanese society, despite an absence of ethnic differences. The performative aspect of voices is a tactic employed in daily interactions with Lebanese society, to pass checkpoints, to perform, or to aurally "pass" as Lebanese. These tactics vary from choosing the proper repertoire, to taking on colloquial accents. Music offers a relief from logocentric narratives that might be particularly valuable to refugees, whose "otherness" is revealed vocally.

Taking a voice other than one's own, in everyday speech or in song, is telling of the pluralities and complexities of voice in contexts of displacement. The accents that singers put on to move across repertoires is a creative strategy that has been employed since the 1950s to signify authenticity in songs, or to reach a wider audience (in particular *lahjeh beida*, somewhat the

Levant's *lingua franca*). For Yara, exploring *Mesri*, *Bedu*, *Saheli*, *Lubnani* and *Shāmi* accents is a form of role-play that allows her to become other through song. Taking on a rural Egyptian woman's voice allows her to sing about topics usually condoned off, and momentarily suspend taboos. Syrian singers must often take on a Beiruti accent to access performing opportunities in the capital. At times performing, at others erasing markers of authenticity, dropping or taking on accents in daily speech and song, Syrian musicians in Lebanon are caught in a strategic interplay to navigate stigma and access performing opportunities. In music, like in voice, performing or erasing signs of 'authenticity' are deployed with similar aims.

What stands out is the role of music as refuge in the lives of the participants. Music offered them shelter, a safe space in which to find comfort, a livelihood they can rely on, and communities they felt they could belong to. While Reem "found refuge in the cello," to Amir, "the nāy is [his] home" and offers him psychic rootedness; the nay is also what allowed him to find refuge in Beirut. In Issa's experience, his bandmates were his shelter upon their arrival in Beirut, and the alternative community of musicians act offer protection and act as solidarity networks.

Despite Syria and Lebanon's intertwined history, music and voices - as sites of cultural specificity - demarcate Syrian otherness. While musical traditions retrace a shared cultural basin across both modern nation-states, disrupting the imaginaries of a nation-state aesthetic and traversing modern borders/boundaries that have created refugees, the specificity of Syria's vast musical heritage remains undeniable. Yet Syrian music displays a combination of overlapping traditional, modern and postmodern traits, that bear the marks of a diverse society's complexity in an admixture of old and new, local and foreign. Besides, musical cultures and music itself have always been displaced. "No branch of the arts furnishes more examples of borrowing, re-using and appropriating across cultures than does music" (Scott 2015, 1). Besides, there has always been a migration and intermixing of sounds; traditional Syrian music can cut through ethnic, religious, political and national boundaries, and has the potential to reconfigure 'Syrianness' in exile.

Threatened by the dispersal of its practitioners, the Syrian musical heritage is particularly vulnerable as an oral tradition whose transmission requires the right to move and gather. This rich intangible heritage must be played and recorded to be heard and remembered. In 2006, the musicologist Jonathan Shannon foresaw that the future of Syrian music "will depend on how the coming generations will experience and value its message" (2006, 225). Second-generation Syrian refugee youth in Lebanon and those who migrated as children and youth, whom I call the "1.5

generation", have become culture bearers and purveyors despite having little memories of Syria. When Reem and Yara play *musiqa turāthiyeh* (traditional music), they reconnect with their roots, voice belonging, and reignite collective memory. Tapping into the Syrian musical heritage is a way to reconnect with their cultural identity, which, though indelible in Lebanese society, was not experienced enough first-hand, provoking a struggle for authenticity at the level of identity.

By focusing more on what has been sustained than on what has been lost, I hope to have complexified a 'nostalgic dwelling' (Lagerkvist 2013) positionality, where melancholic attachment to national traditional forms provide a source of comfort. Rethinking 'nostalgia' as a positive form of agency, I posit that turning to the past is not so much an atavistic looking backward as it is a will in the present and for the future. In seeing the old (*qadīm*) in the new (*jdīd*), we can elucidate different "ways of inhabiting and articulating lived experience in places and communities embedded with a heightened awareness of the past" (Habash 2021, 4).

Despite their talents being recognized, Syrian musicians face unsurmountable obstacles in Lebanon. Unlike their Lebanese counterparts, Syrian musicians face constant risk of deportation, do not have papers nor visas to travel for concerts abroad, are unable to settle down and to do many mundane things that most of us take for granted. To Dunya Habash, in refugeehood, agency is the capacity to create opportunities within harsh limitations and "against the consequences of war, migration, displacement and dispossession" (Habash 2021, 4). Saba Mahmood defines agency as "the capacity to realize one's interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles, whether individual or collective" (2005, 8). Challenging social taboos, pursuing music as a career, and pushing gendered boundaries through song, are some of the ways that displaced Syrian musicians are transforming their own societies.

Forced migration reconfigured urban and rural patterns, redistributing musical aesthetics across both environments. *Baladi* 'folk' music, generally attributed to the countryside, has entered urban centers and ruralized urban musical aesthetics. Somewhat mirroring this situation, classical Arab music (*turāth klasiki*), once an aesthetic of privilege associated with the cultural elite in Syria, has become a popular heritage (*turāth sha'bi*) in exile. Whether recuperating age-old rural musical tropes or erudite urban classical melodies, what stems from the past carries forward notions of 'authenticity', which are imbued with value and depth.

Meanwhile, the classicization of folk music operates as a mode of cultural preservation. The music curriculum of the NGO Action for Hope (*Amal al-Amal*) contributes to this tendency

by teaching Syrian folk songs (*turāth*) using the *solfège*, Western music notation, as a technique of instruction. Both phenomena, the ruralisation of urban musical aesthetics and the classicization of the folk repertoire, are linked to displacement and may work to further blur the boundaries between overlapping musical – and other - categories. As discussed, in Arab music theory, popular folk music and classical music are not dichotomous terms like in Western classification, but rather part of a fluid scale forming the notion of "heritage," or *turāth*.

While displaced Syrian musicians actively revive their cultural heritage, they also engage in musical experimentations and collaborations across their sites of displacement. Transposing the *maqāmāt* melodic scales to Western instruments, exploring new genres and influences, attempting electronic renditions of traditional music, or singing in the Lebanese colloquial accent, are all symptoms of these transformations. For some, like Issa, partaking in Beirut's cosmopolitan musical aesthetics contributes to forging new forms of belonging, fueled by a drive for freedom of expression. In its "openness to divergent cultural influences and as a practice of navigating across cultural boundaries (Gilbert & Lo 2007, 8), musical cosmopolitanism draws new pathways, virtual or otherwise. By re-evaluating the opportunities the medium and their environment offers, musicians embrace influences, learn new skills, and expand their repertoires. For others, like Reem, transposing Arab music theory to the Western cello is a way of innovating through tradition. In adopting and disjoining norms, musicians create new works outside of centralized paths, piecing together composite identities in sounds. Directed by relation, the expression of these "forces made sonorous" (Deleuze & Guattari 1980) create meaning in the way they are combined. "If there is meaning to be found in music, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into its composition, but only in the way those elements are combined" (Lévi-Strauss 1972, 210).

The growing interest in traditional forms, instruments, scales and linguistic registers, notably Classical Arabic (*fus'ha*) or Syriac lithurgical chant, is reflected in contemporary Syrian music. *Electro-sha'bi* (Shkoon), *electro-tarab* (Hello Psychaleppo), *disco-dabke* (electronic folk dance music) and *Sufi jazz* are some of its outcomes. Diasporas in Europe and North America have embraced new hybrid genres. Techno music mixing refrains of nostalgic songs between two beats-per-minute, rock bands layering heavy metal instrumentation with the poetic *mawwal* singing style, sampling and repurposing traditional instruments through electronic manipulation, or replacing traditional *takht* ensembles with a single-handed synthesiser (*org)*, all became commonplace.

Music is practiced as a means to move forward and away, geographically and metaphorically. It represents hard work in dire circumstances, a diligent practice sustained despite a lack of time and resources. A daily effort which requires discipline and dedication, it is not carried out to beat boredom, but to build a different future amid a stark lack of opportunities. These musicians remind us that "no matter where one is, no matter how strong the force of errantry, one can hear the mounting desire to "give on-and with," to discover order in chaos" (Glissant 1997, 170). To them, music is a gateway toward a better life, a means to propel themselves out of Lebanon, out of refugeehood—more than a melancholic outlook towards the past. I hope these nuances dispel the trope of a passive refugee positionality and contribute to show how music is employed as a form of agency geared towards futurity.

An act of co-creation and self-creation at once, music-making demonstrates agency and resistance by enacting cultural rights. Though the limits of agency in refugeehood are binding, the potential agency in music lies in "the ability to make one's own decisions determining musical act and meaning" (Alkaei & Küssner 2021, 6). Music may redress misrepresentation, voice resistance, prevent culture loss, and uphold a sense of individuality and power. Mediating between the homeland as a refuge, and the refuge as a *mahjar*, music conveys the vulnerability and transformation of the Syrian cultural heritage in displaced imaginaries.

After being silenced by the dehumanizing media coverage of the Syrian conflict and its aftermath, Syrian refugees use art as a strategy to speak back, reversing a miserabilist gaze. Music is an area where they have achieved great success, in Lebanon and abroad—many producers recognize that the Lebanese music scene was "revitalized" by Syrian musicians since 2012, infused with new breath, talent, passion, and academic know-how.

Given the current instability in both Syria and Lebanon, refugees may be forced to remain displaced from their homes for the foreseeable future. All the participants in this study have relinquished the dream – obliterated in the face of an unchanged regime - of a safe return. I was told time and again that "Syria will never be the home it used to be." This resignation has redirected hope to other lands. Although this perspective assumes a position of exile for the foreseeable future, it also opens up to the world and expresses a desire to meld with it in new ways. Self-estrangement may become an opportunity for creative self-liberation. Music reveals "what the world makes and expresses of itself" (Glissant 1997, 160).

Coda

In February 2024, Yara and Issa are both invited to perform at a fundraising concert for families displaced by war in South Lebanon. Beirut's indie music scene is gathered in this dimly-lit industrial art gallery turned concert space. As the audience stands in front of the stage, drinks in hand, an activist gives an opening speech, reminding us that "Lebanon is at war. It is important for us to realize this. Let's have solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the South, and with Palestine."

Yara travelled from the Beqaa for the occasion, accompanied by her 25-year-old brother. Performing in Beirut's venues exposes her to different lifestyles; the only one in the crowd wearing a hijab, she whispers in my ear that smell of beer bothers her. Raised in the refugee camps in rural Lebanon, Yara lives worlds apart from Beirut's music scene yet knows how to speak with its crowd with confidence and ease. After performing a moving clarinet solo enhanced with delay and echo effects, Yara takes the microphone and addresses her audience in a perfect *Beiruti* accent, dropping-in English words and softening her pronunciation in Arabic:

> First of all, hi. [*Awal shi, hi.*] What you've just heard me play is my composition. My name is Yara Wardan, I am from Syria, I am sixteen years old [*omri sixteen*].

The crowd cheers her on loudly. When the concert's host, Ziad Hamdan, mentions an upcoming cultural event, Yara admits, "But I won't be here." A voice in the crowd asks her where she will be. "I will be travelling," she says. "Where to?" another voice screams out. Yara has a big smile; waving her hand in the air in a posh gesture, she says with an air of pride, "In just 9 days, I will travel to America." The crowd claps and cheers even louder. Yara adds, "This is my last concert at KED Beirut, the last time I play and sing here." To which someone in the crowd retorts, *"Not the last time! You will return later!"* Yara seems unsure. She hesitates, before explaining:

> Inshallah... (*smiles*) but I can't (*finnish*[165]), because this is immigration (*le eno hiyye hejra*), it's more difficult, because… It is through the UNHCR,[166] so... (*'an tariq al-'Umam, fa…*) Okay, we can say that, God willing, I will come back. And I will not forget Lebanon. (*Fa mnqoul eno inshallah nirj'a. O ma bensa' Lubnan.)*

Yara swiftly shifts the tone, and is ready to begin. "Okay, Zeid, *yalla*, together…" The crowd giggles at her assured tone as she directs one of Beirut's biggest superstars accompanying her on the electric guitar. Yara is so down-to-earth and unapologetically herself, a stark contrast to other performers, singers twice her age who had been deferential, blessing Zeid for the opportunity and honour of playing with him.

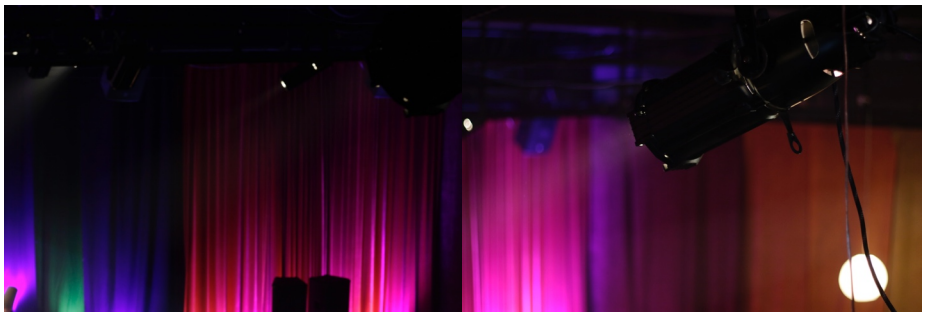
Yara sings a classical *tarab* composition almost *acapella*; her voice climbs up two octaves and back effortlessly. Midway into the song, they double on the rhythm; Yara calls on the crowd to get up and dance: "*Yalla, yalla, yalla, foq!"* The performance is a great success.

On our way out, way past midnight, Yara is exhausted, having travelled that morning. She tells me she wants "to sleep forever." With a sad air, she adds, "I will miss Beirut a lot…" (*ana ktir 'am eshtaghtel Beirut…*) I tell her, "Beirut will miss you too." She smiles back at me.

* * *

Amir tells me to meet him at *Dawar al-Shams,* a theatre in Tayyouneh, Beirut's old frontline between East and West, repurposed by a large garden that hides a gaping scar from the civil war. He is busy lighting a concert of Sufi music; dervishes perform *raqs-e samā,*[167] twirling on stage.

[165] Yara reveals her South Syrian accent in the compression of "*ana ma fini*", also used in Palestinian and Egyptian colloquials.
[166] '*al-'Umam*' is short for the United Nations and High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *al-Umam al-motahede*. Migrating as refugees means they might never be able to return to Lebanon, nor Syria.
[167] Twelfth-century jurist al-Ghazzali referred to song and dance as *samā* ('listening' or 'audition'), while Sufi literature refers to *samā* as "a spiritual audition of sacred truths and not merely listening to music" (al-Farūqi 1985). *Raqs-e samā,* known in the West as 'swirling dervishes", finds its roots and meaning in listening to Sufi poetry, Quranic recitation (*tawjid*), and accompanying traditional instruments, most notably the *daf* as a percussion.



Back in the lighting booth, I notice an etching on the wall: "*our story started in the theatre*" (*qesetna balashet be al-masrah)*. It gets me thinking of the power of performance to rewrite personal narratives. Below it, a line from Fayrouz, "*our names, our parents got tired finding them*" (*asamīna, shou ta'abou ahalina talaūha*). My eyes keep wandering across the wall as I try to recollect the melody. Other messages are written in English: "Let's be happy whatever the situation;" in a different handwriting, "Soon tornado will stop and I will sail and go forward." Inside the drawn contour of a hand's palm, "*Love is taking a stance*" (*hob māwqef*). Finally, my eyes alight on the largest writing on the wall; it reads "*in the circle of the journey*" (*fi daīrah al-rehlah*). It reminds me that the journey of my Syrian friends in Lebanon is unfinished; Beirut, like the Beqaa, is just a *māwqif*[168]—an in-between place—as Lebanon does not represent a *qarār*[169]—an ending point. "The *māwqif* is the pause, the stop-over," wrote al-Niffari, "between two moments of movement, two runs, two sites, two places, two states." Syrian music, like its people, are still "moving across ponds" (Said 1999). While sounds travel and music *moves*, they do not provide a stable status, dividing once more a people between those who can return and those who cannot; those who can roam, those who are stuck; those who moved on, and those who stayed behind.

* * *

After a decade in waiting, the Wardan family obtained asylum and settled in the United States. Reem and Yara had been preparing for this moment by learning English. Reem managed to travel with all her instruments—even her cello, which is "impossible [for her] to give up." The

[168] A *mawqif* is a musical concept derived from Sufi terminology which designates an in-between bridge or a pause.
[169] In musical terms, *qārar* is the tonic and the ending point of a piece. One must always return to it; like one's home, it offers and provides "grounds"- a place to return to - for the piece or improvisation with "tonal fixation."

sisters plan to continue teaching and performing traditional Syrian music in America. Their first impression of their new surroundings, they tell me with humour and wit, is "boredom" (*malal*).

Amir migrated again, starting a new life in Switzerland, where he works as a lighting technician and by playing the *'ūd* in a café, while learning French. Nawal and Samah were not able to follow, and had no choice but to return to Syria. While Nawal tells me she misses Beirut, Amir tells me he can barely cope not being by their side. He sends me a video of Samah dancing to Syrian folk in Dara'a, standing on a rock in the meadow he calls home. I send Nawal a family portrait I took of them one year ago on Alley's mountain peak, under the snow, writing in it, "May God give you patience." As I write, Amir is finally expecting their arrival, after a year separated.

In the Spring of 2024, the Lebanese Armed Forces, helped by ultra-right-wing Christian militias, have forcibly returned hundreds of Syrian refugees into Syria. Issa is tragically one of them. Though he managed to work and find success in Beirut for many years, he was forcibly deported in April 2024. Once again, he was *disbanded*. While his band members remain in Beirut, he is stuck in Damascus, with most of his network and friends out of reach, spread between Lebanon and Europe. His deportation happened just as his band was about to release their third album. His sudden disappearance shook Beirut's indie music scene and left a big void. He participates in recordings from afar and hopes to reunite with his band members soon.

* * *

At a *sobhiyeh*, a women's morning gathering involving coffee and conversation, I join a Ethiopian and Lebanese friends to greet the mother of our Syrian friend who recently arrived in Beirut. She remarks, "how interesting, we are all from different countries, but we all drink yerba mate!" Before the conversation transitions to food and Syrian delicacies, she tells us that she misses Syria, and that Beirut lacks social life (*hayat ejtemaīyeh*). As we smoke cigarettes and refill each other's cups, she opens up about the journey she undertook with her husband, another musician who, during their recent migration from Salamiyeh to Beirut, broke his '*ūd* along the way.

Bibliography

ABBAS, Hassan. *Traditional Syrian Music*. Beirut: UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States, 2018.

ABBAS, Hassan et al. 2021. "al-Qudud al-Halabiya." *UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.

ABDOUMALIQ, Simone. *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South*. London: Polity, 2019.

'ABDUH , Samir. *Taryif al-Madinah wa Madnanat al-Rif* ('*Ruralising the City and Urbanising the Countryside*'). Damascus, 1989.

ABU SHUMAYS, Sami. 2013. "Maqam Analysis: A Primer." *Music Theory Spectrum* 35 (2): 235-255.

_____. *Microtones in Arabic Music*. Podcast: http://shumays.libsyn.com/microtones-in- arabicmusic

ABU-LUGHOD, Lila. *Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

_____. *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

_____. 1986. "Modest Women, Subversive Poems: The Politics of Love in an Egyptian Bedouin Society." *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 13(2): 159-168.

ACTION FOR HOPE, Ed. 2019. "Desk Study on the Cultural Rights of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon." Beirut: UNESCO.

ADORNO, Theodor W. 1958. "On Lyric Poetry and Society." In *Notes to Literature,* translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 59-74. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.

AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford University Press, 1995.

AHMED, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.

AL-AZMEH, Aziz. 1992. "Barbarians in Arab Eyes." *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies.* no. 134 (February 1992): 3-18.

AL-FARĀBI, Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Tarjan, and Gattas Abd al-Malik Jasaba. *Kitab Al Musiqa Al Kabir* (*The Great Book of Music*). Cairo: Arab Writer, [920] 1967.

AL-GHAZZĀLI, Imam. *The Revival of the Religious Sciences.* Translated by Kenneth L. Honerkamp,. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, [1058-1111] 2015.

AL-HUSSEINI, Basma; Fawaz Baqr, Farah Qadour, Zahra Dahous, Benan Hossein, Abed Qabisi, Rami AlJindi, and Raghed Nefaa. *Sot jdid: dalil ila t'alim mūsiqā badil: Bena' 'ala tajrobah mūdāres al'amal al-amal lel mūsiqa* (*New Sound: Pedagogical Guide for Teaching Different Music: Lessons from Action for Hope's Experiences in Music Education)*. Action for Hope, the British Council, the French Institute, Aga Khan Music Programme et al., Eds. 2020.

AL-IṢFAHĀNĪ, ta'līf Abī al-Faraj, 'Abd Allāh al-'Alāyilī, Mūsá Sulaymān, Aḥmad Abū Sa'd, et al. *Kitab al-Aqāni (Book of Songs*). Beirut: Dar al-saqāfeh, [897] 1955.

AL-JABRI, Muhammad Abed. Al-turāth w al-hadātha: darasāt w munāqeshāt (Tradition and Modernity :Studies and Debates). Beirut: Markaz darasāt al-wahidah al-arabiyah, *1991.*

ALKAEI, Zaher and Mats B. Küssner. 2021. "Taqsīm as a Creative Musical Process in Arabic Music." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (June): 1-11.

ALLAN, Diana. 2021. "Mothers gather: the fractured temporalities of Palestinian motherhood." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography,* Mikko Joronen, Helga Tawil-Souri et al, Eds. 103(4): 367-379.

_____. 2022. "Not the Songs but the Singing: Sounding Sense in Colonial Films from British Mandate Palestine." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 89 (4): 1107-1133.

_____. 2021. *Voices of the Nakba: A Living History of Palestine.* London: Pluto Press.

_____. 2018. "What Bodies Remember: Sensory Experience as historical counterpoint in the Nakba Archive." In *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba,* edited by Nahla Abdo and Nur Masalha, 66-86. London: Zed Books.

AL-ṢABBĀGH, ta'līf Tawīq and Toufic Ṣabbāgh. *Kitāb al-dalīl al-mūsīqī al-'āmm fī aṭrab al-anghām*. Aleppo: Maṭba'at al-Iḥsān li-Maytam al-Rūm al-Kāthūlīk, 1950.

AL-SAID Baddawi. *Mustawayāt al-'Arabīyah al-mu'āṣirah fī Miṣr (Levels of Contemporary Arabic in Egypt)*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1973.

AMIN, Ash. *Land of Strangers: From a Politics of Social Ties to a Politics of the Commons*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
ANDERSON, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
APPADURAI, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
_____. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 7(2-3): 295-310.
APPIAH, Kwame Anthony. *1997*. "*Cosmopolitan Patriots"*. *Critical Inquiry* 23 (3): 617-639.
ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, Eds. *The Postcolonial Reader* (2nd edition). London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
ATTALI, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music.* Translated by Brian Massumi. Manchester University Press, 1977.
AZOULAY, Arielle Aïsha. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Princeton University Press, 2021.
BACHELARD, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space* [1957]. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
BARTHES, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
_____. *The grain of the voice [Le grain de la voix, 1985]*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009.
BAUDRILLARD, Jean. *Simulacra & Simulations* [1981]. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
BAUMAN, Zygmunt. 1995. "Making and Unmaking of Strangers." *Thesis Eleven* 43(1): 1-16.
_____. *Culture as praxis*. London: Sage Publications, 1999.
_____. *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.
_____. *Liquid Fear.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
_____. 2016. "On what it means to be included." *Power and Education* 8(2): 124-139.
De BEAUVOIR, Simone. 1952. *The Second Sex* [1949]. Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Knopf.
BECK, Ulrich. 2007. "The Cosmopolitan Condition: Why Methodological Nationalism Fails." *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(7-8), 286-290.
BELL, Susan Groag. *Between Worlds: In Czechoslovakia, England, and America*. New York: Dutton, 1991.
BHABHA, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
_____. 1996. "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism." In *Text and Nation,* edited by Peter C. Pfeiffer & Laura Garcia-Moreno, 191-207. Columbia: Camden House.
BOLTANSKI, Luc. *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics.* Cambridge University Press, 2019.
BOSWALLA, Karen and Ruba Al Akash. 2017. "Listening, resistance and mobile phone playlists: musical listening practices of Syrian women living as refugees in Northern Jordan." *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 34(2): 167-183.
BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Outline of the Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1977.
CAMPT, Tina M. *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017..
CHAHIN, Rami. 2023. "Music education at the primary level in Syria before and during the current crisis." *International Journal of Music Education,* 0(0): 1–14.
CHAKRABARTY, Deepesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
_____. 1999. "Nation and Imagination." *Studies in History* 15(2):177-207.
CHALCRAFT, John. *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
CHATTERJEE, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
CHÁVEZ, Alex E. *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
CHION, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
CLIFFORD, James and George Marcus. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
COLLIER, Jane, Michelle Rosaldo and Sylvia Yanagisako. 1982. "Is There a Family? New Anthropological

Views." In *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, Barrie Thorne & Marilyn Yalon, Eds. New York: Longman.
COOKE, Miriam. 2018. "The Syrian Revolution, Art and the End of Ideology". In *The Edinburgh Companion to the Postcolonial Middle East,* 427-445. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
COX, Christoph. 2016. "Sonic Philosophy" *Artpulse Magazine.* http://artpulsemagazine.com/sonic-philosophy
_____. 2018. "Sonic Realism and Auditory Culture." *Parallax*, 24(2): 234-242.
CRAPANZANO, Vincent. *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Chicago University Press, 2004.
CRAPANZANO, Vincent. *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire: On the Epistemology of Interpretation*. Harvard University Press, 1992.
CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1996.
CUNNINGHAM, Robert B. and Yasin K. Sarayrah. *Wasta: The Hidden Force in Middle Eastern Society*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.
CURREY, Nancy. 2002. "History in Contemporary Practice: Syria's Music Canon." MESA Bulletin 36.
DAVIS, Hanna. 2023. "With All Eyes on Lebanon's South, number of Syrians leaving from Northers Shores Spikes." *Syria Direct*, December 14. https://syriadirect.org/with-all-eyes-on-lebanons-south-number-of-syrians-leaving-from-northern-shores-spikes/
DAYAN, Daniel. 2013. "Conquering Visibility, Conferring Visibility: Visibility Seekers and Media Performance." *International Journal of Communication* 7: 137-153.
_____. 2005. "Paying attention to attention: audiences, publics, thresholds and genealogies." *Journal of Media Practice* 6(1): 9–18.
DEEB, Lara, and Jessica Winegar. 2012. "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41(1): 537–558.
DE CERTEAU, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
DELEUZE, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia in the 21st Century.* Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.
DERRIDA, Jacques. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation.* Schoken, 1985.
_____. *Of Grammatology* [*De la grammatologie*, 1967]. Translated by G.C. Spivak. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
D'ERLANGER, Baron Rodolfe. *La musique arabe*. [1930] Paris : Institut du Monde Arabe, 2021.
DOUGHTY, Karolina. 2019. "Rethinking musical cosmopolitanism as a visceral politics of sound." In *Sounding Places: More-than-representational geographies of sound and music, edited by K. Doughty and T. Harada 1989-201. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar*.
DU BOIS, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk.* Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903.
EIDSHEIM, Nina Sun. *The race of sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality*. NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
ENG, David and David Kazanjiyan. 2003. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. University of California Press.
EVREINOV, Nikolai Nikolaevich. *Teatr kak takovoy* [1923] (*Substantiation of Theatricality in the Sense of a Positive Source of Stage Art in Life*). Moscow: Vremya, 1970.
FANON, Frantz. *Black Skins, White Masks.* New York: Grove Press, 1952.
FARIAS, Ignacio and Thomas Bender, Eds. *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies.* London: Routledge, 2010.
FELD, Steven. 2004. "Doing Anthropology in Sound." *American Ethnologist* 31 (4): 461–474.
_____. 1988. "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style, or 'Lift-up-over Sounding': Getting into the Kaluli Groove."*Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20: 74–113.
FELD, Steven and Charles Keil. 1992. *From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: Notes on the Discourses and Commodification Practices of "World Music" and "World Beat.* University of Chicago Press.
FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, Elena. 2016. "Palestinian and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Sharing Space, Electricity and the Sky." *Refugee Hosts*. https://refugeehosts.org/2016/09/20/photo-gallery/
_____. 2019. "Disrupting Humanitarian Narratives?" *Refugee Hosts* International Conference, 2019. refugeehosts.org/our-work/refugee-hosts-international-conference/panel-1-disrupting-humanitarian-narratives/

. 2022. "Critical Reflections on 'Decolonising' Humanitarianism and Refugee-Related Research." *Southern Responses to Displacement*, Conference. https://southernresponses.org/2022/06/27/critical-reflections-on-decolonising-humanitarianism-and-refugee-related-research-roundtable-event/.
FOUCAULT, Michel and Jay Miskowiec. 1986. "Of other spaces." [1967] *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22–27.
FRIEDRICH, Paul. *Language, Context, and the Imagination*. Stanford University Press, 1979.
FRIEDL, Erika. 1975. "The Folktale as Cultural Comment." *Asian Folklore Studies* 34(2): 127–44.
GALLOPE, Michael. *Deep Refrains: Music, Philosophy, and the Ineffable*. Chicago University Press, 2017.
GATT, Caroline and Valeria Lembo. 2022. "Knowing by Singing." *American Anthropologist* 124: 830-840.
GAUTIER, Ana María Ochoa. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
GEERTZ, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
GELL, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
GILBERT, Helen and Jacqueline Lo, Eds. *Performance and Cosmopolitics*. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007.
GILLIS, John R. *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
GLICK SCHILLER, Nina. 2010. "A global perspective on transnational migration: Theorizing migration without methodological nationalism." In *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods,* edited by R. Bauböck & T. Faist, 109-129. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
GLISSANT, Édouard. *Poetics of relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. University of Michigan Press, 1997.
GOFFMAN, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Bantam.
GRANDI, F., K. Mansour, and K. Holloway. 2018. "Dignity and displaced Syrians in Lebanon." HPG Working Paper (1): 1-29.
HABASH, Dunya. 2021. "'Do Like You Did in Aleppo': Negotiating Space and Place Among Syrian Musicians in Istanbul." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(2):1371-1386.
HABIB, R., Ziadee, M., Abi Younes, E., Harastani, H., Hamdar, L., Jawad, M., El Asmar, K., 2019. "Displacement, Deprivation and Hard Work among Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon." *BMJ Global Health* 4(1), pp. 1-10.
HALBWACHS, Maurice. *La Mémoire collective*. Paris : Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1997.
HALL, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997.
HAROOTUNIAN, Harry. 2007. "Remembering the Historical Present." *Critical Inquiry* 33 (3):471.
_____. 2004. "Shadowing History: National Narratives and the Persistence of the Everyday."*Cultural Studies* 18(2/3): 181–200.
HEIDEGGER, Martin. 1971. *Building Dwelling Thinking*. 1951 Lecture translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
HENNINGSEN, Therese and Juliette Joffé, Eds. *Strangers Within: Documentary as Encounter*. London: Prototype, 2022.
HEUSON, Jen. 2015. "On Hearing Together Critically: Making Aural Politics Sensible Through Art & Ethnography". *Ethnoscripts* 2015 17 (1): 74-95.
HEYNEN, Evelyn, Vivian Bruls, Sander van Goor, Ron Pat-El, Tineke Schoot. Susan van Hooren, Eds. 2022. "A Music Therapy Intervention for Refugee Children and Adolescents in Schools: A Process Evaluation Using a Mixed Method Design." *Children* 9(10): 1434.
HIRSCHKIND, Charles. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
HOURANI, Albert H. *Minorities in the Arab World*. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. 2024. "Lebanon: Armed Forces Summarily Deporting Syrians." Published on July 5, 2023. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/05/lebanon-armed-forces-summarily-deporting-syr.
HUSSERL, Edmund. 1991. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* [1893-1917]. Translated by John Barnett Brough, edited by Rudolf Bernet. Dordrecht: Springer.
IBN KHALDŪN. *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History*. London: Routledge, [1377] 1967.
IHDE, Don. *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound.* Ohio University Press, 1976.
JACKSON, Michael. *Life Within Limits: Well-being in a World of Want*. Duke University Press, 2011.
_____. *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity.*

Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002.
JACKSON, Cecile. 2012. “Speech, Gender and Power: Beyond Testimony.” *Development and Change* 43(5): 999–1023.
JANMYR, Maja and Lama Mourad. 2018. “Categorising Syrians in Lebanon as ‘vulnerable.’” *Forced Migration Review* (57): 19–22.
JARGY, Simon. 1978. “The Folk Music of Syria and Lebanon.” *The World of Music* 20(1): 79–93.
KALACH, Najla. 2020. “Folk Songs in Homs’ Weddings: a Sociolinguistic Perspective.” In *Mediterranean Contaminations: Middle East, North Africa, and Europe in Contact,* edited by Giuliano Mion, 232-242. Berlin: De Gruyter Press.
KASSAB-HASSAN, Hanan. 2008. “Tomorrow You Will See How Beautiful Our Home Is.” *Al-raida* 122-123(Summer/Fall): 48-52.
KASSIR, Samir. *Being Arab*. [*Considérations sur le malheur arabe*] Translated by W. Hobson. London: Verso, 2006.
KIWAN, Nadia and Ulrike Hanna *Meinhof*. 2011. “Music and Migration: A Transnational Approach.” *Music and Arts in Action* 3(3): 3-20.
KRAUSZ, Michael. *The Interpretation of music: philosophical essays.* NY: Oxford University Press, 1993.
KOSELLECK, Reinhart. *Futures Past*: *On the Semantics of Historical Time.* Columbia University Press, 2004.
KOSKOFF, Ellen. *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.
LABELLE, Brandon. *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance.* London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018.
_____. *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*. NY and London: Continuum, 2010.
LACAN, Jacques. 1978. "The Line and Light." In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, t*ranslated by Alan Sheridan, 91-104. New York: Norton.
LAGERKVIST, Amanda. *Media and memory in New Shanghai: Western performances of futures past*. Berlin: Springer Press, 2013.
LANGER, Susanne K. *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967.
LASHUA, Brett and Paul Thompson. 2014. “Getting It on Record: Issues and Strategies for Ethnographic Practice in Recording Studios.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43: 746-769.
LASHUA, B., K. Spracklen and S. Wagg, Eds*. Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.
LEFEBVRE, Henri. *The Production of Space* [*La Production de l’espace*]. Translated by Donald Nicholson Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.
LEFEBVRE, Henri and Catherine Régulier. 1985. “The Rhythmanalytical Project” (‘*Le projet Rythmanalytique’)*. *Communications* 41: 191-9.
LEIMBACHER, Irina. 2017. “Hearing Voice(s): Experiments with Documentary Listening.” *Discourse* 39(3): 292-318.
LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude.1962. *The Savage Mind.* [*La Pensée Sauvage*], Paris: Plon, 19662
_____. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
_____. *Mythologiques vol. 4* [1972]. Translated by J. & D. Weightman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
LOMAX, Alan. 1959. “Folk Song Style.” *American Anthropologist* 61(6): 927–954.
MAALOUF, Amin. *On Identity* [*Les identités meurtrières*]. Paris : Livre de poche, 1998.
MACKAY, Nathaniel. 1987. “Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol.” *Callaloo* **(**30 Winter): 29-54.
MACDOUGALL, David. *Transcultural Cinema.* Princeton University Press, 1998.
_____. *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*. Princeton University Press, 2006.
MAKDISI, Ussama. *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
MALKKI, Lisa. 1996. “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization.” *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (3): 377–404.
MARCUS, George. 2010. “Contemporary Fieldwork Aesthetics in Art and Anthropology: Experiments in Collaboration and Intervention.” *Visual Anthropology* 23 (4): 263–277.
MARTINEZ, Francisco, Lili Di Puppo and Martin Demant Frederiksen, Eds. *Peripheral Methodologies:Unlearning, Not-knowing and Ethnographic Limits.* London: Routledge, 2021.

MASHARANI, Vijay. 2022. “Interview with Oraib Toukan: ‘Cruel Images’ and the Blind Spots of Hypervisibility.” *Artforum*. Published on April 20, 2022: Artforum.com/author/vijaymasharani/
MASSEY, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005.
MAUSS, Marcel. 1973 [1934]. “Techniques of the Body.” *Economy and Society* 2: 70–88.
MAYO, Rachel. 2018. “Impact of Family Separation in Refugee Populations.” *Family Medicine*: 1–8.
MBEMEBE, Achile. *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization.* NY: Columbia University Press, 2021.
MEERZON, Yara. *Performing Exile, Performing Self: Drama, Theatre, Film*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012.
MEINHOF, Ulrich H. 2009. “Transnational flows, networks and 'transcultural capital': Reflections on researching migrant networks through linguistic ethnography.” In *Globalization and Languages in Contact*: *Scale, Migration, and Communicative Practices,* edited by James P. Collins, Stefaan Slembrouck and Mike Baynham, 148-169. London: Continuum.
MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. [1945] London: Routledge, 2010.
MINH-HA, Trinh T. 1992. "Speaking nearby." *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 (1 Spring): 82-91.
_____. 1989. “Outside In Inside Out.” *Questions of Third Cinema,* 133-149. London: British Film Institute.
_____. *When the Moon Waxes Red.* New York: Routledge, 1991.
MOLANA-ALLEN, Leila, and Lizzie Porter. 2018. “Did Syria Create the World’s First Song?” *BBC*. Published on May 7, 2018. Online: https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20180424-did-syria-create-the-worlds-first-song
MOUNZER, Lina. “Beirut Sounds Like This”. *Aramco World*, July/August 2016, pp.26-44.
MOSTOLIZADEH, Ali S. 2019. “Piano is My Homeland”: Subverting Violence through Musical Resistance in Yarmouk Refugee Camp.” In *Sounds and the City*, edited by Brett Lashua et al., 231-251. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
MOTIN, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
MUFTI, Dana and Deborah Parker. 2016. “Music therapy meets the Syrian refugee community: a pilot project for psychosocial music training.” *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 25(1): 56-57.
NACHMANOVITCH, Stephen. *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*, Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1990.
NAKASSIS, Constantine V. *Onscreen/Offscreen: Towards a Linguistic Anthropology of Cinema*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023.
NANCY, Jean-Luc. *Listening* [*À l’Écoute*, 2002]. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
NERCESSIAN, Andy. *Postmodernism and Globalization in Ethnomusicology: An Epistemological Problem*. Maryland : Scarecrow Press, 2002.
NASSAR, C. K., & NASTACĂ, C.-C. (2021). “The Beirut Port Explosion: Social, Urban and Economic Impact.” *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 42–52.
NETTL, Bruno. 1974. “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach.” *The Musical Quarterly* 60 (1): 1–19.
NOOSHIN, Laudan. *Music And The Play Of Power In The Middle East, North Africa And Central Asia*. London: Routledge, 2009.
NORA, Pierre. 1989. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* (26): 7–24.
NOVAK, David and Matt Sakakeeny, Eds. *Keywords in Sound*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.
OBERLANDER, Brian & Ruth David, Eds. *Music and Encounter at the Mediterranean Crossroads: A Sea of Voices.* London: Routledge, 2022.
ÖĞÜT, Evrim Hikmet. “Music, Agency, and Public Space Politics: Syrian Street Music in Istanbul” *Journal of* Music *and Minorities*: *Musical Topographies of the Mediterranean*. 2021.
L’ORIENT TODAY. 2023. “Lebanon arrested 2,000 Syrian refugees, deported 1,800 since April 2023.” Published on July 5, 2023. Online: https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1342472/lebanon-arrested-2000-syrian-refugees-deported-1800-since-april-hrw.html
O’TOOLE, M. 2014. “Sonic Citizenship: Music, Migration, and Transnationalism in Berlin’s Turkish and Anatolian Diasporas.” PhD dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
PAREDES, Américo. *Some aspects of Folk Poetry*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964.
PARPART, Jane L. and Naila Kabeer. 2010. “Choosing Silence: Rethinking Voice, Agency and Women’s

Empowerment." *Gender Development and Globalization.* Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press.
PASQUETTI, Silvia and Romola Sanyal, Eds. *Displacement: Global conversations on refuge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.
PERISTIANY, John George. *Honour and Shame: the Values in Mediterranean Societies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
PICARD, Élizabeth. *Liban-Syrie, intimes étrangers: Un siècle d'interactions sociopolitiques*. Paris: Sindbad – Actes Sud, 2016.
POIRIER, Richard. *The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life*. NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
PRATT, Carroll Cornelius. *Music as the Language of Emotions*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1952.
RACY, Ali Jihad and Robert Moser. 2017. 'The Homeland in the Literature and Music of Syrian-Lebanese Immigrants and their Descendants in Brazil.' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 19 (2/3): 280–311.
RACY, Ali Jihad. 2021. "Improvisation in Arab Musical Practices*."* In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts,* edited by Alessandro Bertinetto & Marcello Ruta. London: Routledge, 2021.
_____. *Making Music in the Arab World: the Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
RADANO, Ronald & Philip Bohlman. *Music and the Racial Imagination*. University of Chicago Press, 2001.
RANCIÈRE, Jacques*. The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004.
RANGAN, Pooja. 2017. "Audibilities: Voice and Listening in the Penumbra of Documentary: An Introduction." *Discourse* 39 (3) 2017: 279–291.
RASMUSSEN, Ann K. 2010. "Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria." *Review of Middle East Studies* 44(2): 218–22.
RICOEUR, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting.* Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
RICOEUR, Paul. *Soi-même comme un autre*. Paris: Seuil, [1990] 1996.
RILKE, Rainer Maria. *Letters To a Young Poet* [1929]. London: Penguin Classics, 2016.
RISSET, Jacqueline. *Traduction et mémoire poétique*. Paris: Hermann, 2007.
ROBINSON, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
RUTI, Mari. 2005. "From Melancholia to Meaning How to Live the Past in the Present." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 15(5): 637-660.
SAID, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile, and Other Essays.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
_____. *Culture And Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
_____. *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
_____. *Musical Elaborations*. Columbia University Press, 1991.
SALAM WA KALAM. 2015. "Voices from Syria inject life in Beirut." Published on Oct. 1, 2015. Online: https://www.salamwakalam.com/articles/music/273/voices-from-syria-inject-life-in-beirut/en
SALIH, Ruba. *Gender in Transnationalism: Home, Longing and Belonging among Moroccan Migrant Women* London: Routledge, 2003.
SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics* [*Cours de linguistique générale,* 1916]. Translated by Wade Baskin, edited by Perry Meisel & Haun Saussy. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
SCHAFER, Murray R. 1977. *The Soundscape: The Tuning of the World*. Destiny Books.
_____. 1986. *The Thinking Ear: Complete Writings on Music Education.* LA: Arcana Editions.
SCHARFF, Christina. *Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Work* : *The Classical Music Profession*. London: Routledge, 2018.
SCHILLER, Nina Glick and Ulrike H. Meinhof. 2011. "Singing a New Song? Transnational Migration, Methodological Nationalism and Cosmopolitan Perspectives." *Music in Arts and Action* 3(3): 21-39.
SCHUTZ, Alfred. 1977. "Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship." In *Symbolic Anthropology*, edited by J. Dolgin, D. Kemnitzer, and D. New York: Columbia University Press.
SCOTT, Derek B. 2015. "Cosmopolitan Musicology." Keynote address, 17th Nordic Musicological Congress.

SEGALENE, Martine. *Historical Anthropology of the Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
SEWELL, Abby. 2023. "Saved from Death at Sea, Syrian Refugees Face Deportation." *APN News*. Published on January 1, 2023. Online: https://apnews.com/article/politics-political-refugees-lebanon-4cd018738c42d7d3be499093ebaba67b.
SHAHEEN ESPINOSA, Andrea. 2020. "On Diasporic Generation and Syrian-Argentine Musicking in Buenos Aires, Argentina." *International Council for Traditional Music.* Cambridge University Press.
SHAPIRO, Michael J. *Punctuations: How the Arts Think the Political*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
SHANNON, Jonathan H. 2019. "From silence into song: Affective horizons and nostalgic dwelling among Syrian musicians in Istanbul." *Rast Musicology Journal* 7(2): 139-165.
_____. *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006.
SHELEMAY, Kay Kaufman. 2006. "Music, Memory and History." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15:17-37.
SHELEMAY, Kay Kaufman. *Let Jasmine Rain down: Song and Remembrance among Syrian Jews*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
SIGONA, Nando. 2014. "The Politics of Refugee Voices: Representations, Narratives, and Memories." In *The Oxford Handbook of Forced Migration Studies*, edited by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long & Sigona, 369–382. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
SILVERSTEIN, Shayna, and Darci Sprengel. 2021. "An (Un)Marked Foreigner: Race-Making in Egyptian, Syrian and German Popular Cultures." *Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 10 (1).
SIMONDON, Gilbert. *L'individuation psychique et collective*. Paris: Éditions Aubier, 1989.
SIN, Engin and Greg Nielsen, Eds. *Acts of Citizenship.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
SIMPSON, Leanne R. 2004. "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge."*American Indian Quarterly* 28(3/4): 373-38.
SMITH, Laurajane. *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2004.
SONTAG, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.
_____. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
Sound Connections. "Action for Hope Music Schools Evaluation. October-November 2019." UNESCO.
SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Columbia University Press, 1985.
STERNE, Jonathan. *The Audible Past*. Duke University Press, 2003.
_____. 2011. "The theology of sound: a critique of orality." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36(2): 207–225.
STEVENSON Lisa. 2017. "Sounding Death, Saying Something." *Social Text* 35(1): 59–89.
STOEVER, Jennifer. *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York: NYU Press, 2016.
STONE, Christopher. *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon.* London: Routledge, 2007.
TAN, Marcus Cheng Chye. *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
TAYLOR, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
_____. *Performance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
THOMPSON, Marie. 2017. "Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies." *Parallax* 23(3): 266-283.
TILLEY, Christopher Y. *Space*, *Place, Landscape and Perception: Phenomenological Perspectives Landscape, memory, identity*. Oxford/Providence: Berg Publishers, 1994.
TRUAX, Barry. *Acoustic Communication*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing, 1984.
TSING, Anna. 2000. "The Global Situation." *Cultural Anthropology* 15 (3): 327-360.
TURNER, Victor. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.
UNHCR Lebanon. 2014. "Annual Operational Report". Online: http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2520?y=2014#year
UNHCR, UNICEF, World Food Program (WFP) Lebanon. 2023. "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon". Published on May 19, 2023. Accessed online: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/vasyr-2022-vulnerability-assessment-syrian-refugees-lebanon

VALERA, Francisco. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992
WARNER, Michael. 2002. "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14(1): 49-90.
WEIDMAN, Amanda. 2014. "Anthropology and Voice." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 37–51.
WESTERN, Tom. 2020. "Listening with Displacement: Sound, Citizenship, and Disruptive Representations of Migration" *Migration and Society*. *Advances in Research* 3: 294–309.
WHITE, Benjamin T. *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, . 2011.
WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. *The philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953.
YOUNG, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
VAN DAM, Nikolaos. *Destroying A Nation: The Civil War in Syria*. New York, London: I.B. Tauris, 2017.
VERTOVEC, Steve & Robin Cohen, Eds. *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, *1999.*
YASSIN, Nasser. 2018. "101 Facts & Figures on the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Vol. 2." *Issam Fares Institute Public Policy International Affairs*: 1–140.
Y. NAGI, H. Sender, M. Orcutt, F. Fouad, R.A. Burgess, D. Devakumar. 2021. "Resilience as a Communal Concept: Understanding Adolescent Resilience in the Context of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Bar Elias, Lebanon." *Journal of Migration and Health* 22:3.
YUE, Geneviève et al. 2017. "Roundtable: Wild Sounds and Women's Voices." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 39 (3) Article 4.
ZIADÉ, Lamia. *Ya Leil, Ya 'Ain (Ô Nuit, Ô Mes Yeux) : Le Caire, Beyrouth, Damas, Jérusalem*. Paris : P.O.L., 2015.

Dictionaries:
SAWA, George. 2015. *An Arabic Musical and Socio-Cultural Glossary of Kitab Al-Aghani*. [1947] Leiden.
MANDHŪR, Ibn. 2021. Lisan al-Arab (*The Tongue of the Arabs*). Arabic dictionary, 1290. Beirut: Dar Sadr.
MAHFUDH, Dr. Husayn Ali. 1964. *Dictionary of Arabic Musical Terms*. Baghdad: Al-Jumhiriyyeh Press.

Mediagraphy:
Halab… Maqāmāt al-masra (*Aleppo, Maqāms for Pleasure*). Documentary directed by Mohammed Malas. 52min, colour, Syria, 2011.
Wajd: Songs of Separation. Documentary directed by Amar Chebib, 87min., colour, Canada, 2018.
Early Singers from Bilad al-Sham: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine. (8 CDs)
Tangeret Daghet, official website and albums: https://tanjaretdaghet.com/

Online Learning Resources:
ABBAS, Hassan. "Syrian Heritage Archive". Online: https://syrian-heritage.org/folk-music/
ABU SHUMAYS, Sami. "Maqām Lessons". Online: http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis
AL-QALAA, Saadallah Agha. "The Revival of Arab Music Project". Online: https://www.agha-alkalaa.net/
FARAJ, Johnny. "Maqām World". Online: www.maqamworld.com
FITYAN, Ustād Muhammad. "Fityan Academy." Online: www.fityan-academy.com