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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Traveling Sounds: Cairean Independent Music Landscape

Thesis Submitted to

To The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts/Science

By Ewelina Trzpis

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea

June 2016

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Chapter One: Questions, Positions and Methodological Concerns.

Introduction

In the early summer days of 2010 I traveled to the city of El Minya with a small camera crew and a group of friends who organized the first edition of Artbeat, World Music Festival based in Egypt. The picturesque city of El Minya located in Upper Egypt occupies both banks of the Nile and we had to cross the bridge connecting both parts of the town in order to reach our destination. The white columns of the Roman Theater, where the event was taking place, were set against a beautiful background of Nile's blue waters contrasted by browns and beiges of the mountains dotted at their base with greenery and red brick houses. We were all very impressed with this setting, the natural beauty of the stage backdrop and this admiration quickly transformed into a desire to capture it all on video. We filmed a lot of B-roll footage and, while bands were going through their sound checks, videographers dutifully looked for the best angles from which the music, the artists and the background could be harmoniously presented.

Foreign musicians participating in Artbeat such as A Fulla's Call mesmerized by this outdoor venue tried to express their appreciation through vibrant performance and interaction with a rather small audience attending the event. During recorded interviews they would frequently point out how enriching their experience of performing in Egypt was and how important it would be for such events to take place where visiting artists and local audiences could have more opportunities to get to know each other and share their artwork. Egyptian artists participating in Artbeat were equally excited about collaborations with visiting artists and opportunities to exchange creative ideas about music production.

Almost six years since this event, I revisited the footage in order to recall those initial moments, which led Nazmi, a longtime friend and one of the main interlocutors participating in this research, to set off on a new path in his musical career. Nazmi's successful cooperation with A Fula's Call band members offered him an opportunity to travel to Europe, collaborate with numerous musicians and experience performing for diverse audiences in several locations across Holland. Expectations of the foreign audience and political turmoil of the country significantly influenced Nazmi's first recording released in 2012 in Egypt. Newly acquired knowledge and experience helped Nazmi create his unique musical voice and establish himself as one of the best base guitarist in Egypt.

I, on the other hand, became more involved in the activities of a live entertainment venue, witnessing its developments and struggles during turbulent days following the January Revolution. Whereas my initial introduction to the field of Cairean independent music was based on socializing with artists, attending live music performances, and learning about musicians' perspectives of the Egyptian music scene, personal involvement with one of the partners at Cairo Jazz Club (CJC) significantly reshaped my relationship to the scene and its participants. Consequently the questions on which this ethnography has been based are shaped by this confusing, and at times uncomfortable, position where love of music and support of the artists would frequently clash with the economic realities of the venue.

Additionally, while the official span of the fieldwork presented in this thesis lasts no longer than twelve months, it is the preceding years of participation and observation that should be credited with the legitimacy of this research question, which aims to describe how transnational experiences of the Egyptian independent music artists influence their artistic performance and music production. I have been privileged to witness career trajectories of several Egyptian independent musicians whose career aspirations, music production and stage presence has been significantly reshaped by transnational encounters, some of which, did not require actual physical border crossing (Levitt, 2001), but were realized by access to internet technology. No longer an elite affair, transnational practices extend their domain of influence also through online social networks (Hannerz, 1996) by presenting new opportunities and sharing knowledge among a wider range of individuals. Consequently throughout the content of this work I attempt to present the effects of those transnational practices on the local music production by describing the continuously contested character of the Egyptian independent music genre and by identifying its specific features, which are necessary to the better understanding of the group on which this study focuses. I then move to a description of the Cairean independent music scene's developing infrastructure, which is pertinent to independent music's expansion and sustainability. Finally, I conclude with an exploration of the actual transnational encounters of Egyptian independent musicians during their travels abroad as well as while residing in Egypt and collaborating on projects or participating in workshops initiated by the foreign cultural entities located in Cairo.

Fieldwork Methods

As I already mentioned above, the time during which I was conducting interviews and officially gathering data for this research took one year, beginning in early September 2014 and ending in August 2015. However, because my participation in the scene was initiated

much earlier I never truly entered nor left the field of study upon the completion of this work. This insider position certainly deepened my knowledge of the scene prior to fieldwork and in rare instances it also problematized my interaction with participants questioning the purpose of my work. Straightforward explanations of my position as well as the guarantee of confidentiality were the only two ways in which I could combat those obstacles.

Participant observation technique is the most customary method of gathering ethnographic data and the content of this work relied heavily on opportunities to participate and observe multiple concerts along with rehearsals and recordings. The fieldwork took place at numerous nightlife entertainment locations, cultural centers, open-air concerts and rehearsal studios spread around various districts of Cairo. Since attending performances at CJC constitutes a significant part of my 'everyday', many of the events featured in the following chapters took place at that particular venue which became the focal site of my fieldwork. Among other benefits participant observation technique allowed me to deepen my understanding of the music scene dynamics and it presented me with an opportunity to interact with musicians and audiences in various settings as well as to make observations of artists' relationships with their fans. By attending bands rehearsals and recordings I was able to observe the dynamics of the group in the 'off stage' music production process. Participating in live music events at multiple locations broadened my perspective of the independent music infrastructure and provided alternative sites and models to that applied by CJC, which I was also already quite familiar with. Additionally, observing performances at different venues permitted me to be fully related to the audience and performing artists. On multiple occasions I also socialized with artists during private events, however, I decided to omit these particular experiences in this work out of the respect for the privacy of my interlocutors and my personal rather than scholarly relationship with them evident during these encounters.

Participation in Facebook groups also offered an interesting insight for the content of this thesis. Local Facebook groups such as Metal Station 'Egypt' or Monsters of Rock allow the artists and fans to interact, share new music from different parts of the world, and engage in various discussions. Another interesting way of incorporating social media activities in this work was to follow multiple event pages where artists were promoting their shows, while fans and possible audiences were confirming their attendance or providing feedback after the event. Monitoring these online interactions would give me a better sense of how musicians market themselves, how audiences respond to their performances and what possible issues could have occurred in relationship to these events. For instance, a lot of controversy surrounded an event

featuring an American black metal band called Inquisition whose performance in Cairo was not welcomed by some of the local metal artists as well as the Music Syndicate authorities. As a result Inquisition's event page provided grounds for interactions between supporters and critics of the upcoming show. Following the communication taking place on Facebook's event page before and after the concert, kept me well informed about the various debates taking place within the Egyptian independent metal scene and gave me access to the publications discussing the show shared by its attendees and organizers.

At the very onset of this research a number of the interlocutors addressed in this study already belonged to the group of my friends. Other artists with whom I was yet not familiar were either introduced to me by friends, or I would approach them directly after their performances. The most efficient way to access possible interlocutors within the music field is through snowball technique, therefore my social network was very helpful in acquiring contacts with artists I did not yet have a chance to meet. The independent music scene in Cairo is relatively small; therefore artists usually know one another and enthusiastically share their network contacts. Each meeting with an artist led to introduction of further interlocutors and consequent expansion of the sampling frame (Bernard, 2006). On a few occasions I also initiated conversation with musicians through their Facebook accounts, which led to our initial meeting, discussion and ongoing friendship. Since in the following chapters I also hope to present the diversity of genres comprising the Cairean independent music scene, interlocutors addressed in this work compose various styles of musical arrangements such as electronic, metal, jazz, fusion and rock.

The unstructured interviews were conducted mainly with musicians and other significant actors in the music field with whom I had an opportunity to meet frequently since few of them were already part of my circle of friends and inevitably became the key interlocutors in this work. Many of these interviews took place in the informal settings of a musician's home, recording studio, café or my own apartment. It was during these conversations that artists shared with me the distinctive histories of their career paths as well as their ideas and plans for the future. Those musicians who already participated in transnational networks would do their best to retrieve from memory accounts of distant and more recent times spend abroad, while others who contributed to the online transnational group practices would often provide me with various international and local Facebook groups' interactions, latest Youtube videos featuring their favorite bands, or descriptions of their experiences during participation in multiple workshops organized by Egyptian and international cultural promoters. Some of the interlocutors asked for my opinion on their new musical compositions and on a few occasions

I was invited to participate in their music video recordings. Usually the unstructured interviews began with a single question, which branched out into multiple others, always relevant and informative, while still allowing comfortable and relaxed atmosphere.

The semi-structured interviews were designed for the Egyptian independent music industry professionals and cultural entities with whom I have had only one opportunity to meet under predetermined time length, which consequently required efficiency and the use of an interview guide. The reasons behind these semi-structured interviews were to understand the varying perceptions of the independent music scene in Cairo from the multiple agents involved in this particular music field as well as to gain a better understanding of their role in the development of the independent music scene. Cultural Centers and numerous Embassies are frequently involved and supportive of the Egyptian music scene. The Polish cultural attaché supports the Egyptian metal scene, while cultural centers such as British Council and Goethe Institute frequently sponsor foreign and local artists to perform in Cairo and abroad. Consequently these agents play a significant role in transnational networking and create various opportunities for the artists. Egyptian music hubs such as Culture Wheel, 100 Copies, Vibe and Ganoub Studios, CJC or CJC Agency are only few among many other places where musicians meet, record music, share ideas, create new projects, and develop connections within the country as well as abroad. Representatives of these hubs perform a major part in the development of the independent music scene in Cairo and their informational input within this project is substantial. Whereas the unstructured interviews allowed me to become more familiar with the artists and their transnational practices, the semi-structured interviews presented me with the socio-economic realities of the local music scene in which these musicians are situated and which partially determine their career development opportunities in Egypt as well as abroad.

My personal relationship with the co-owner of CJC has a significant influence on my understanding and involvement in this music scene. During the past six years the political economy of the Egyptian nightlife and music industry has been a part of my 'everyday' and it significantly shaped my present perspective. Positioned between sincere appreciation and support of the independent music genre and the economic realities driving its development, I hope to briefly discuss how the correlation between contemporary art and corporate world is inevitable in the present day neo-liberal economic structure. Major musical events taking place in Cairo are usually sponsored by big corporate organizations such as "Soundclash" organized by Red Bull, featuring Cairokee and Sharmoofers, while PMI sponsored the new album launch performances of Massar Egbari, one of the leading independent bands in Egypt.

Consequently, while some musicians pride themselves on being independent the present opportunities for them to perform are highly dependent on commercial entities, a theme that I discuss in detail in chapter three. Music and art events such as “3alcanoob Festival” and “Cairo Jazz Festival” are all relying on sponsorship by major companies interested in promoting their brands among independent music audience. Musicians’ perspectives and opinions filtered through my everyday conversations containing insights into the music industry benefit this work and offer an opportunity to present a multifaceted description of the varying agents and trajectories involved in the making of independent music genre in Cairo, Egypt.

Until this date the topic of transnationalism and its possible impact on the Egyptian independent music production and performance was not academically addressed, while the phenomenon takes place, and it has an impact on the cultural life of Caireans as well as on the changing nature of the local music industry. Little is also known about the developments and trajectories of the independent music scene in Cairo, therefore, observations contained in this project and presenting my understanding and interpretations of the scene will hopefully initiate ideas for further research and discussion. I hope in some ways this research can also contribute to the general debate focused on transnational practices and the affects of globalization on the contemporary art worlds.

The major shortcoming of this research rests in limited attention given to the numerous particularities of the independent music scene. Although my research field was located only in Cairo, the wide spectrum of my fieldwork prevented me from adequate description of many significant details and the final results offer only the fundamental aspects of the Cairean independent music scene. Additionally while my insider and personal relationship with the scene’s participants heavily enriched my knowledge of its trajectories, the same intimate affiliation prevented me from including some of the actual statements made during social gatherings and interactions at CJC. Furthermore many of the younger generation artists who most recently joined the independent music field were not included in the content of this work consequently limiting the scope of the scene’s present demographics. As I frequently pointed out the Egyptian independent music scene is in a state of constant shift and many significant actors joined the music field that I did not manage to address before completing my fieldwork.

I would like to also note that the continuously evolving nature of the Egyptian independent music scene prevents me from making solid conclusions and prognosis about its future developments. A lot has already changed, new set of agents joined the independent

music field and many of my interlocutors altered their career paths along with some of their perceptions expressed in this work. Consequently opinions conveyed by participants in this research should reflect a specific point in time and may have been already significantly altered in accordance with the shifting socio-political and economic landscape of Egypt, along with that of independent music.

Literature Review

Addressing the general discourse on music genre formations provides me with the initial understanding of how music genres are conceived in the international music industry. According to the North American interpretation of this particular kind of music, where it was also first labeled as such, contemporary independent music represents a multiplicity of genres which consequently can be referred to as “indie rock”, “indie metal”, “indie jazz” etc. Essentially any music genre can be labeled as indie as long as it fulfills the basic standard of the contemporary independent music, which is mainly based on the independence of the band’s or the artist’s music production from a major commercial record label and its wide range of marketing tools. However, it is important to point out that international independent music industry continuously debates the defining factors of independent music, which are no longer as transparent as they were at the time of its emergence. Egyptian independent music genre also does not fully conform to the above definition and some of the musicians as well as music professionals have a hard time identifying bands that could unquestionably belong to this particular category. During the ethnographic fieldwork I was able to discuss these vague boundaries and confounding interpretations of the Egyptian independent music genre while conducting unstructured and semi-structured interviews with musicians and music industry professionals.

My understanding is also informed by scholarly literature published on the topic of music genres. “Music Genres and Corporate Cultures” by Keith Negus presents an informative study of the music industry and its influence and control over the development of music genres. The author’s personal experience of the music industry and his professional sociological background evidences an interesting perspective on how “an industry produces culture and culture produces an industry” (Negus, 1999, p.14). Numerous studies of music genre developments within diverse national contexts are addressed by different scholars in the book entitled “World Music, Politics and Social Change”(1989) edited by Simon Firth. They illustrate an interesting perspective on how genres acquire various meanings in other parts of the globe. Additionally the sociological study of genre categorization, “Classification as

Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres” by Jennifer Lens and Richard Peterson, presents very interesting findings on the symbolic classification of genres “we build on the theoretical and conceptual use of genres to better understand the dynamics of symbolic classification and change in order to identify recurrent sociocultural forms of music genres” (2008, p.697). Lens and Paterson’s study provides an interesting perspective on the construction of music genres and informs this work in relation to the subject of transnational practices and their impact on the independent music production in Cairo, Egypt.

At this juncture, I would like to introduce the body of literature discussing the historical trajectories of the Egyptian music industry, which paved the way for the various developments of the Egyptian music scene and informed its contemporary discourse. Numerous biographical and historical studies discussing careers and lives of famous Egyptian artists representing either classical or popular music genres provide the historical context for my understanding of the local music scene. The musical career and political influence of the Egyptian famous singer Umm Kulthum analyzed by Victoria Danielson (1997) and Laura Lohman (2010) provide an informative introduction to the life of this Egyptian icon. “Western Classical Music in Umm Kulthum’s Country” by Selim Sednaoui examines the influence of Western classical music on the contemporary Egyptian music by depicting its development before and after 1952 revolution. Sayyed Darwish’s artistic influence on the Egyptian audience is addressed by Saed Muhssin’s study “The ‘People’s Artist’ and the Beginnings of the Twentieth-Century Arab Avant-Garde” (2013). The first electronic music experiments of Halim el-Dabh, also recognized as an avant-garde artist, provides information most relevant to the purposes of this research by discussing the musicians’ carrier in the United States and his inspirations drawn from different aspects of Egyptian culture. The career of Abd al-Wahhab “and his role as a synthesizer of Western and Middle Easter cultures”(Armbrust, 1996, p.64) also enhances my understanding of the Egyptian singers who still feature in the memories of today’s artists. Many of the Egyptian independent music artists are proud of their historical music icons, while expressing larger disregard for the contemporary popular musicians. MEM, one of the interlocutors in this project, frequently samples songs of Umm Kulthum and Abdel-Halim Hafez in his musical compositions, emphasizing the Egyptian nature of ‘Egyptronica’, his newly developed independent electronic music style.

Moving on to the studies addressing more recent histories of contemporary music, the doctoral thesis of Yaz Shehab entitled “Contemporary Egyptian Music”(1996), presents an informative overview of the Egyptian music scene of the 1990s. Shehab also analyzes Egyptian music culture through the social, religious and political perspectives, which are

highly relevant to the development of Egyptian contemporary music. Nicolas Puig's most recent study of the Muhammad Ali street musicians describes the history of the area and development of Shaabi music genre, which is highly popular and plays a vital role in the social and political arena of the lower income citizens of Cairo. Andrew Hammond's study entitled "Popular Culture in the Arab World: Arts, Politics, and the Media"(2007) illustrates the recent trends and developments of the Egyptian music. Author undertakes a variety of angles and multiple frameworks in his study of popular culture and highlights the significance of Cairo as career starting place for non-Egyptian nationals representing various Arab countries, who are hoping to achieve international recognition. Hammond's assessment of the popular culture in the Arab world presents the general impression of the contemporary environment in which the Egyptian independent music scene takes shape. "Heavy Metal Islam. Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam"(2008) by Mark Levine describes the independent metal music developments within the Middle East region from a sociological perspective. In the chapter dedicated to metal music in Egypt, Levine discusses the difficulties faced by Egyptian musicians in their struggle for recognition as well as adequate comprehension of their music genre. Finally, the latest ethnographic study of the Egyptian underground hip-hop music scene entitled "Egyptian Hip-Hop: Expressions from the Underground" (2015) by Ellen Weis is an interesting introduction to this alternative music style, which presently reaches wider audience and has gained popularity among young Egyptians, consequently opening up the possibility of joining the independent music scene in Cairo. A significant number of published interviews with the independent music artists as well as articles discussing various independent music events published by various Egyptian entertainment magazines and newspapers inform me on the past and most recent developments and career trajectories of different bands and solo performers.

In order to justify my assumption, stating that transnational experiences in multiple ways influence artists' performance and musical creativity, I will briefly address few case studies supportive of my claim. Marie-Pierre Gibert in her anthropological study entitled "Transnational Ties and Local Involvement: North African Musicians In and Beyond London" discusses how "artists' own musical pleasure and desires; their professional constraints and opportunities; and the social, historical and personal context of their migration experience" (2011, p.93) influence their artistic production and "the use of local politics to pursue their own cultural, social and political agendas within a multi-scalar perspective [local-national-transnational]." (2011, p.93) Gibert presents trajectories and networks of various African artists residing in Europe and strategies they developed in order to gain recognition and maintain

their original music style. “Representing an ‘Authentic Ethnic Identity’: Experiences of Sub-Saharan African Musicians in an Eastern German City” by Inken Carstensen-Egwuom analyses how “immigrant networks or associations relate to expectations and ascriptions of ‘authenticity’ in a small-scale city” (2011, p.116). The author discusses the issues of authenticity and ethnic identity expressed by Nigerian musicians within the context of their music performed in a small German town. Another informative scholarly piece written by Anne Rasmussen entitled “The Music of Arab Americans; Aesthetics and Performance in a New Land” (1998) describes the course of Arabic music introduced to the United States by Arab migrants, its development and reasons for subsequent deterioration. John Baily in “‘Music is in Our Blood’: Gujarati Muslim Musicians in the UK”(2006) describes how musicians of Gujarat referred to as Khalifas “have followed the path of other migrant communities, inventing new hybrid forms of music which entail the Westernization and modernization of an older repertoire...”(p.269). Baily claims that while residing in England the Khalifas incorporate various music styles in their performances and create music which combines multiplicity of genres popular among their fellow citizens. Finally, the work of Thomas Burkhalter entitled “Local Music Scenes and Globalization. Transnational Platforms in Beirut” (2013) presents the author’s observations and analysis of “how musicians from Beirut position themselves strategically between local and transnational reception platforms, and it shows supposed contradictions between these positions”(p.6). Burkhalter’s study provides me with an informative example on how to navigate between the complexities of the transnational, social theory, and creative music production.

Methodology

This research relies heavily on the concepts introduced by Raymond Williams in his “Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society” (1976) the study of the most central yet changing and confusing notions of the twentieth century cultural discourse, as well as “Culture and Society 1780-1950” (1960), exploring how the concept of culture developed over a specific time period. Williams’ investigation of a number of key words presents how they alter in meaning over time and affect our understanding of various statements providing me with an adequate framework for the analysis of the term independent within Egyptian independent music discourse. Williams’ analyses also enrich my understanding of how the term independent may have undergone significant changes after the January 2011 Revolution reflecting the socio-political transformations of the country at a given time. Williams’ examination of literary criticism in “Marxism and Literature”(1978) and his discussion of the

emergent formations that represent an oppositional relationship to the dominant culture informs my study of the Egyptian independent music genre as a possible subcultural movement within the prevailing and commercialized, popular music industry. Consequently I also rely on the literature addressing subcultural and post-subcultural theory, while deconstructing discourses constituting independent music in Cairo.

Additionally, I consult Michele Foucault's notion of discourse discussed in "Archaeology of Knowledge"(1972). According to Foucault the analysis of the discursive formations requires us to "...grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes"(Foucault, 1972, p.28). Following Foucault's notion, in this work I attempt to deconstruct the discourse of the independent music genre in order to identify its constitutive parts. The aim is to learn about the different elements, which became central in constituting the object called independent music. Accordingly, I analyze the emergence of the Egyptian independent music and the course of its present development. Greater awareness of how this particular category is shaped and understood within the contemporary context allows me to recognize the dominant statements governing the Egyptian independent music scene.

In "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed"(1993), Pierre Bourdieu analyzes the structural and economic properties of artistic production. Bourdieu argues: "The literary or artistic field is a 'field of forces', but it is also a 'field of struggles' tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggle to defend or improve their positions [...], strategies which depend for their force and form on the positions each agent occupies in the power relations" (1993, p.30). When narrowed down, the artistic field can be understood as an arena of cultural production and struggle among competitive differently positioned actors. Bourdieu's focus on the social conditions of cultural production supplements Foucault's notion of discourse analysis providing an indispensable angle to the discussion of the Egyptian independent music genre. The affects of discourse on the value of art (1993,p.36), the relationship to the audience (p.46), the dominance of particular cultural producers (p.44) and the hierarchies based on the economic profits (1993, p.43) present concerns this projects addresses in order to better understand the dynamic of the Egyptian independent music scene. Bourdieu's notion of fields serves also as an example of the ways in which power is

distributed among the members of different social groups with varying levels of social and cultural capital.

I also apply Steven Vertovec's conceptualization of transnationalism claiming that "Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common—however virtual—arena of activity" (1999, p.447). In "Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation"(2004) Vertovec suggest that "while not bringing about substantial societal transformation by themselves, patterns of cross-border exchange and relationship among migrants may contribute significantly to broadening, deepening or intensifying conjoined processes of transformation that are already ongoing" (972). Music travels with people and its regional novelty in a foreign context may inspire production of new music genres, while absorbing sounds and instruments encountered during its voyage. In the present day globalized Internet technology, musicians also absorb a lot of information and influence through online social networks and as suggested by Levitt "Movement is not a prerequisite for engaging in transnational practices"(2001, p.198). In this study I elaborate on those alternative transnational practices and address their role in the musical practices of Egyptian artists.

The work of Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, entitled "Music and Migrations: A Transnational Approach" (2011), addresses the importance of various social networks in the transnational movements of musicians and use of the metaphor of the hub to better exemplify their point: "We argue that the transnational networks within which migrant musicians operate are facilitated through and by human hubs, spatial hubs, institutional hubs and, lastly somewhat ironically by what we have called accidental hubs"(p.6). In the following pages I identify these hubs located within the Cairean independent music landscape. Recognition of these various hubs helps me to analyze the various trajectories and connections that musicians employ in their transnational networking. Once identified, the possible relationship between various hubs and artists presents the web of networks and localities available to the potential transnational musician.

Chapter Overview

The central aim of this thesis is to identify the ways in which transnational experiences of independent music artists influence their artistic performance and music production. In order to answer this question in the first chapter I explore the shifting and fluid meaning of the term

independent music. First, I reflect on the increased value of independent music's subcultural capital affected by the January 2011 Revolution, and second by addressing the significance of the term independent within present socio-political context. Finally, I trace the reemergence of independent music by identifying the term through the discursive formations shaping its present meaning among Egyptian musicians, audiences and culturally engaged participants. While my excavations did not produce a firmly defined meaning of the term, the discourses I follow, offer an assemblage of the multiple connotation and diverse understandings of independent music within a local context. Numerous perspectives shared by my interlocutors illustrate the dynamics of the Cairean independent music scene as well as the differing positions within the field of cultural production occupied by a multiplicity of engaged actors.

In chapter two I move on to the mapping of the stages accessible to the independent music artists in Cairo. Each of these stages presents an opportunity for musicians to showcase their work, attract new audiences and generate income therefore allowing for the sustainability and expansion of the local independent music scene. The emerging infrastructure of the independent music scene in Cairo illustrates the neoliberal politics of Egypt where majority of these stages are funded by commercial entities frequently assisting and cooperating with cultural sectors. The third sector economy prolongs the expansion of the local independent music scene and to a large extent initiates prospects for engagement in transnational flows addressed in the next chapter.

In the third chapter I discuss the several ways in which transnational connections are established and experienced by Cairean independent music artists. Analysis of the human, spatial, institutional and accidental hubs constitutes a framework, which allows a broad overview of transnational practices and their general influence on independent music artists' performance and music production. By focusing on individual cases I present the diversity of encounters and emerging perspectives, which provide the response to the main question of this research.

Chapter Two: Discourses, Meanings and the Field of Independent Music

Introduction

While my initial interest in the Egyptian music scene predictably followed from my lifelong fascination with music, my focus on what is commonly referred to as the independent music genre was to a large extent shaped by the world in which I am presently situated, where music and commercial enterprise converge to mutually benefit each other, and where the contradictory understandings of this particular genre first became evident. Being exposed to the commercial practices of a live entertainment venue presented me with a new perspective of the music industry and of the confounding meanings associated with labels used to identify a music genre, an artist, an audience or even a nightlife locale. Numerous discussions held with Egyptian musicians, other music connoisseurs and professionals who interchangeably used terms such as “independent”, “underground” and “alternative” in reference to the same band or musician, provoked questions about the obvious differences in understanding what independent music means in the local context. Additionally, academic requirements to provide clarification of the focus group addressed in this research, namely independent music artists, have altered personal questioning into a necessary component of this study, directing my attention towards the shifting meaning of words and the possible implications of such changes on the discourses shaping our understanding of our environment, or as in this particular case, of the independent music in Cairo. Better comprehension of the term is also relevant to the main question addressed by this work inquiring about possible impact of transnational experiences on the local independent music production. Therefore, before I can elaborate on the transnational adventures of my interlocutors and subsequent influence of their travels on music production I would like to introduce the group in question by examining discourses that are constitutive of its developing character.

These are the original thoughts which instigated this section of academic inquiry into the dynamics and complexities of the Egyptian independent music scene and what follows is an attempt to describe the multiple discourses shaping this particular music genre, which ironically, in its fluid and ever changing nature, refuses to be adequately identified and rather demands to preserve its peculiar independence from static and concrete definitions.

‘Music is the Weapon’: Revolution, Affect and Music

To start with, I would like to briefly consider the multiple connotations implied by the usage of the term “independent” and acknowledge the possible relationship those meanings may have with the Cairean independent music scene. Although I do not intend to provide a historical analysis of the phrase, I do hope to address its politicized meaning and the possible implications of such associations on the current developments in the local independent music scene. I suggest that the intensified affiliation of Egyptian musicians with the independent music genre and its subsequent development is very much a reflection of the revolutionary and post-revolution political climate in Egypt from 2011 onwards.

I do not mean to imply that the independent music scene originated with the onset of the 2011 Revolution, when the demands for an end to the oppressive regime of Hosni Mubarak were expressed by the Tahrir Square protesters; nor that the term independent took on a new meaning after January 2011 and was diverted away from its previous one. Rather, I want to suggest that within the artistic, subcultural environments such as those inhabited by Egyptian musicians addressed in this work, its meaning gained on significance in the context of the political struggle and empowerment expressed in the first 18 days of the Revolution and during the following months. The overthrow of the Mubarak regime by the Egyptian people had a strong impact on ideas about relationships with authority and the effect of this new atmosphere promoting emancipation, liberty. A strong stand against policing and state control, strengthened the value and the essence of being an independent music artist in Cairo. At this point I also want to briefly note that the popularity of songs such as “Sout Al-Huriya” (“The Sound of Freedom”) inspired by the Revolution and written by independent music artists, directed the attention of the local mainstream music industry towards the genre which until this point has been largely underestimated and therefore neglected. As a result, the local music market began to reconfigure itself in order to accommodate independent music; this shift will be addressed further in this study.

The link between social movements and music is indisputable. It is evident in such historical events as the fight against apartheid in South Africa, the fall of communism in Poland, and the civil rights movement in the United States, only to name a few examples among many. “Music is the weapon of the future” were the famous words of Nigerian musician and activists Fela Kuti, whose inspiring songs criticized the government and the social injustices experienced daily by Nigerian citizens. Combination of Afrobeat musical sounds with witty and socially relevant lyrical content helped to spread political awareness among Nigerians and build a sense of solidarity amongst them through the affective force

embedded in music. It is evident that artistic participation and responses to social uprisings are universal, and so understandably the January 25th Revolution also inflicted a significant share of affect on the local art scene. According to ethnomusicologist and anthropologist Steven Feld “at some level, one just cannot say with words what music says without them” (1984, p.14) and while the lyrics of the songs written during the Revolution played a major role in popularizing independent music in Egypt it was also the new sound, very different from the mainstream Arabic pop, that was able to express the spirit of the revolt.

The unpolished sound of the singer’s voice and the bold tunes of the acoustic guitar frequently heard in the square resembled the courage and raw emotions of the people standing up to the corrupted regime. This point is well illustrated by John Shepherd and Peter Wicke in “Music and Cultural Theory” (1997) where they describe music in “Its special capacity to evoke and symbolize the emotional and somatically experienced dimensions of people’s lives and, through that, the external social relations with which they are intimately involved, has equally been responsible for shaping important aspects of the social worlds that people mutually create. Music can emphasize the relatedness of human existence with a directness and concreteness that language cannot easily reproduce. Through its fundamentally iconic and concrete functioning, music can foreground the character of people’s involvement with their biographies, their societies and their environment.” (p. 183) Independent music was able to unite and articulate the desires of the protesters as well as to a certain extent capture the affect of the Revolution in the newly formed melodic compositions, far more grounded in the struggles of the protesters than Arabic pop.

While there is no single, general theory of affect, the origins of the idea can be traced back to the work of philosopher Baruch Spinoza, upon which scholars such as Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi have shaped their understandings and interpretations of this rather confounding concept. For the purposes of this work I find Nigel Thrift’s reading of Spinoza’s affect most transparent “So, affect, defined as the property of the active outcome of an encounter, takes the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act, which can be positive and increase that ability (and thus ‘joyful’ or euphoric) or negative and diminish that ability (and thus ‘sorrowful’ or dysphoric)” (2008, p.178). The general affect produced by the actions and events of the 2011 Revolution is overwhelming and the increased interest in the Egyptian independent music scene was only a small, yet nonetheless significant and positive, outcome of this historical encounter. The experience of the social upheaval translated into art which “may well have meanings or messages but what makes it art is not its content but its affect, the sensible force or style through which it

produces content” (Colebrook, 2001, p. 24). Independent music in its sound and in its anti-music industry, anti-control, anti-censorship, and anti-standardized song-writing position found itself in tune with the values of the Revolution being against the corrupt government, the policing of civilians, the repression of free speech, the demeaning treatment of citizens and against numerous other injustices experience daily by Egyptians. The affective force of the Revolutionary combat is evident in the amplified emergence of the independent music followed by the enhanced membership value within this subcultural field. Considering the affect of the Revolution and its expression in the independent music production I began to reflect on the actual term “independent” and the significance of the word within this particular context. Bearing in mind the subsequent incidences following the Revolution and the current political situation, the possibility of an alternative or somewhat enhanced value of the term, independent in music as well as in other forms of subcultures begin to emerge. Values reaching beyond the non-corporate associations of independent music most common in the West but rather penetrating deeper into a particular way of living, a way of addressing politics, a way of dealing with society, a way of presenting oneself to the world and a way of handling all other aspects of the everyday. Values, which might be presenting a potential for an emerging ideology among Egyptian youth affected by the uprising and desiring independence from the authoritarian regime.

Shifting Meanings: ‘Independent’ Then and Now

During the concluding research phase for this study I asked a few of my interlocutors to tell me what are the first association they make when they hear the term “independent”. At first, every one of them would start defining independent within the context of the music industry and understandably so, considering their prior familiarity with the nature of my research. However, once I clarified the question the main connotations were always expressed by the interlocutors in words such as “free”, “autonomous”, “individual” and ideas in line of “not following certain pattern, like society”¹ all somewhat expected notions, highly sensitive within the present Egyptian political climate in which freedom of expression and criticism of various forms of authority is increasingly circumscribed. Raymond Williams dedicated two of his renowned works, “Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society”(1976) as well as “Culture and Society 1780-1950”(1960), to the study of how meanings of words change over time reflecting their relationship to shifting social, economic and political conditions. The

¹ Interview with Ismaeel Attallah, August 2015.

author presents a range of words which underwent significant changes in meaning throughout their course in history and his detailed analysis on the transformation of the term “culture” in particular presents us with a model through which an alternative layer of perception of the term independent can be illustrated. As Williams points out, the idea of culture was a response to numerous factors undergoing developmental changes such as industrialism, democracy and social transformation (1960, p.19) suggesting that this novel utilization of words may also point to the manner in which the actual nature of these changes can be explored. According to Williams “...it is necessary to insist that the most active problems of meaning are always primarily embedded in actual relationships, and that both the meanings and the relationships are typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the process of social and historical change”(1976, p.22). While it is commonly understood that the general dictionary definition of the term independent presents a specific, stable meaning its consequent application and practical usage may undergo adjustments and manipulations according to the requirements of a particular setting in which it is being used. Williams’s work again supports and clarifies this claim whereas the author asserts, “...the air of massive impersonality which the Oxford ‘Dictionary’ communicates is not so impersonal, so purely scholarly, or so free of active social and political values as might be supposed from its occasional use (1976, p.18).” These supposed static definitions are not fully objective and their content tends to reflect the historical dynamics at the point of their emergence. The term independent in its absence, covert presence, and final reemergence may therefore suggest the relationship of the environment to the meaning of the expression and its connotations within transforming socio-political and economic landscape.

Looking back at my first interviews with the Egyptian musicians conducted in the early spring of 2010 I realized that the term independent is barely ever mentioned and words such as “contemporary”, “original”, “modern” and “alternative” are being used much more often in reference to the music now predominantly defined as independent. The idea behind those initial interviews was to learn more about the Egyptian music scene and to formulate a question that could help me study the local music field. Consequently during those discussions I was not focused on any specific genre or category and my questions would refer to the music scene in general. There was no insistence on any particular terminology, which allowed the interlocutors to speak freely about Egyptian music and describe it in terms most utilized by them at the time. While this is clearly not the case in this study when my questions concentrate directly on the independent music genre and therefore partially influence the responses of my interlocutors the fact that five years ago, before the January Revolution the term independent

was not as strongly associated with the local music scene illustrates its enhanced significance in the days following the historical events.

CJC holds small archives of publications dedicated to the Egyptian music scene, which I was able to review along with the magazines and articles I begin to collect since the initial interest in the scene. Magazines issued as early as in 2001 feature short articles about Egyptian musicians, concerts and other music related events taking place mainly in Cairo. While some of these magazines such as “Live!”, “Carnival Arabia”, or “Alter Ego” are no longer published, others such as “Egypt Today”, “Campus” or “Identity” are still delivering monthly reviews of local “happenings”. In the September 2006 issue of “Live!” magazine a few pages long article dedicated to the S.O.S. Music Festival demonstrates the point I am trying to present. S.O.S Music Festival first took place in 2006 in Cairo and continued until 2009, when the sponsoring corporations decided to withdraw their funding. During the three years of its existence the S.O.S. concept traveled to other Egyptian cities such as Alexandria and Mansoura, adding up to 18 events celebrating original music by Egyptian youth. According to the article: “Since one of the pressing problems in Cairo’s mainstream music scene is the lack of originality, the festival is expected to promote originality and creativity. Bands are allowed to perform only their own music”(p. 56). The event and featured performers are introduced in terms of originality and creativity rather than their independence. After the brief description of the event author presents a short biography of bands such as Nagham Masry, Wust El-Balad, Massar Egbary, Eftekasat and Cairokee who are all participating in the upcoming S.O.S. festival. While each band’s musical style and point of origin is addressed, none of them is referred to as independent, whereas in 2015, when the same bands mentioned above, including Massar Egbary and Cairokee, are perceived as symbols of the independent music scene in Egypt and are often described using the term “independent”. In the 2006 article the term is not used at all, and other articles published before the 2011 Revolution demonstrate the same pattern; the word “independent” is mentioned very sporadically and without the same primary significance associated with it in the present day context. In addition, according to my rough review of the database of local newspapers published in English and available on the internet, not much had been written about independent music in Egypt before 2011. Newspapers use the same terms as magazines, describing musical events and new talents as “underground” or “original”.

Since 2011, music-related articles published in both magazines and newspapers have highlighted the growth of what they term the Egyptian independent music scene, and discuss the different actors involved in its development. “Egypt Today” most recently featured a piece

on the independent electronic music artist Abdullah Miniawy, and its January 2015 issue discusses Sofar Cairo, a pop-up musical event focused on providing an intimate music experience at different privately owned locations throughout the city and its suburbs. In newspapers including “Al-Masry Al-Youm”, “Daily New Egypt”, and “Al-Ahram” I found numerous articles discussing emerging independent music artists, newly shaped booking agencies and recently established live music venues, all dedicated to the independent music scene. “Mada Masr”, a news website established several years after 2011 Revolution to publish what it describes as “independent and progressive journalism”, is presently perhaps the most interesting and reliable news provider on the dynamics of the local independent music. For example, one of the articles authored by musician Rami Abadir entitled “The contradictions of independent music” stirred up a lot of attention from the site’s readers. Abadir’s piece was followed by two additional editorials written by other individuals and featuring alternative viewpoints along with some criticism of the numerous arguments made by the author. Abadir’s article initiated a dialog on the pages of Mada Masr as well as in artistic circles. During the research process for this study, musicians would frequently mention his article by either referencing Abadir’s point of view or disagreeing with his way of presenting the local independent music scene. Regardless of their personal perception of Abadir’s work, many of my interlocutors wanted to make sure that I was familiar with the article and at the same a new perspective on the Egyptian independent music. Additionally online sources such as “Cairo Scene”, “Cairo 360” and “Cairo Gossip” whose readership mainly constitutes of upper-middle class Egyptians, address the independent music scene in their online publications. However, those are mainly dedicated to marketing purposes such as branding of events and very rarely produce material with a well-informed content. I will elaborate on these particular online sites in further sections of this work. Present acknowledgment of such online resources is made inevitable by the fact that even though highly lacking in informative substance, the above mentioned news reports implement a lot of influence and power over the dynamics of Cairo’s nightlife and music industry frequently dictating what are the “hip” and “hot” happenings around town. Mentions of independent music events and artists on the above referenced sites became a lot more frequent after 2011, therefore reflecting the growth of the scene and its significant role in the Cairo’s entertainment industry.

At the beginning of 2015 independent music projects initiated by certain international corporations operating in Egypt were canceled and replaced with funding of events promoting the Egyptian fashion industry which is very much engaged in renewal of ethnic styles and

consequently and most likely unintentionally better aligned with the state's ideal of patriotism and loyalty to the ruling government. Finally to further highlight the significance of the term independent within the present local framework it is important to point out that in its latest attempts to reconnect with the Egyptian youth the Ministry of Culture invited numerous independent music artists to perform during the opening of the new branch of the Suez Canal. However, the celebratory event featured only the classical compositions of Omar Khairat, along with the opera Aida, while none of the independent artists took part. According to one of the interlocutors, independent music artists were invited to perform for free although his particular decision to not take part in the festivities was not influenced by the lack of monetary reward but rather by his ideological standpoint. This attempt at the absorption of this particular subcultural movement expressed in the form of independent music and favored by a segment of the Egyptian youth illustrates the acknowledgment of its potency and influence, which authorities may wish to exploit in order to reach and win the favor of the younger members of society. Independent organizations, which can be still somewhat controlled by the state through deployment of legal mechanisms have little choice but to either shut down their operation or cooperate, while subcultural groups such as independent music performers, not easily identifiable and therefore hard to monitor by the authorities, with a minor exception of the Music Syndicate which will be later on addressed in greater detail, face possible attempts of assimilation with the aim of closing the distance separating the state from a significant part of the public.

Soon after the 2014 presidential elections independently organized events such as the street festival Al-Fann Midan (Art is a Square) were canceled due to the lack of necessary permits from the Ministry of the Interior, denied under the pretext of heightened insecurity within the country. The new amendments to the NGO law in Egypt prohibiting direct foreign funding led Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafi (Culture Resource) to stop its activities in the country, consequently depriving Genaina Theater of management that was providing the venue with quality programmes frequently showcasing emerging musical talents. According to Al-Mawred Al-Taqaafi's vision statement, the aim was to create "A vibrant, diverse and interconnected cultural life throughout the Arab region; a cultural environment that will enable individuals and groups to unleash the powers of their imagination, and to express their feelings and air their criticism freely; a dynamic cultural renovation that will serve as a cornerstone for democracy and the development of productive, just and free societies."(Al-Mawred Al-Taqaafi, 2015). Limiting access to financial support for organizations that aspire to promote freedom of speech and expression through creative practices reflects the state's attitude towards the

advancement of emancipation and independence of its citizens. According to the statement made by Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at the Human Rights Watch “Egypt’s proposed NGO law would allow the government free rein to cut off funding and halt activities of groups that it finds inconvenient. It is hostile to the very notion of independent civil society.”(Daily News Egypt, 2013). Fortunately Al-Mawred Al-Taqafi was able to continue its operation in Egypt by invoking alternative routes, which made its existence feasible under the current law. Regrettably that was not the case for numerous other NGOs, many of which had to shut down their programs and activities in Egypt due to lack of access to sufficient funding. Ammar Dajani, one of the partners at CJC suggests “One expected effect of the new law prohibiting direct foreign funding is the drive for independent actors in the music field to seek the support of the government entities, most obviously the Ministry of Culture”.² As a result their autonomy from the state control is no longer possible and cooperation with governmental entities presents the only possible and legal way of achieving certain career goals.

All of the above examples reflect the dynamic and complex relationship of the term independent within particular contexts and time periods. The initial interviews and publications preceding the 2011 Revolution suggest that the term was not frequently employed in reference to music, signifying its minor relevance to the developing music scene at that particular time. Considerably after 2011 uprising this situation underwent a drastic change and the term began to appear regularly in publications, social media and various discussions addressing music production in Cairo. International corporations expressed their interest in the music scene by sponsoring independent music events and featuring independent music artists in all types of advertisement such as promotional billboards, TV commercials and sponsorship of events. However, this increased attention started to depreciate after a government was elected and the political climate began to change once more, reflecting the relationship of the authority towards independent organizations which are either controlled by new amendments to the law or become a target of possible assimilation. According to interviews conducted with Bassem, manager of artists booking agency Al-Moharek “The scene is showing the same thing for more than one year, there is nothing new, which is worrying me but I never lose hope.”³ Alexander manager of Cairo Jazz Club Agency also suggests that the end of 2014 witnessed slight decrease in the emergence of new independent bands, a situation continuing throughout 2015. This rather worrying state of affairs could also indicate that the present political

² Interview with Ammar Dajani, April 2015

³ Interview with Bassem, Eka3, August 2015

situation has a negative impact on the music production and the affect produced by the Revolution and evident in the temporarily amplified value of the independent music subcultural capital is now slowly decreasing.

Independent Music and the Emerging Subculture

At this point it is useful to look at the general emergence of the term independent within the field of music by tracing it back to the DIY (do it yourself) punk subculture, which first challenged and managed to overcome the practices of the global, mainstream music industry of the 1970s Britain shortly followed by its appearance in the US. Authors of “Do It Yourself...and the Movement Beyond Capitalism” suggest that “DIY is not simply a means of spreading alternative forms of social organizing or a symbolic exchange of a better society; it is the active construction of counter-relationships and the organization against and beyond capitalism.” (Holtzman, 2007, p.45) Punk subculture was initiated by working class British youth in an attempt to reaffirm their opposition to the dominant social structure and institutions (Hebdige, 1997) and it was largely expressed through the eccentric style adopted by its practitioners. In the iconic work of Dick Hebdige entitled “Subculture The Meaning of Style” author conceptualizes the punk style with the notion of bricolage “a mode of adaptation, where things are put to uses in ways for which they were not intended, ways which dislocate them from their ‘normal’ context.”(Gelder, 1997, p.88) Bricolage as a concept was first introduced by an anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss then borrowed by John Clarke whose work reached Hebdige and helped him to express the stylistic processes of the punk subcultural movement.

The visual appearance of the subcultural participants and messages embedded in those styles were highly relevant to the founding scholars of subculture but might not necessarily serve as an adequate way of analyzing and identifying types of subculture in the present. As an individual whose wardrobe constitutes mainly of black clothes I have frequently been associated with the goth subculture, with which I am only slightly familiar, while at the same time many of my friends who wear colorful clothes are also loyal fans of black and death metal music and are deeply involved in metal subculture. The most recent occurrences of a music festival fashion industry further complicates style-correlated subcultural associations and consequently suggests exploration of alternative measures that could identify emerging subcultures. It is also important to point out that DIY reacts to the contemporary social, political and economic context and as a result its values will differ among communities located in diverse geographical locations. Therefore while the dynamics of the independent

music scene in Cairo may significantly fluctuate from those of the independent scene in the West they are no less authentic than their initial predecessor.

While starting off with punk, at present the independent music includes many different types of music genres such as rock, electronic, metal, and folk among numerous others. The field of the independent music, in its obvious opposition to the operations and values of the mainstream music industry, represents one among many other facets of subculture defined in general terms as “a cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture”(“Subculture”, 2015). Since this work is largely concerned with the academic reading of subculture I would like to briefly present its initial scholarly manifestation. The study of subculture originated at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the early 1970s. The pioneering works of scholars such as the previously addressed Raymond Williams along with Richard Hoggard largely influenced the scholarships of Stuart Hall and the above mentioned Dick Hebdige, whose works became popularized among the subculture researchers. The initial approach of subcultural studies was highly representative of the Marxian perspective with its focus directed towards young working class men (Wulff, 1995, p. 30). The researchers were largely focused on the relations between ideologies and forms “Their work thus turned to the distinctive ‘look’ of these subcultures; but the primary aim was to locate them in relation to three broader cultural structures, the working class or the ‘parent culture’, the ‘dominant’ culture, and mass culture”(Gelder, 1997, p.83). The CCCS’s conceptualization of subculture was largely embedded within the rather narrow identifications of class, particular territory occupied by its representatives, separation from traditional domestic lifestyle, negative approach towards work, stylistic expression, as well as the dislike and rejection of conformity.

While the work accomplished by the CCCS presents the main pillars on which one can approach the study of subculture, many of its critical notions and methodological approaches are questioned by post-subcultural studies, which originated in the early 1990s. In the post-subcultural framework the working class structures and style as an expression of resistance are less relevant to the contemporary understanding of the notion, where the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler and Michel Maffesoli are the main contenders for the new theoretical supremacy in the subcultural scholarship (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2006, p.5). As has been stated by Weinzierl and Muggleton “Whether or not this was ever an accurate portrayal of subcultural emergence and eventual incorporation, the sheer diversity and plurality of current (sub)cultural styles, forms and practices presented and discussed in this reader bears testimony to its irrelevance for the twentieth-first century”(2006, p.6). Certainly concepts applicable to

the post-WWII era do not adequately assess the complex and technologically affected issues of the present day youth. However, considering the disproportionate and distinct developmental opportunities experienced in different parts of the world the fundamental subcultural notions might find certain relevance in diverse global contexts. My observations and interactions with Egyptian independent music artists in varying degrees reflect aspects of both subcultural and post-subcultural scholarly ideas.

I should admit that the term subculture used in reference to the Egyptian independent music scene in this work was not frequently utilized during the process of my fieldwork. None of my interlocutors representing or supporting independent music scene would consider themselves to be members of subculture nor would they express their understanding of its activities within subcultural paradigms. Nevertheless, I chose to engage this academic reading of the Egyptian independent music scene because of its distinction from the mainstream music culture and numerous commonalities with the standard concepts characterizing a music subculture. As Andy Bennet points out “Perhaps one reason why subculture persists as a point of critique and of inspiration is that its identifiability and coherence provide an effective point of departure for contemporary research”(2004, p.15). Cairean independent music scene and its participants involved in this research offer multiple lifestyle alternatives to the dominating social order, which are recognizably common to subcultures.

Egyptian independent music is a form of subculture because it articulates resistance to the mainstream hegemonic order while at the same time contributing to the transformations taking place in social and cultural structures. As I have already pointed out the significance of the term independent was emphasized post January Revolution when its connotations of resistance gained on value through affective relatedness. None of the mainstream Arabic pop singers were actively supporting the Uprising during the determining 18 days at the Square while independent artists such as Hani Adel (Wust El-Balad) and Amir Eid (Cairokee) wrote Sout Al-Huriya (The Sound of Freedom) one of the most popular songs of the Revolution. Independent music artists discuss socio-political issues and through their songs mobilize their followers to openly criticize corruption of the State. The lyrical content of the independent music compositions tackles much wider spectrum of topics from that of mainstream. As many of musicians would suggest Arabic popular music speaks mainly about variations of love with few occasional tracks of patriotic nature while many alternative subjects relevant to the Egyptian listeners remain omitted.

Additionally, according to Akram al Sharif, musician and one of the founding partners of CJC “The mainstream in Egypt has a very basic method, there are few producers, there are few artists, there is a very specific formula to the songs, there is a very specific beat and rhythm particular to Arabic pop or mainstream.”⁴ Egyptian mainstream music production follows a set of guidelines, which makes their sounds quite generic and lacking in artistic creativity. Having said that, it is also important to mention that mainstream musicians are talented and skillful and as Nazmi points out “they are more professional than independent music artists”⁵ However, the requirements of the Egyptian major record labels and music producers are certainly directing and controlling the final output, therefore constraining musicians and leaving them with very little room to express their musical vision. Undoubtedly, this is not the problem independent music artists struggle with since they refuse to cooperate with labels that could hinder their creativeness and aspirations directed towards originality and inventiveness. Egyptian independent music artists invest their personal resources into the production of their albums and video clips. They frequently engage their social networks and collaborate on multiple projects with other independent artists.

To set an example, I have been participating in MEM music video and produced a short promotional clip for his work while his friend and painter Akram Fadl is designing the artwork for his posters and albums. I also directed Neobyrd music video with the help of a talented friend and visual artist Amr Qenawi who presently handles the artwork for CJC and CJC Agency. Although accomplished on a very small budget, filmed with basic equipment and cast made up of friends, “My sweet heartless” was awarded second place on Al Ahram 2012 best independent music video list, recognized for its complex and unique rotoscope technique mastered by Amr. Many videos on that list feature other musicians helping out their fellow artists and multiple projects are continuously realized by the good will and support of friends and individuals belonging to the same social network.

Validation of Egyptian independent music subcultural nature is also apparent in its position towards the notion of class. Throughout my six years of participation in the scene I have not witness a single time where musicians would mention social class in reference to other artists or fans. Rather, they judge each other based on their skill, creativity, quality of performance and music production. Although independent music artists come from various social backgrounds and attract equally diversified audiences the notion of class is not

⁴ Interview with Akram al Sharif, April 2015

⁵ Interview with Ahmed Nazmi, May 2015

considered nor included in the independent music discourses. Therefore independent music scene presents an alternative approach towards class, which is contrary to that of public institutions such as Cairo Opera House where hip hop artists were not allowed to perform during an awareness event because of their lower social status. The subcultural condition of the scene does not indicate its opposition to the mainstream music culture but rather an alternative way of participation in the Egyptian culture. I will address these notions further in the following section while discussing the multiple traits of discourses through which the independent music scene in Cairo can be identified.

Independent Music: Discursive Assemblage

I will begin by briefly addressing the confounding characterization of Foucault's notion of discourse. According to Foucault the term 'discourse' can be applied in reference to the remarks and statements "which have been made which have meaning and which have some effect"(Mills, 2003, p.53). On other occasions he also used the notion in reference to the unrecorded yet commonly understood sets of structures and rules constituting particular discourse. It is also important to point out that discourse for him is not strictly textual but that "Foucault's very radical notion of discourse is primarily directed away from any form of textualism, textual idealism, texts as disembodied artifacts or intertextuality towards a concept of the materiality of language in every dimension"(Young, 2001, p.398-99). Statements and utterances cannot be reduced only to linguistic expression because they are also situated in the materiality of the circumstance where statements are conveyed through events and things as well as the units of language (Young, 2001, p. 401-402). To sum it up what we can say of a discourse, as presented by Foucault, is that it is a synchronized set of statements, events and things, combined in predictable ways with others of the similar sort and regulated by a set of rules which lead either to their further circulation or diminishment (Mills, 2003, p.54). While some statements are circulated widely and openly, the movement of others can be largely constrained. Therefore Foucault directs the attention towards the notion of exclusion, which highlights the association of discourse with relations of power (Foucault, 1981, p.65).

It is necessary to clarify that according to Foucault, discourse presents both the methods of oppression as well as the means of resistance. In "The History of Sexuality"(1978) author states, "We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and

makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, p.100). To set an example, marketing strategies of various international companies residing in Cairo, who aim at targeting new clientele, present their brands as original, authentic, unusual and fitting to the assumed unique characteristics of the independent music audience. This discourse of uniqueness, authenticity and originality strongly associated with the independent music audience presents a high market value for companies who then sponsor numerous independent music events such as the recent “Soundclash” organized by Red Bull. Companies attract new customers by insinuating their support and supposed shared values with independent music followers, and it is here, where the discursive power of independent music that first attracted these investors now exposes its weakness, embedded in its professed opposition to the mainstream music as well as resulting and frequently unacknowledged dependency on commercial sponsorship to perform in front of a larger audience with a promise of sustainable income. The attractive discursive power of independent music lies in its self-professed commercial autonomy. At the same time, this autonomy prevents it from significant growth and sustainability, and identifies its discursive weakness within the realms of the neoliberal economy (Locke, 2013). This point will be elaborated further in the consecutive chapters as it is now the time to hear what the multiple agents involved in the music production have to say about Cairean independent music scene.

“The independent scene started in the late 80s with few bands playing cover songs, mainly rock songs and it stayed in a small community, only few people knowing what’s going on. The people who attended these shows were mostly musicians.”

(Amr Hefny, 2015)

“So, this so-called underground or independent, whatever you want to call it, is a scene of guys who do not want to learn.”

(Fathy Salama, 2014)

“The Independent music artists know how to market themselves, they know what works, they are persistent and smart about their choices, they know how to express themselves in the market.”

(Ahmed Nazmi, 2015)

On February 12th 2015 I attend a Massar Egbari new album launch party at Cairo Jazz Club (CJC). Despite being a “guest list only” event the venue is filling up with musicians,

friends and family members of the band. The place gets very busy very fast, and the background music featuring the new album is competing for attention with the numerous voices engaged in greetings and conversations. I notice a lot of familiar faces whom I did not see at CJC for a while and who have made an extra effort to go out tonight and pay their respects to one of the most highly respected Alexandrian independent bands. The popularity of the band among the independent music artists and audiences is largely due to the lyrical context of their songs, at least this is what I am repeatedly being told tonight, while participating in various conversations and listening to musicians feedback on the newest album. When two members of Cairokee appear at the venue, the rumor of their tonight's tribute performance with Massar Egbari circulates among the attendees who are wondering with excitement about the possibility of such controversial engagement. The new album is being sold and some people ask the artists to sign their newly purchased CDs. All the information on the packaging is written in Arabic and the front cover illustrates the silhouettes of the band members with the Sinai mountains in the background and the Giza pyramids alongside Cairo Tower hanging upside down above their heads. The band starts performing and surprisingly they open their tonight's set with one of their older and well-known songs. (2015)

The statement, the utterance, the event, the thing, the elements of discourse which are present a possibility to create a better understanding of the term 'independent' as appropriated by the music scene. While being well aware of the fact that Foucault did not offer us a precise methodology (Mills, 2003, p.124) and that suggested essentials are neither exclusive nor fully straightforward, I present the results of my attempted excavation of the independent music scene's character by addressing the above elements and by relying on their efficiency within this discursive analysis. The musicians' statements which precede this paragraph, as well as my field notes excerpt, both illustrate only a few among many other varying ways in which independent music in Cairo is being discussed and represented. The album produced without sponsorship, the rather intimate nature of the launch event, the subjectivities hidden behind individual understandings of the term within a local context, the appreciation of the independent management contrasted with the disappointments with the musical compositions, technical skills and the general attitude of the independent music artists are all constitutive parts of the Cairean independent music discourse. Consequently while throughout my interviews and interactions with the scene the definition of independent music was always

based on bands' and musicians' autonomy from a major record label, numerous other traits surfaced in the process.

When discussing the origins of the independent music scene in Cairo I was faced with differing opinions frequently resembling musicians' own participation in the scene. Organizers of the S.O.S Music Festival such as Ousso would suggest the mid 2000s around when their legendary event took place, metal and rock artists such as Amr Hefny would point me to the mid 1990s when this music genre was at its peak, while artists representing older generations such as Fathy Salama would suggest years where music from which they drew inspiration to become musicians was composed. According to Salama, Fusion as music genre existed in Egypt since the early 1920s and 1930s and was frequently featured in the films starring celebrities such as Anwar Wagdi, Muhammad Abdel al-Wahhab and Abdel Halim Hafez. Significant number of foreigners residing in Egypt at that time allowed for frequent musical collaborations, which according to Fathy resulted in a new Fusion genre constitutive of great quality music exhibiting technical and compositional skill reflective of both cultures and at the same time absent among the contemporary independent music artists. Referring back to William's earlier mentioned point, the subjectivities of the interlocutors are evident in their perceptions on the origins of the independent music in Egypt and at the same time present their diverse individual experiences of the emergence of this specific scene. Subsequently, artist's positionality within the field of independent music becomes significant in possible identification of its foundations and leads to the consideration of cultural capital, a notion introduced by Pierre Bourdieu.

In brief, Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production can be described as a site in which agents and their social positions are situated. These social positions of the agents result from the specific interactions between the rules of the field, agent's particular habitus and social, cultural or economic capital. (Bourdieu, 1993, p.30) The more capital agents have the more powerful positions they occupy in life. In author's terms "Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its incorporated embodied form) that, when appropriated on a private, that is exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour"(Bourdieu, 2001, pg. 96). Cultural capital in particular refers to various symbolic elements such as tastes, mannerism, appearance, skills, credential, familiarity with the arts, few examples among numerous other, which at the same time allow further categorization of cultural capital into three types of the embodied state, objectified state and institutionalized state. For the purposes of the below argument I am considering the institutionalized cultural capital where interlocutors' educational training and

professional experience have a large influence on their understanding and succeeding criticism of the Egyptian independent scene.

Academically trained musicians frequently complained about the lack of professionalism among the independent musicians who in their opinion do not properly learn their instruments and present rather shallow and technically unsophisticated compositions. According to Nazmi “Being experimental is the easiest way because it does not require knowledge...not knowing your instrument helps to go into that direction since you don’t know, then you experiment.”⁶ Consequently while some of the independent music artists put a lot of effort into mastering their skill by practicing and thoroughly learning their instruments, others seem to be taking a different approach where the technical knowledge is sacrificed for the sake of moving on to the actual performance and labeling such improvisation as experimental music. Some independent music artists also proud themselves on singing out of tune and consequently breaking the standard expectations imposed on the professional singer while others criticized them for lack of skill and misguidance of the audiences supporting these particular artists.⁷ Interestingly, in the early stages of its development punk music genre suffered from similar criticism by the traditionally trained artists who had a difficult time accepting this rather provocative at the time new sound of the youth. Again referring back to Bourdieu’s concept of the field such conflicts resemble one of the oppositions within the structure of the field of cultural production “the opposition, within the sub-field of restricted production, between the consecrated avant-garde and the avant-garde, the established figures and the newcomers, i.e. between artistic generations, often only few years apart, between the ‘young’ and the ‘old’, the ‘nep’ and the ‘paleo’, the ‘new’ and the ‘outmoded’, etc.; in short, between cultural orthodoxy and heresy.”(Bourdieu, 1993, p.53) The independent music subculture, already opposed to the mainstream also experiences divisions among its practitioners where two groups with varying institutionalized cultural capital struggle for power and domination within the sub field. Artists, who devote long practicing time and effort in order to built their technical and theoretical compositional skill, feel undervalued and consider those agents who are new to the field and without conservatory music training, inadequate and opportunistic. Possibly musicians with high institutional cultural capital are somewhat intimidated and threatened by the recent developments in the independent music scene where social capital, marketing skills and technology is well mastered by the younger

⁶ Interview with Ahmed Nazmi, February 2015

⁷ Interview with Fathy Salama, September 2014

generations and to a certain extent equally influential in career developments as pure skill and talent was not very long ago.

As Salama also points out being independent should not only indicate autonomy but should encompass creativity and innovative styles. Consequently he raises the issue of originality, which in his opinion is presently lacking among the artists who consider themselves the representatives of the scene.⁸ Numerous independent music artists follow in the footsteps of the well established bands such as Wust El Balad (Downtown) and Cairokee by producing similarly sounding music and attracting audiences and fans supportive of the two icons. Ahmed Al Fekky, former employee of Cairo Jazz Club Agency who at the time was in charge of the CJC nightly entertainment schedule also suggests, “they want to take the same direction like those bands, they don’t want to be independent, eventually they want to have a source of income behind the music that they do.”⁹ Al Fekky argues that emerging bands inspired by career developments such as that of Massar Egbari produce music that is already accepted and appreciated by the audiences and the market. Consequently in his opinion they do not fit the idea of independent music because their music lacks innovation, creativity and is based on the already set standards that guarantee certain level of success. Nadal El Shazly’s understanding of the independent is also largely embedded in the musical content “Mainly, I think it is about the content in the music, it is about challenging the mainstream ways of production.”¹⁰ As an electronic music artist Nada experiments a lot with innovative sound production techniques and while expressing her dissatisfaction with the term independent she appreciates the effort that in her opinion Egyptian independent artist employ into developing the local music scene.¹¹

The creative dynamics of the independent music in Cairo are evident in the emergence of the new music genres such as Electro Shaabi and Egyptronica. Machine Eat Man a.k.a. MEM, self thought musician and one of the key interlocutors in this project, frequently samples songs of Umm Khulthum and Abdel-Halim Hafez in his musical compositions, emphasizing the Egyptian nature of ‘Egyptronica’, his newly developed independent electronic music style. Umm Khulthum was one of the most important and famous singers of the 20th century Egypt, as well as the rest of the Arab world. By sampling Khulthum’s songs, MEM embeds the symbol of his country’s musical heritage within his abstract electronic

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Interview with Ahmed Al Fekky, April 2015

¹⁰ Interview with Nada El Shazly, April 2015

¹¹ Ibid

compositions. During our conversation he praised the complexity of the orchestral arrangements and the technical skills of the musicians performing with Khulthum.¹² He chooses specific parts of Khulthum's songs where the lyrical context can be evidently contrasted with the aggressive sounds of his music and visual imagery always featured as the backdrop during his performances. Electro Shaabi, independently produced yet closely bordering with the mainstream due to its great popularity among Caireans, although rooted in the Shaabi (local) music style, nevertheless is still highly innovative. Definitely it is one of the new genres least influenced by Western music production and greatly representative of Cairo's soundscape. Akram al Sharif suggests that Electro Shaabi "audience wise it could belong to mainstream but technically speaking most of this music comes from independent artists, it comes from small studios or home made studios."¹³ Consequently, Electro Shaabi position is still largely contested by independent music participants who either choose to exclude it from the independent music field because of its vast popularity among local audiences or embrace it due to its independent production style.

Ahmed Nazmi, in Hawidro, the newest project he recently joined, is highly influenced by the Nubian heritage and he openly admits that his work aims to compete with that of Mohammed Mounir.¹⁴ Nazmi is developing his own unique technique of playing base guitar that will reshape the standard Nubian compositions and hopefully present him with career development opportunities. MEM, Electro Shaabi artists and Nazmi exemplify independent music artists who present uniqueness and innovation in their music. Consequently, considering the above statements made by Salama and Al-Fekky, we are again faced with two conflicting opinions about the local independent music scene which nevertheless equally contribute to the ongoing dialog about its nature within the Egyptian music scene. While the notions of originality, creativity and innovation will be addressed later in more detail what I am aiming to point out here is that the discourses shaping the independent music in Cairo are as well identified in these particular terms. Musical novelty and experimentations with new sounds and instruments also constitute the discourse of the independent music in Cairo.

The type of the venue or an outdoor concert space also speaks the independent although again in rather confounding terms due to its frequent commercial or institutional sponsorship as well as the standard nature of the profit oriented locale. The fieldwork excerpt describing Massar Egbari's "Toqaa' w Teqom" (To Fall and Stand Up) new album release

¹² Interview with Machine Eat Man, September 2014

¹³ Interview with Akarm al Sharif, May 2015

¹⁴ Interview with Ahmed Nazmi, February 2015

party and included in the opening of this section presents another way in which independent music discourse is conceptualized. The event was organized by the band in cooperation with CJC receiving the minimum of publicity from the local newspapers but acknowledged by social media networks such as Cairo Scene regularly covering events, which are taking place at the venue. The idea behind this particular album launch party was to celebrate it in the intimate setting among friends, family and fellow musicians whereas subsequent album launch concerts taking place around the country were dedicated to the general public supporting the band. Since Massar Egbari is not signed with a record label the whole production of the new album was commissioned by the band members and technically supported by friends at “The Mix” studio located in New Cairo. The atmosphere at CJC was very relaxed and did not encompass any of the glamour and grandeur typical of mainstream album releases. Friendly interaction between the band members and the guests gave everyone an opportunity to congratulate the artists or get their signatures on the album cover. Independent music artists do not hide away in the backstage area but usually can be spotted amongst the audiences attending the show at any of the few Cairean venues. The ability to comfortably socialize with the performing artists in a cozy atmosphere characterizes the independent music event in Cairo and largely distinguishes it from any mainstream music event featuring inaccessible celebrities.

Metal music scene in Cairo faces the largest number of obstacles in its development and presentation to the public but nevertheless it continues on growing and attracting the support of such unusual individuals as Stanislaw Gulinski, the 2nd secretary of the Polish Embassy responsible for culture and science. Gulinski participates in the organization of the Metal Blast Festival taking place annually in Cairo where metal bands from Egypt, other Middle Eastern countries and Poland perform for the local audience. The festival is supported by the participating Embassies and always takes place at El Sawy Culture Wheel, the cultural center and the safest, most reliable venue for these unconventional performances. Metal music artists such as Wael Al Soukkary leader of the band Enraged and Nader Sadek a visual artist and composer, organize events featuring their music as well as that of other Egyptian and most recently European bands. On different occasions both organizers dedicated the ticket sales profits to charities with the hopes that the negative reputation of metal and its followers can be positively affected by such grand gestures. Metal music is not easily accepted in Egypt usually attracting few hundred participants and there are no venues in Cairo properly equipped for metal performances and its rather younger audience. Consequently artists resort to Culture Wheel, rarely Rawabet and Ghenina Theaters and private performances taking place in villas

located on the outskirts of the city. It can be argued that metal music in Egypt is a form of avant garde (Harbert, 2013) and while I will elaborate in greater detail on this particular genre of independent music in the next chapter, at this moment I would like to point out that the Egyptian metal music artists are considered one of the best examples of the independent music bands by most of the interlocutors participating in this research and familiar with the turbulent history of metal scene in Egypt. Some even consider Egyptian metal as an underground movement but largely due to their unfamiliarity with all of the events, albums and international performances of the local bands such as Scarab, Crescent and Nader Sadek.

New initiatives such as Sound From A Room (Sofar) also figure in the local independent music discourse. These secret concerts taking place at various private locations arranged by the organizers and participants became very popular among the independent music fans. The concerts are always free of charge and based purely on donations made at the end of the event. The sound equipment for few of the shows was sponsored by “Vibe” music studio, and the maximum audience capacity counts approximately one hundred people. Attendants are not allowed to talk, use their phones or leave while the performances are taking place. The driving idea behind Sofar is to show full respect and appreciation to the artists performing on the stage. Participants are encouraged to enjoy the music without any disturbances rather common at the venues where people attend the shows not only for the music but also in order to socialize. The secrecy of the event location, the non profit standpoint, the limited number of people allowed to attend each Sofar, all create a very distinguished ambiance around the event, which is very much valued by both the audience and the artists. Attending or performing at Sofar suggests that the partaker supports the values of the independent music scene and does not perform only in order to generate profit. Sofar is for those who are ‘hip’ and ‘in’, it is a secret venture independent music fans and performers are proud to be a part of, a show that validates their belonging to the independent music subculture and subsequently amplifies their subcultural capital.

The subcultural capital concept was developed by Sarah Thornton and inspired by the work of previously mentioned Pierre Bourdieu discussing the links between taste and social structure in his book “Distinction” (1984). Subcultural capital shaped very much in light of cultural capital discussed earlier, can be objectified or embodied. (Thornton, 1995, p.202). Its objectified form can be embedded in such things as the collection of vinyl records, phone applications, particular type of books or place of residency, and embodied in the practice of slang, fashionable haircut, mannerism and symbolic use of style such as the presently more of a cliché beard and Ban Ray sunglasses popularized by the American hipsters. According to

Thornton the main difference between cultural and subcultural capital is that media is strongly involved in the circulation of the subcultural assets. Author claims “For within the economy of subcultural capital the media is not simply another symbolic good or marker of distinction (which is the way Bourdieu describes films and newspapers vis-à-vis cultural capital), but a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge.”(Thornton, 1995, p. 203). As mentioned earlier in the present post January Revolution context various social media platforms begin to play a big role in displaying the subcultural capital of the independent music artists. Being ‘in the known’ by attending specific gathering at specific locations, festivals, Sinai camps, presenting a particular look, attending certain workshops and independent film screenings are only few ways in which subcultural capital is expressed and marketed by social media. As I have suggested earlier the affect of the Revolution spilled over into the art world and expressed itself in the enhanced emergence of the independent music, which subsequently increased the value of subcultural capital among its participants. Songs discussing socio-political issues performed in the native language, hanging out at the local ahwa (café), wearing clothes and jewelry inspired by Egyptian folklore by some of the independent music artists, became few of the many staples of the subculture largely absent from the music scene before the January events.

Independent music discourse is also evident in the actual objects created by this music genre such as self produced records, which speak their independence not only through the lack of major label signature on its cover but also through the actual aesthetic appearance. What I found very characteristic about the locally produced independent music albums is that very few of them would feature the picture of the band or of the artist on the CD cover. This is a very contradictory presentation to that of the Arabic mainstream music where artists, usually the pop singers are always the focal point of the album’s cover image. Independent music album covers are usually very imaginative and even those which display an image of the artists usually do so in an artistically creative manner, where faces are illustrated in graffiti like style, abstract and caricature like drawing or as in the case of previously mentioned Massar Eghbari presenting the silhouettes of the band members. Music videos featuring independent music artists are also very illustrative of scene’s character and very different from those sponsored by the major record labels for the signed performers. Few of the independent artists distribute some merchandise during their performances in forms of pins, t-shirts and wall posters, which usually feature the cover of the album or simply the logo or the name of the band. The aesthetic look of these objects is very much distinguished from the mainstream music merchandise and it articulates the independent in Cairo’s music scene.

Following the notion of Bruno Latour I suggest that the above mentioned objects have agency and take part in shaping of the local, independent music discourse. Latour argues, “we have to accept that the continuity of any course of action will rarely consist of human-to-human connections (for which the basic social skills would be enough anyway) or of object-object connections, but will probably zigzag from one to the other.” (2005, p. 75) Author claims that social action is expressed in the interaction between objects and humans and is not reserved only to the relations created among persons. Exchange of Mariam Salah CD among friends speaks a lot more than simply sharing an album, it indicates certain musical taste, interest in the political context in which the recording was produced, subcultural belonging and most importantly interest in the local independent music production. The self produced album signifies strength and perseverance to overcome obstacles in the way of recording music that doesn't have major sponsorship or large audience and rather limited distribution possibilities. Album's cover page featuring Salah's graffiti style sketched face tells us about musicians relationship to the Revolution and the art style which took over the streets of Cairo after January events. Recordings' cover page could be also an indication of any artists' relationship towards the idea of celebrityhood and recognition over the desire to share their art and focus the attention on the actual musical content of the album.

During discussions with Nada El Shazly and Mahmood Rifaat the head of 100Copies music label, both artists expressed their growing dissatisfaction with the notion of independent music, which according to Nada “is making more problems than making anything good”¹⁵. Nada believes that independent music terminology creates constraints and does not adequately present the complexities involved in music production. Rifaat considers independent an imported and colonial term, forced by the global music market and related to everything else than the artwork itself.¹⁶ Rifaat claims that “You cannot say independent in the pure sense of music quality, it is all other things related to it and I am not interested in anything else besides the actual sonic experience.”¹⁷ Consequently the ambiguity of the term ‘independent’ within the local music context, the shaping discourses, which I am trying to present in this chapter, are also evident in the varying attitudes towards its connotations. While to many members of the independent music subculture it still signifies freedom and rebellion, there are also those who on the contrary find it constraining and limiting. Although I will come back to the issue raised by Nada and Rifaat in the next chapter at this point I would like to suggest that the

¹⁵ Interview with Nada El Shazly, April 2015.

¹⁶ Interview with Mahmood Rifaat, May 2015.

¹⁷ Ibid

rejection of the term by these artists is at the same time a confirmation of its substance. Just like a newly purchased t-shirt with a picture of the characteristic Mickey Mouse gloved hand showing middle finger and stating “Fuck fashion”, a contradiction in terms. John Leland the author of “Hip: The History”(2004) analyses the cultural developments of the term ‘hip’ in the United States where in his discussion of the incorporation of subcultural hipness he cites a figurehead of the 1960s counterculture Michael Harrington “Free love and all-night drinking and art for art’s sake were consequences of a single stern imperative: thou shalt not be bourgeois. But once the bourgeoisie itself became decadent—once businessmen started hanging nonobjective art in the boardroom—Bohemia was deprived of the stifling atmosphere without which it could not breathe”(p. 286). While very different socio-political and economic environments have shaped the above statement it is also possible that its message becomes relevant in the present dynamics of the Egyptian independent music scene when the incorporation of the independent bands, limiting funding options, temporary saturation of the scene with new participating agents, complex political climate and possibility of judgment by those who ‘do not sell out’, could present a potential barrier between some of the artists and the independent.

To elaborate further on the discourses constituting independent music in Cairo I address numerous culturally involved entities that in different ways support the advancement of the scene. Previously introduced Stanislaw Gulinski’s understands independent music “as a one developed outside the net of powerful media, production companies and advertisement industry. I always found it catering to the minorities’ tastes usually underprivileged in terms of visibility and access to financial sources.”¹⁸ Gulinski also suggests that the not for profit principle frequently associated with independently produced art is rather flexible and “A band starting as an ‘independent’, if successful, may start getting involved in ‘profit-oriented’ activity, not necessarily losing its artistic value and integrity.”¹⁹ Cathy Costain, the Head of Program for the Arts at British Council in Cairo found it difficult to explain what the term means to her while struggling with the same confounding meanings constituting ‘independent’ discourse discussed in this chapter. According to Costain Egyptian independent music “Is independent of the State, but it is not independent of the foreign cultural centers funding, definitely independent of thought, but I don’t have a clear answer.”²⁰ Ambiguity of the term independent within local context is acknowledged by artists and cultural representative alike

¹⁸ Interview with Stanislaw Gulinski, Polish Embassy, May 2015

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Interview with Cathy Costain, British Council, May 2015

and while some individuals don't feel comfortable defining the term other are more inclined to present their views based on their experiences working in the Cairean music field. Monika Brudzinska employed by Al-Sakia associates independent music with three following categories "The style of the music, somehow, different from mainstream, the lyrics being a little against the political track I would say, and third the budget that doesn't allow them to be more famous."²¹ Brudzinska's broader definition of the term may reflect her active participation and understanding of the required organizational details before each musical event held at Al-Sakia. Brudzinska is aware of the strict lyrical censorship and financial arrangements every performer is submitted to before each concert and her articulation reflects that knowledge when she is considering lyrics and budget within her definition of independent.

Aida Seoudi the managing director of Radio Hits station prefers to use alternative and independent terms interchangeably defining their meaning as "alternative or independent because they don't talk mainly about the mainstream topics, and even when they discuss love it is different, from a different aspect and different perspective."²² According to Seoudi the lyrical content of the songs differentiates independent music from the mainstream Arabic Pop. Seoudi is a long term supporter of the Egyptian independent music scene and before her career as the radio presenter and manager she was involved in the scene while managing one of the local bands. Seoudi's radio show is dedicated towards young listeners addressing topics relevant to the interests and concerns of the Egyptian youth. Seoudi points out "In my show I try to play the least number of the required mainstream tracks because I am not interested in playing commercial songs, they are all similar to each other and I believe that listening to different music in general offers different perspective to life, so I keep looking for new music all the time."²³ Seoudi also believes it is crucial for radio stations to promote local independent music and she is proud to admit that in the past some of the songs introduced by Radio Hits were picked up by other commercial radio channels. During our discussion Seoudi expressed her excitement about the ongoing developments of the scene suggesting that the varying discourses presently shaping the scene will eventually provide a new set of guidelines for further advances of the Egyptian independent music field because in her opinion "nothing is destructive when it comes to music."²⁴

²¹ Interview with Monika Brudzinska, Al Sakia, April 2015

²² Interview with Aida Seoudi, Radio Hits, April 2015

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Furthermore, Bassem Abuarab manager of Al-Moharek booking agency division at Eka3 suggests a short definition of independent music, which is “The music that is not following the big production companies.”²⁵ Bassem points out that “the question is causing a lot of debates”²⁶ and since the Egyptian independent music scene is in a state of ongoing development it might take a long time for these labels to fully clarify their meanings. Interestingly Bassem also suggests that “For the industry workers, like me it is so important to have a clear meaning of the term, everyone in the industry cares but audience usually doesn’t, unless extremely loyal to the particular meanings of these labels.”²⁷ Bassem claims that labels will happen anyway regardless of the dislikes expressed by certain artists or fans. During his work experience at Eka3 he was very often faced with “artists who refuse any connections to any agencies because they are so loyal to the term, however after a while they change their opinion.”²⁸ Consequently, Bassem believes that it is only with a matter of time and greater exposure to the practices of independent music field before some of the artist will understand the dynamics of music industry and pragmatic aspects of music production. Bassem suggests “people need to come to understand this on their own terms”²⁹ and in the constantly evolving and moving scene the shifting meanings and attitudes towards the term independent are a natural part of that development.

Conclusion

At this point I would like to put a hold on this component of an academic inquiry, the designed assemblage of the numerous discourses shaping the independent music in Cairo. I do not intend to sum up all the different discourses emerging during the interviews into an understandable whole and I do not believe that fixed definition will help us comprehend what constitutes the independent music in Cairo at this point in time. As Nada El Shazly suggests “defining and the reinforcing the term all the time is limiting the debate and simplifying it in a lot of ways.”³⁰ Best understanding of the genre can be achieved through the acknowledgment and reflection on independent music constituting parts and on their constant fluidity and motion that prevents such investigation from ever reaching a satisfactory ending.

²⁵ Interview with Bassem Abuarab, AlMoharek, Eka3, March, 2015

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with Nada El Shazly, April 2015

The term is clearly contested by multiplicity of diverse actors involved in the Cairean independent music field. Each individual addressed in this chapter offered interpretation of the term most utilized by them through personal involvement in the scene. Consequently musicians focused on developing their careers would express their dislike of the term while agents participating in the music market would certainly acknowledge its relevance to the practical aspects of the music industry. Specific nature of independent music events and objects produced by its participants along with their cultural and subcultural capital feature among the articulations of Cairean independent music field. Subjectivity is a defining factor behind these varying connotations and it is safe to assume that presently there is no single, correct answer to what is independent music in Cairo. The scene is continuously evolving and in the process it is also responding to the trajectories of the international music market, as it will be presented in the upcoming sections of this work.

Many of the points raised in this chapter will be further elaborated on in the following section where I plan to discuss the topography of the independent music scene, the available stages supporting its existence and guaranteeing its continuity as well as the socio-political and economic realities in which all of these actors and agencies are situated.

Chapter Three: Staging Independent Music: Performance, Space and the inflections of Independence.

Introduction

Whereas preceding chapter was initiated by a personal inquiry transformed into an academic question of the term ‘independent’ within Egyptian music context, the following pages address the numerous locations at which listeners experience independent live music performances and the stages on which independent musicians are able to showcase their art, earn income and gain spotlight. However, the mapping of the Cairean independent music scene is not any less personal than understanding of its discursive nature while being simultaneously situated as a supporter of the independent music subculture as well as of the commercial entity such as Cairo Jazz Club. This questioning is deeply rooted in the conflicting notions intensely circulating the local music scene post January Revolution when, as I already mentioned in the previous chapter, the significance of independent music and the increased value of the subcultural capital was and to a certain extent still is propagated. I was frequently faced with musicians condemning each other for labeling their bands as ‘independent’ while participating in corporate events and TV commercials. CJC as well was not spared the accusations of being too commercial while also never denying the fact that as a commercial entity the venue functions according to a specific profit oriented business model. (Article in Business Today, Ammar) At the same time I’ve witnessed Cairokee performing free of charge during a politically themed event where all of the partnering organizers, CJC included, covered all the relevant costs without an aim of generating any profit. Consequently the mapping of the independent music scene I am about to present aims to describe the available stages the independent music artists can use to perform as well as the continuous collaboration between the commercial and cultural sectors which most often then not make these stages available in the first place.

Many of the stages addressed below serve other roles beyond that of showcasing musical talents, providing performers with necessary income, exposure to diversified audience, as well as initial fundamentals for the independent music industry’s further development. Numerous venues featured on the following pages serve also as a meeting point between foreign and local artists, which open up avenues for collaboration and transnational networking. Visiting artists performing at CJC frequently engage with Egyptian independent musicians during

jamming sessions either initiated in advance or following spontaneously after the show. Stages instigated by interaction between cultural centers and commercial entities open up a potential dialog often resulting in further collaborations between their representatives and musicians involved in the projects. In many instances this is how independent musicians find their initial entry to the international independent music market while utilizing their social capital build on local networking followed by well established reputation promoting the necessity of further exposure abroad among foreign cultural entities based in Cairo. While I will elaborate further on this point while discussing transnational networks in the following chapter, I find it necessary to mention in this section in order to highlight the relevance of these stages to the main question addressed by this work.

Mapping of ‘Independent’ Stages

Since the January Revolution, Cairo’s music scene witnessed an increase in the amount of platforms interested in and often fully dedicated towards showcasing of the Egyptian independent music artists. The variety of these new stages on which independent artists could perform offer them more work opportunities, possible career prospects, income and introduction to a wider circle of potential fans. Several aspects of these recent developments will be individually addressed in the subsequent fieldwork excerpts included in this chapter. Particular live music performance, experiences based on my field notes will be included among the general descriptions of the different stages available for independent music performances. For the sake of clarity I choose to present these stages in terms of their commercial and cultural identities, highlighting their continuous interplay, which is at the same time reflective of the social, political and economic realities in which present day Egypt is situated. The boundaries are not always very clear, and the confounding and fluid nature of the term independent music discussed in the preceding chapter is very much corresponding to and reflecting the interaction between the market, culture and society situated within particular political climate of the region.

Before I engage in the discussion of the stages available to the independent music acts I would like to point out that in Egypt public performances fall under the jurisdiction and laws of the Music Syndicate. Consequently any independent music artist performing live is legally obliged to cooperate with the Syndicate requirements which include membership and certain percentage of profit share after each concert. According to Alexander, one of the partners at CJC, since 2013 the Music Syndicate became involved in the activities of social media such as Facebook in order to be more aware about upcoming concerts and events involving

independent music. Additionally most recently passed decree grants certain Syndicate officials the power to issue warrants against musicians performing without the membership and approval of the Syndicate (Helmy, 2016). Furthermore in order to become syndicates' cardholding musician, the artists need to prove their musical skills and specify the category of music he or she is producing. This proves to be quite problematic since many emerging music genres are still not recognized by Syndicate officials and musicians have to select from the pool of categories already set by the institution. Ellen Weis in her research on the Egyptian underground hip-hop scene presents a very interesting scenario that exemplifies this point. According to Weis' interlocutors the syndicate does not offer a category for rappers and hip hop artists and presents them with a single option of monologist, therefore hindering their ability to join. (2015, p.61) Most of the artists in Weis' work would not mind joining the syndicate if the appropriate category for their music genre would be recognized and integrated among the existing group. Unfortunately this is not the case for rappers as well as many other independent music artists who experiment with the newest music genres unrecognized by the Music Syndicate.

Mada Masr latest article on Music Syndicate authored by Ayman Helmy, composer, lyricist and program officer at previously mentioned Al Mawret Al Taqafy, presents a detail description of the decree and its possible implications on the developments of the Egyptian music scene. According to the article the Music Syndicate board members have now the right to issue arrest warrants, conduct searches, accept complaints, report citizens and collect information on the suspects reported directly to the prosecution. Additionally "Violating the provisions of Article 5 of this law is punishable by imprisonment of between one and three months and/or a fine of between LE2,000 and LE20,000,' the law reads" (Helmy, 2016). Those who are hiring non-members of the Syndicate are also susceptible to the ruling of this new decree, which may eventually result in limiting the number of live music performances at the above mentioned venues as well as all other stages presently available to the independent music artists. The decree hinders the right of freedom of expression through music, non-profit oriented performances, it doesn't offer a transparent explanation of the permit fees and most importantly it enforces musicians to join the Music Syndicate contradicting the principle of trade union freedom. While some suggest that the decree will have an impact on competition among members and non-members of the Syndicate resulting in a decrease of work opportunities for non-membership cardholders, and a steady flow of profit for the Syndicate officials, it is also possible to consider that these new amendments provide an avenue for the state to assimilate independent music subculture and exercise censorship over the musical

content as well as control over its now easily identifiable participants accessed through their membership with the Syndicate. The point I have briefly addressed in the previous chapter.

Commercial ‘Independent’ Stages

The group of commercial entities addressed in this work is identified mainly by their profit oriented nature and constitutes of nightlife music entertainment venues, cafes, performance spaces, rehearsal studios, and corporate events all featuring independent music artists. All of these platforms perform according to the designed business models that aims at generating profit from sales of food and beverage, entry cover fees, corporate sponsorship and branding, rental of equipment and rehearsal space, recording sessions and booking services.

Bars and Clubs Stages

There are only few nightlife music entertainment venues, which incorporate independent music performances along with the DJ dance music nights within their weekly schedules. Starting out in Maadi district of Cairo, The Tap and most recently opened Cheers are bars, which both showcase independent artists once or twice per week. Downtown Cairo offers two venues with occasional independent music performances, After 8 and Zigzag, which until very recently was called Vent and under previous ownership served as the hub for the independent experimental electronic music. Presently Zigzag operates as an after hour party and unfortunately the independent electronic performances do not take place as frequently. Moving on to the island of Zamalek rather infrequent independent music acts are presented at Riverside, a bar and restaurant owned by the well known Egyptian businessman Naguib Sawiris. Finally, after crossing the Nile and entering the Giza governorate the independent music concerts are taking place at Underground Bar and Lounge and at Cairo Jazz Club (CJC).

Diverse entertainment schedules of these venues present Cairo with a vibrant nightlife where on every single night of the week audiences can enjoy at least one performance by an independent music artist. These clubs and bars provide a fairly steady entertainment industry where audience can attend independent music concerts and the independent music artists gain exposure and income. Out of the listed venues, only After 8 and CJC existed prior to the January Revolution and even at this point CJC is the only locale in Cairo, which offers daily music entertainment with four nights out of the week being dedicated to the performances by independent music artists and the remaining three featuring different DJs. What all of the above mentioned venues have in common is that they are all working under the jurisdiction of

the Ministry of Tourism, they are catering to the groups of audiences participating in the nightlife scene, they all serve alcohol, implement age policy and door selection, and highlight their dedication to the field of independent music. While some charge entry cover or minimum charge others offer their services for free. What is also important to mention is that each of these venues handles any issues arising from the Music Syndicate visits during live music performances. Very often artists are not even aware that Syndicate was at the venue attempting to shut down a show featuring artists who are not its cardholding members. It is important to note that the alternative arrangements between the artists, venues and Syndicate may undergo further complication with the recently passed decree addressed on the preceding pages.

I would like to return now to the description of the available live music performance stages by presenting a detail picture of a specific venue, Cairo Jazz Club, through the daily work experience of Alexander, my partner and co-owner of the night club, as well as through my own CJC encounter described in one of my field notes. There is a common misconception about working at the entertainment venue, which certainly may have its charms and benefits but nevertheless requires large amount of labor and effort from all of its employees. Musicians who work in music studios and event organizing companies understand that quite well, yet regardless of this fact many still underestimate the exertion applied into the maintenance of such commercial entity constantly struggling for the balance between the love of music and the necessity of profit. To further clarify, the main revenue supporting CJC is acquired on the three DJ nights when the venue gets filled to its maximum capacity with clientele willing to spend more on the variety of alcoholic beverages offered at the club. Live independent music performances with higher entertainment costs, significantly lower attendance, and lesser spending, are not highly dependable when sustainability of the venue is considered. While entry to CJC is usually free of charge on rare instances some selected performances by foreign, visiting artists may require admission fee in order to cover higher entertainment costs. Due to the small size of the venue allowing room for maximum 280 guests, with the general turn over of 450 visitors throughout the busy DJ nights, CJC is compelled to strict door policy and limited in their choice of the performing acts who are aiming for larger number of audience. Additionally, actual audience exerts a significant pressure on the choice of the attendees on the busy nights and openly expresses their criticism of the 'undesirable' crowd they may refuse to socialize with.

Throughout my participation in CJC's life I frequently heard comments about the comfortable and laid back atmosphere of the venue. It is known among the live music

attendants that there is no obligatory dress code required to enter the venue and particularly women can visit CJC without necessity of chaperons guaranteeing their security and comfort. This is a very significant detail when considering the general public disdain of nightlife venues serving alcohol. The quality of the live music performances is also monitored by musicians visiting CJC who do not shy away from pointing out to the management the drop in quality of the featured acts or dissatisfaction with the level and clarity of the sound.

While I cannot ensure that the daily work dynamics of CJC are exemplary of all of the above mentioned venues I hope to present the one that in many ways constitutes my 'everyday' and that to many of its so-called 'regulars' represents 'a second home'.

The Life of a Venue

Cairo Jazz Club, as we know it today, was established in 2001 by three partners, Akram Al Sherif, Ammar Dajanni and Alexander Rizk in response to Cairean nightlife demands for an entertainment venue featuring live music performances. While Cairo always offered significant number of opportunities for the mainstream pop stars, the prospect for artists to work in the less commercial music sector was rather dim, due to the lack of outlets offering stages for alternative music acts. Consequently CJC partners involved in the local music scene during their university days at AUC decided to open up a commercial venue, which even though based on a particular business model, would aim at developing cultural objectives and fostering what now is referred to as independent music scene. As a result musicians were able to explore different music genres, build up a fan base by introducing their music to the audiences visiting the venue and earn income that would help them sustain the rental of the rehearsal studios, purchasing of new equipment and any other relevant expenses. CJC partners would offer artists professional feedback on their music and stage presence as well as the reactions and expectations of the CJC crowd who quickly grew in numbers. Soon enough CJC earned a reputation for being the independent music scene expert that other event organizers and music professionals would refer to with questions relevant to the local music scene. This position directed the partners towards opening up of Cairo Jazz Club Agency (CJC Agency) responsible for organizing events, providing booking services for the artists, supplying corporate and private events with bands and scheduling the daily entertainment at CJC. Up to date CJC Agency collaborated on projects with diversity organizations such as Darb 1718, GIZ, Polish Embassy, Cairo Jazz Festival, and PMI among numerous others.

Luka Blue at CJC

As we approach the entrance to CJC I notice few individuals engaged in a discussion with Fikry and Mahmoud, the two main guardians of the entry to CJC. Fikry as usually is using all his charm and diplomacy to convince the group of people trying to get in that he is not picking on them in any way but that according to the door policy groups of boys are not allowed entry to the club regardless of their style, age and social position. Mahmoud follows us to the small hallway preceding the direct entry into the venue and engages Alexander in a conversation while I continue, drawn in by the sounds of the early entertainment performance already taking place. The music sounds different from what I've expected, prepared for live electronic concert and before I move on to meet and greet friends I take a quick assessment of the mood CJC is offering tonight's guests. This is a skill I naturally acquired from attending performances with my partner who is running this venue and for many years now insists on an early arrival at CJC in order to reflect on the surrounding atmosphere and any possibilities that could offer its clientele the best outing experience. Regardless of the good and the bad that comes with such initial approach at this point we both catch ourselves evaluating the ambiance while visiting other performance venues in Cairo as well as during our trips abroad. The lights, the air circulation and temperature inside the venue, cleanliness of the place and the relations of the bartenders and waiter with the guests, type and number of attendees during a particular performance, volume and quality of sound along with the specific play list set up for the night in accordance with the type of the performers, set up of the decoration designed for particularly themed nights, the male to female ratio and interaction among the guests, the impression of whether they are enjoying themselves or feeling bored or awkward, or if the place is too crowded or filled to its most comfortable capacity are some of the thoughts running through Alexander's head and often entering my mind.

I join Ammar, Alex's business partner and Soleil, event organizer at CJC Agency who remind me that tonight's early entertainment is featuring Luka Blue an independent music band who gained a large popularity with their rather controversial song entitled 'Hashrab Hashish' (Smoke Weed), which went viral on multiple social networks. The lead vocalist, tiny, short hair girl from Mansoura, wrote this song as an act of rebellion against her family with following lyrics:

My teacher told me that girls should wear dresses

My mother told me that girls don't play in the mud

My aunt who wears a big veil told me to sing if I will but I'll be send to hell

But my father didn't tell me anything
 So I'll do what's right, and smoke hashish
 (X2)

In their world all they think about is marriage, china's, bed sheets, gold and decorated
 curtains

Don't ever stay a night out or stay out late
 Don't let the doorman see you
 Don't let yourself without marriage

My grandma told me that girls wear dresses
 My mother told me that girls don't play in the mud
 My aunt who wears a big veil told me to sing if I will but I'll be send to hell
 But my father didn't tell me anything
 So I'll do what's right, and smoke hashish

“Hashrab Hashish” shared among friends quickly reached a sizeable attention on social media and over two million views on You Tube channel without any promotional effort. The song became simultaneously a hit and a mystery because majority of listeners have not previously heard about Luka Blue and had no idea who the author of this controversial song truly was. Consequently tonight's debut performance is surrounded by anticipation and attracts a large audience composed mainly of the younger listeners involved in the local independent music scene. The crowd is very interactive and the vocalist along with her band presents a very charismatic show despite the fact that this is their first live performance. The space in front of the stage is filled to its capacity and everyone is trying to get a glimpse of the musicians. Throughout the duration of the concert people constantly yell out “hashrab hashish” hoping to once again hear and sing along to their favorite song, however, approaching the end of their stage time the young artists screams back at them “hashrab hashish” and ends her performance thanking everyone for their support. Afterwards fans keep coming up to the band asking to take pictures or congratulating them on a successful show. We join few friends at their table discussing how the song took the internet by storm and how entertaining and promising Luka Blue concert turned out to be. Early performances tend to be risky in a sense that they can either turn out to be very good or quite mediocre, yet,

nevertheless they are indispensable to the development of the independent music scene and introduction of new artists to CJC's clientele. Showcasing upcoming talents before performances of the already established independent music artists is a standard and worldwide practiced way of building up an audience for promising musicians. Commercial entity can and frequently is involved in the development of a cultural movement when the decisions being made are not always profit oriented and often aim to benefit the independent music scene as a whole.

I keep observing the crowd appreciating their very relaxed and laid back interaction while at the same time wondering how the mood of each night at CJC differs and attracts an audience that can best relate and reflect the ambience of the venue on individual nights. Jazz Sunday, usually the least crowded nights, featuring artists focused on jazz, blues and Latin sounds attracts audience made up mainly of musicians and listeners favoring classic jazz outings. Manic Monday follows with house music presented by local and foreign DJs and fills up the place to its capacity with young people fascinated by EDM and other dance music genres who like to be seen at popular venues. Alt Tuesdays offer us debuts such as Luka Blue, as well as experimental electronic acts and rock performances pulling in the largest amount of independent music crowd visiting CJC during this particularly themed night. Hip-hop, Boogie and most recent Taxi El Sahra are themes, which circulate on Wednesday's and bring in a very age and style diversified crowd who tends to take itself less seriously and goof around to the Western and Eastern music of the 70s and 80s. On Thursday Night Live CJC offers its stage to early entertainment showcasing less known artists usually followed by main acts of well recognized independent music bands such as Massar Egbari, or cover bands such as Screwdriver, Vybe, Glass Onion and most recent tribute performances to popular rock bands such as The Doors. On these nights the venue is filled with expats, international students and middle age audiences ready to start off their weekend. The younger independent music followers are also there keeping the demographics in balance. Friday Fever is again all about house dance music, younger audience showing off the newest fashion and dance floor sexappeal. We end the week on Saturday L'Oriental featuring oriental and fusion musicians such as Dor El Awal, Hawidro, Bashir and Eftekasat. Saturday's visitors are also quite diverse and made up of bands' local followers, musicians and expats interested in exploring the oriental sounds of the region. International performances can take place on any of the nights according to the repertoire of the musicians or DJs. Appropriate stage and venue lighting enhance each of these nights, and are extremely important for the best ambience at the venue. Playlist music, décor, complementary beverages or host and guest interaction are all factors

taken into consideration. Previously mentioned Music Syndicate visits as well as other unexpected interruptions keep Mourad, the host and his team quite busy throughout the night.

Second performance of the night is featuring Lebanese producer Zeid Hamdan in collaboration with an Egyptian vocalist Maii Waleed. Their indie electronic tunes don't necessarily correspond with the preceding performance but nonetheless create a positive response from the audience. Guests begin to dance and it is not easy to continue conversation among the loud and much more energetic sounds coming out of the speakers. Its almost 1am and the band is introducing their last track of the night while the arrangement with the performers was to finish half an hour later. CJC Agency team responsible for the entertainment quickly interferes and artists announce to the audience that another short set will follow after a small break. However, considering the already late hour, majority of listeners decides to leave rather than wait for the last set. We are well aware that this would not have happened if break wouldn't interrupt the concert. Many seemingly insignificant details could affect the flow of the night. Short power cuts, ventilation issues, musicians arriving late and either delaying their performances or improvising quick sound check in front of the already expecting audience, video projection quality and the general ability to keep up the right energy at its highest point are the details that usually go unnoticed by the guests while at the same time being highly influential on their experience and the decision to leave or continue their night out.

Referring back to the work of Pierre Bourdieu in "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed"(1993) I would like to point out two notions discussed by the author and relevant to the above observations. First, Bourdieu suggests that discourse about the work of art creates its value (p.36), a point I was also trying to illustrate in the preceding chapter while discussing the enhanced value of independent music subcultural capital after the January Revolution. Bourdieu claims "The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art"(1993, p.35). Luka Blues' "Hashrab Hashish" was popularized through social media and never received the sort of professional criticism Bourdieu is addressing. Nevertheless exposure to the wide range of online listeners who liked and kept on sharing the song intrigued by its controversial content created a discourse around Luka Blue. Whereas large attendance of the show as well as audiences' vigorous participation demonstrated the value associated with "Hashrab Hashish" gained through collective recognition and appreciation of the song. CJC also recognized its value by inviting the artists to hold their debut performance at the venue and by associating its Alt Tuesday concept with the ideas of

rebellion against social norms expressed by the singer. This is also where the second argument made by Bourdieu becomes relevant to the discussion of the commercial stages on which independent music artists showcase their art. CJC with its long history of involvement in the Cairean music scene along with the rest of the above mentioned venues featuring live music performances, also plays a significant role in the production of the independent music value. Bourdieu suggests that the material production of art, Luka Blues' "Hashrab Hasish" song, creates its value alongside "critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such"(1993, p.37). Live music venues are indispensable to the vigorous and progressive development of the independent music scene. Recognition and exposure of the independent artists offered by these venues mutually benefits the artists, the locale and subcultural members therefore illustrating the participation of multiple agents involved in the field of cultural production.

Café Stages

After the January Revolution few of the newly established cafes opened up their locales to independent music performances. Cafes such as 3elbt Alwan (Box of Colors), Balcony and The Room begin to host a range of independent music concerts. Developing a new café concept these places also offer daily activities, variety of workshops, movie screenings and numerous other special events along with performances by Egyptian independent music artists. Usually they charge a cover fee per performance and begin the musical acts much earlier in the evening than the clubs and bars. The above mentioned cafes accommodate their entertainment schedule to the younger audiences, which also in comparison to the nightlife locales congregate a larger number of the subcultural crowd. They also do not serve alcohol and consequently don't need to implement age policy allowing for a largely diversified audience.

Corporate Events Stages

International and local companies' involvement with the Egyptian music scene is not a new phenomenon. Major corporations such as Coca Cola and Phillip Morris have already sponsored Egyptian rock concerts in the 90s³¹ and Vodafone, an international phone company,

³¹ Interview with Amr Hefny

was one of the main financial backers of the already mentioned S.O.S. festival³² Attempts at incorporation of the independent music subculture occur everywhere in the world and as I have already mentioned in the first chapter, the aim is to target new clientele associated with assumed nature of specific subcultural group as well as production of positive image of particular company by promoting undiscovered artists (Shipley, 2003, p.2). With the increased number of audience and wider exposure following the January Revolution, independent music naturally caught the attention of many developing businesses as well as of the already established corporations, which in the attempt to refresh their image in accordance with the changing political landscape resulted to incorporation of various cultural practices within their new marketing strategies. Independent music artists were now offered a chance to perform at the new product activation events as well as larger music concerts indirectly promoting tobacco brands during such festivals as London Sound (BAT) and El Fusion (PMI). International corporations such as H&M and Microsoft showcased West El Balad and Massr Egbari during the launch of a new store branch and employee appreciation day while local restaurants such as Ted's and Edwards opened up their new establishments to the rockabilly sounds of the Cadillacs and few other independent music bands. With time Cairokee, the sound of the Revolution, became the face of Coca Cola billboard adds lighting up the 6th of October Bridge. Pepsi adopted West El Balad and Massar Egbari was featured in the Close Up toothpaste TV commercial. Numerous other independent bands begin to perform at corporate events which offered them additional income and exposure to new audiences.

In 2014 CJC Agency organized a series of events for PMI (Phillip Morris International) tobacco company responsible for cigarette brands such as Marlboro, Merrit and L&M. The events entitled "El Fusion Sama3na Maziktak" ("Let Us Hear Your Music") aimed at enforcing new brand identity and offer PMI an opportunity for consumer engagement among independent music listeners attending live music performances. At the same time CJC Agency was presented with an opportunity to showcase local talents along with the more popular independent bands from the MENA region. Tobacco companies are heavily restricted in their advertisement opportunities consequently resulting to channeling of their marketing budget to exclusivity deals with venues and branded events where they rely on consumer engagement. Following the disastrous attack on the metal scene in the 1997 tobacco companies stopped sponsoring live music events and with time reshuffled their focus onto the DJ commercial culture, which took over the Cairean music scene for many consecutive years. With the

³² Interview with Alexander Rizk

emergent popularity of independent bands such as Cairokee, Massar Egbari and Wust El Balad in the post January Revolution Cairo, PMI noticed sufficient potential in the independent music subculture, which resulted in El Fusion concerts as a pre-run trial campaign for the main event Sama3na Maziktak corresponding with PMIs “Don’t be a Maybe” campaign. “Don’t be a Maybe” was initiated by PMIs global marketing department to be executed by the numerous branches located in various countries. Besides steering significant attention with its rather puzzling name, the campaign aimed at challenging and enabling the consumers to take risks and fulfill their ambitions. PMI aspiration was to refresh the image of the brand among independent music followers and mobilize connotations of affect (Baudrillard, 1968) embedded within the subculture. The image of the lone, rugged and masculine cowboy associated with Marlboro brand was now outdated. According to PMI market research individuals between age 18 and 22 develop loyalty to a particular cigarette brand. Therefore the new global marketing strategy aimed to appeal to the contemporary youth who according to the market investigations presently values and embodies ideas of uniqueness, originality and rejection of standardized norms. In Egypt such type of youth belonged to the independent music subculture and consequently became the target of the new campaign. El Fusion concerts took place in Cairo, Alexandria and Mansoura, however the project never reached its final event Sama3na Maziktak due to PMIs internal divisions and shift of interest from independent music to the world of Cairean fashion. As I have already suggested the political climate of the country may not have been most welcoming to the corporate promotion of connotations implied by the local independent music scene.

Concert Hall Stages

Until very recently Music Tent served as the only commercial concert hall in Cairo featuring independent music artists. Located in the New Cairo district Music Tent was literally a big tent designed to host large music concerts, theatrical plays and other types of stage performances. Independent music artists such as Hawidro, HOH and Sharmoofers had an opportunity to perform on Music Tent’s stage before the final closure of the venue at the end of 2015 due to the lack of sufficient income that could sustain its existence. Shutting down of this first of its kind concert hall deprived independent music artists of a suitable venue with a good quality equipment and big enough of a space to host large number of audience. At this point there are no other such venues in Cairo and event organizers resort to the rental of spaces such as Greek Campus and on rare occasions AUC Falaki and Qasr El Nil Theaters. I choose

to make a note of the Music Tent because during the time of my fieldwork the venue was still open.

Music Studios Stages

After the Revolution rehearsal and recording studios such as The MIX, EPIC 101 and Vibe Developing Arts opened up in various districts of Cairo. They joined an already established pool of music studios catering specifically to the independent music artists. Dedicated to the technical requirements of independent musicians and respectful of their financial realities, these new studios offered artists a chance to practice and record all types of independent music genres while at the same time allowing them an opportunity to share this specific musical environment as well as prospects for engagement with other artists. One of the newly established studios Vibe Developing Arts puts an additional effort into development of the local independent scene by organizing workshops, providing different types of music courses and most importantly organizing small events showcasing some of the local independent music talents. Very often these are acoustic performances on a rather small stage within an intimate setting³³ nevertheless they play a significant role for musicians and audiences who are both given the chance to showcase and appreciate the art which first came to life in the surrounding rehearsal spaces. 100 Copies situated in Downtown Cairo is a record label, which also provides rehearsal space, workshops and small stage where occasionally independent music acts take place. The performance platform offered by 100 Copies gives artists an opportunity to organize album launch parties and experimental electronic music concerts whose contributors and followers are frequently associated with the label.

Enraged First Album Launch Party at Vibe

AUC colleague Wael Al-Soukkary who is also a guitarist, vocalist and a leader of an metal band Enraged, invited me to the listening party of Jeremiad, the first album independently released by the band. The event took place at Vibe Developing Arts and it gave me a first time opportunity to visit the already popular music studio. While making my way up the stairs I could already sense the atmosphere so common among music studios. Few artists leaving the place were trying to make their way pass me in a narrow corridor while carrying their guitar cases. I entered the lobby area of the studios where artists hang out on the couches spread around the space and by a high table area where drinks can be purchased and smoking

³³ Interview with Ammar Dajani

cigarettes is allowed. I ask about Wael and I am directed to one of the bigger rehearsal rooms where after exchanging greetings I am introduced to the rest of the band. Musicians are still setting up and I observe their typical functions such as tuning their instruments and tiptoeing around the pedals and cables spread all over the floor. This nonchalant yet careful motion with which they handle all of the equipment and wiring always draws my attention within studio or stage performance settings. I meet Wael's wife Rousha who is also the female vocalist of Enraged and I take a seat on one of the chairs lining up the wall. All other attendees also settle themselves in different spots around the room while Wael introduces his band. He gives us a brief overview of the album and the story line connecting all of the songs into a single tale of a character created by Wael.

I enjoy the repertoire; double basse drumming and more sensual sounds of keyboards which even though may appear as contrasting always create this beautiful ambience and energy that I find so very attractive in many forms of metal music. Once the five album tracks are finished the band receives an ovation from the audience and some of the more experienced individuals such the leader of metal band Anarchy provides Enraged with some positive feedback. Following, a news reporter also attending the event opens up a discussion on present state of the metal music scene in Egypt in consideration of its rather troublesome past. In 1997 Egyptian metal fans suffered from accusation of Satanic practices initiated by the national media and reacted upon by the State who exploited the opportunity to redirect national attention from its problematic engagement with Muslim Brotherhood towards saving Egyptian youth from demoralization and abandonment of religious believes³⁴. Many fans and musicians were arrested and for a long time afterwards metal concerts in Cairo seized to exist. However, with the perseverance and dedication of metal musicians and renewed opportunity to perform at one of the local venues, late 2000s witnessed a slow come back of metal. Al Sawy Culture Wheel, discussed in detail on following pages, opened up its doors to metal music artists under certain conditions such as censorship of lyrics, verbal decency and appropriate behavior during performances. This set up allowed metal musicians a chance to perform without worrying about any potential consequences and misunderstandings of their art form.

Metal artists attending Enrage album listening party share with the reporter their present struggles through which they hope to improve the distorted image of metal and clarify practices, such as mash pit and head banging, which in the past were interpreted as satanic rituals. The event reached its end and we all move outside of the rehearsal room to the

³⁴ Interview with Amr Hefny, March 2015

smoking area of the lobby. I take a note of the pin board featuring lots of photographs with numerous musicians hanging out at the Vibe and engage in a conversation with some of the musicians I met for the first time during this event. We talk briefly about my research and they all seem willing to help by sharing with me their thoughts on the independent music scene in Cairo.

Egyptian metal and rock artists very often refer to the troubling past of the 90s and to the negative connotations applied to metal, which they are persistently trying to address and modify. As a matter of fact all of the interlocutors in this research, representing diverse positions within the field of independent music subculture, were quite familiar with the accusations of blasphemy and Satanism supposedly practiced by metal artists and fans in the 90s. To the Cairean independent music environment the governments' crackdown on the metal scene symbolized the manipulative power of the State capable to utilize the general misunderstanding and unfamiliarity with the genre by majority of Egyptian population, in order to fulfill its own agenda³⁵. In "Noise and Its Formless Shadow"(2013) Benjamin Harbert points out "The linking of anti-Islamic practice, exemplified as Satanism, to popular music described a type of poison injected into Egypt through the vehicle of non-Egyptian culture"(p.234) exemplifying a tactic which resurfaced most recently after an extreme metal performance in Downtown Cairo took place. While I cannot elaborate on the latest Satanism accusations I would like to point out that the rhetoric used in the 90s was very much repeated in early 2016, although luckily, without equally serious consequences but on the contrary offering metal artists an opportunity to defend their art and make slight attempts at correcting the common misconceptions.

Amr Hefny, musician and owner of Ganoub Studio in Nasr City, was one of the unlucky metal heads who ended up in jail during the 90s crackdown. Since all of the rock and metal events have stopped Amr determined to continue work in the field of music after his release, decided to set up a rehearsal studio where artists could continue practicing their music and socialize during jamming sessions. The studio was opened in 1998 and attracted a large number of musicians. According to Hefny "Ganoub was a heaven for metal heads and independent music artists, owner was one of us, 'ex-satanist', and it was a good place to hang out and meet other musicians. The studio at the time was still shitty but had a great vibe."³⁶ By early 2000s Hefny was able to acquire basic recording equipment and transform the rehearsal

³⁵ Interview with Alexander Rizk, August 2015

³⁶ Interview with Amr Hefny, March 2015

space into a project (home) studio where independent artists could record their albums for reasonable prices. The already existing professional studios were largely dedicated to the mainstream music industry, had neither understanding nor interest in independent music and were simply too expensive for independently produced records. Consequently Ganoub project studio served as a primary location where Massar Egbari, Wust El Balad, Cairokee and Salalem, among numerous others, made their first recordings. Regardless of its basic resources or ‘shitty’ conditions Ganoub offered a common space for musicians to share and collaborate on various projects during a time where no other place offered an opportunity for such engagements. While “For each inhabitant, a place has unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places”(Rodman, 2003, p.208) the attractive ‘vibe’ at Ganoub studio where independent music artists felt welcomed, where their music was appreciated and where they could actually afford to record, presented a great chance for the resurgence of metal as well as other independent music genres. Contrary to Vibe Studio, Ganoub in its rather small space had no capacity to stage live music performances, nevertheless at certain point in time it played a significant role in the revival of the independent music scene in Cairo.

Cultural ‘Independent’ Stages

Cairo offers few stages operated by various cultural entities and available for independent music performances. Here again I would like to differentiate between two different types of cultural platforms. First, composed of small performance venues operated by the Egyptian non-profit and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Second platform is situated within occasional cultural events organized by different embassies, foreign NGOs and cultural centers based in Cairo. The main commonalities between these platforms rest in their non profit oriented nature and work dedicated towards promotion of culture, both Egyptian and foreign in Egypt as well as abroad. The only State run cultural institution that very rarely showcases performances by independent music artists is The Cairo Opera House. With the most recent launch of #ThisisEgypt the initiative aiming to attract tourist back to Cairo and the resort areas of Sinai, some of the music event organizers were hopeful about obtaining possible support for music events from the Ministry of Culture along with Ministry of Tourism struggling to rebuild one of the most significant sources of national income. As I have already pointed out in the first chapter, the most recent amendments to the NGO law in Egypt inflicted a significant impact on the dynamics of many organizations involved in the cultural and social projects. Genina Theater operated by Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafi suffered from a largely reduced performance schedule after the temporary shut down of the NGO. Prior to

and following the January Revolution Genina Theater was very active, presenting variety of music events very often featuring independent music acts. Egyptian independent metal music artists were given an opportunity to schedule competition performances at Genina. Fathy Salama along with other musicians would organize numerous workshops and bands such as Hawidro and Wust El-Balad were always welcomed to perform on Genina's stage. Another platform that suffered from the new law regulations is Rawabet Theater which for the past few months has remained closed. Rawabet Theater was designed to support all sorts of alternative contemporary performing arts and independent music artists would frequently use this platform to showcase their work. Artists such as Machine Eat Man (MEM), Ramy Abadir, Enraged and Crescent organized their performances at Rawabet where affordable entry cover and central location in Downtown Cairo allowed different groups of audience to participate in electronic and metal music concerts. Darb 1718 is another NGO offering its stage to independent music performances although event organizers usually initiate these concerts and this particular location does not own required equipment, which has to be rented out before each performance. Nevertheless, Darb 1718 frequently welcomes performances of the independent music artists and offers them a stage from which they can share their music, gain more exposure and attract new audiences.

“Mixing Signals, Cairo” at Rawabet Theater

Rawabet Theater is located in a close proximity to the Townhouse Gallery situated in the Downtown area of Cairo and designed for independent contemporary performing arts including theatre, music and film. According to the brief website description of the venue, the English translation of the Arabic word ‘rawabet’ means ‘links’, term which also represents the main aspiration of the theater to serve as a space for the continuing interaction between various independent artists and audiences. The streets surrounding the Townhouse Gallery and Rawabet are crowded with diversity of people drinking coffee and smoking shisha at the numerous sidewalk cafes. “Mixing Signals, Cairo” event starts at 8pm and we are running a bit late.

At the entrance to the theater we pay an entry fee of 30LE per ticket. I take a notice of the nice quality of the actual tickets, which even though are rather small in size, still present the art work associated with one of the performing artist, the name of the event and musicians, the date and time of the event and the address as well as the logo of Townhouse gallery and Rawabet Theater. After frequently attending events where not much effort has been put into

the executive details, such small element as an informative entry ticket stands out and creates an impression that the organizers of the event are professional. Before the entry to the main hall we stop by a table with merchandise prepared for purchase. While three different artists are performing tonight only one of them, Machine Eat Man is prepared to sell his CDs, posters and cards. For a while now MEM is working with a visual artist Akram Fadl, who is designing musician's CD covers, framed posters and small post cards all available for purchase during tonight's show.

Friend of the artists who is also selling the merchandise verifies our tickets and we enter the performance hall where the event is taking place. The theater hall is small yet appropriate enough for the type of events it is meant to host. There are only about ten people inside the venue out of which three are tonight's performers. The stage set up is very nice. The backdrop shows the first image of the visual project, to be shown during MEM's performance. His equipment is set up in the middle of the stage, while on each side, slightly more in the background the synthesizers and other equipment used by the remaining two musicians is still being set up. The bleachers are open providing seats for the audience and I notice MEM talking to his friend. We come up to them and after small talk and introduction to his friend we begin to discuss the lack of audience, which does not seem to significantly increase even though the opening of the event is already delayed. MEM claims that the small attendance is due to their weak access to the adequate marketing tools, which could help to promote the event. He also complains that people are not very interested in his abstract electronic music and very often do not understand and don't relate to his experimental sounds. He thinks that the electronic music market in Egypt is still in its stages of infancy and his sound is not catchy enough for the local electronic music audience.

The projector is running and since this is not the first time I attend MEM's performance I recognize multiple images projected on the stage backdrop. As usually it takes a little bit of time to give in to the dark, heavy and a bit industrial sounds coming out of the speakers. The sound quality is not the best, so MEM stops his performance and informs the sound engineer that one of the speakers is not working properly. Once the issue is fixed, the show begins anew. Few more people walk in and take a seat at the bleachers. There is a very minimum amount of light directed at the artists and the overall cozy and comfortable atmosphere of the theater complements the intensity of the image and sound. The act takes about an hour and MEM receives a big applause from his small audience once his performance is completed.

I go outside to smoke a cigarette during the break when MEM moves his equipment of the stage, while Rami Abadir and Mostafa El-Sayed make sure that they are technically prepared for the show. I look at the buildings surrounding the area thinking about the contrasting mood of the inside and outside of the venue. Somehow this distinction reminds me of the industrial area of Brooklyn where I used to attend multiple black and death metal performances. The difference is not as much visual as sensual, rooted in the differing atmosphere between the performance inside the venue and the outside area in which the venue is situated.

The concert is about to start and Rami Abadir introduces himself and Mostafa as a collaborative act arranged for tonight's show. I am impressed with their visuals designed by a company whose name slipped my mind. The abstract images are colorful and lively, significantly different from those we have watched during MEMs' performance. The music is much more upbeat and cheerful constructing a very different atmosphere inside the theater. However, both of these live electronic music performances significantly differ from other concerts, mainly due to the minimum engagement of the audience with the performing artists concentrated on their synthesizers and individual journeys of the listeners focused on the visuals enhanced by the music. Everyone in the audience is sitting down and quietly watching the show.

Few months after the "Mixed Signals, Cairo" show I talked to MEM about his experience performing at Rawabet Theater. MEM appreciates the convenient location of the venue and how it is always easy for him to schedule a performance. Rawabet does not operate in accordance to a monthly set schedule therefore allowing the artists flexibility in booking the location according to their preferences. Most importantly the fairly large stage presents an opportunity for a more creative and aesthetically pleasant set up appreciated by both the performers and the audience. The bleachers can be also conveniently open or closed depending on the type of the show while the backdrop provides a great space for projection of images, which play quite significant role in MEMs concerts. Unfortunately performing in Rawabet requires artists to organize their own complete backline unavailable at the venue, which can be fairly costly and not all independent musicians would be able to rent out the necessary monitors, microphones, guitar amps etc. This was the only drawback of Rawabet pointed out by the artist.

MEM found my personal comparison of the contrast between the indoor space and the outdoor area similar to his experience of one of the venues he performed at during the trip to

the United States³⁷. However, he also pointed out that this reflection was largely influenced by my question rather than an instant impression he would experience while visiting Rawabet. According to Bourdieu's theory of practice explored by the study of anthropology and space "Because social practice activates spatial meanings, they are not fixed in space, but are invoked by actors, men and women, who bring their own discursive knowledge and strategic intentions to the interpretation of spatial meanings."(Low, 2003, pg.22) My comparison and MEMs reflection was very much a product of our mutual experience of similar venues visited in the United States. Nevertheless the sense of familiarity embedded in the inside/outside contradiction was ignited by the memory of similar place, possibly working under similar economic conditions and catering to comparable type of audience, an observation which will be further addressed in the following chapter.

Al Sawy Cultural Center or simply Al-Saqia (Cultural Wheel) is a non profit organization, which maintains itself by revenues from ticket and merchandise sales as well as according Nagla Rizk's research "The Al-Sawy Culture Center's sustainability depends on the renewed support of sponsors"(2010, p.484) who at the moment represent such major companies as Pepsi, Juhayna, CIB and TE Data among numerous others. Al-Saqia hosts multitude of independent music concerts and offers its stage to all types of new and upcoming bands without giving much regard to their prior performance experience and larger exposure. This perspective although very helpful in preserving the life of the independent music scene and supporting young artists has been also criticized by many musicians involved in the local scene. According to many interlocutors allowing amateurish artists a chance to perform breeds a culture of inadequately skilled musicians and misinformed audiences. Underdeveloped bands that performed at Al-Saqia and for the first time experienced professional stage performance very often would implement less effort into mastering their skill and into staging subsequent shows with higher standards. Such bands consider themselves qualified enough for bigger shows and other venues after single performance at Al-Saqia. While setting up their monthly entertainment schedule Cairo Jazz Club Agency team very often is faced with a band or an artist who refuses to audition and frequently finds such requirements insulting despite the fact that they have not perform anywhere beyond Al-Saqia.³⁸ Many consider Soundcloud recordings as the best sample of their musical capabilities and completely disregard the significant impact of a live performance. Consequently while Al-Saqia presents a great

³⁷ Interview with MEM, August 2015

³⁸ Interview with Alexander Rizk

platform for new independent music artists to share their work and offers them an opportunity to experience stage performance many musicians suggest that providing a professional feedback after each debuting act is necessary and would further benefit the advance of the independent music scene in Cairo. Al-Saqia's cultural center status prevents Music Syndicate from interference while at the same time the censorship of the lyrical content implemented by the venue creates an image of a controlled space respectful of the law and supportive of social norms. This is the space where Egyptian metal could resurface after the 90s trauma and once again enter the stage and perform in front of its undefeated audience.

“Nader Sadek: In the Flesh” at Al Sawy Cultural Center

During my short phone call conversation with MEM I am reminded about tonight's metal concert at Culture Wheel. He points out that although he does not know the work of the performing artist he is aware of the supposed guest appearance of Attila one of the vocalist working with Mayhem, one of the first Norwegian black metal bands who shaped this music genre in the early 90s. This a rather exciting opportunity considering that prior to this event none of the black metal icons performed in Egypt. I purchase my 50LE ticket on Al Saqia's website and set out to see the performance.

The space between the mosque and the entry to Al-Saqia is crawling with metal fans and I am infatuated by this contrast. Black is the dominating color of the wardrobe and I comfortably fit right in. Metal fans are wearing bands t-shirts, a lot of the guys have long hair and there are some 'gothic' girls finishing up their cigarettes and moving on to the outdoor area right in front of the Nile and next to the River Hall. I keep observing Egyptian metal fans wondering where are they all hiding on the everyday basis as it is rare for me to see them wondering around Zamalek, Downtown or any other areas of the city. The opening act is already in progress so I text back Stanislaw who is also attending tonight's performance, and announce my arrival. We bump into each other at the entry to the hall and Stanislaw goes back inside with me to see Mephostophilis, Egyptian independent death metal band. The hall is half full, or half empty, which is quite usual during metal concerts in Cairo. The drummer is located in the very front of the stage with his back to the audience, which is a rather unusual set up for a live performance. I assume this inverted drum set up is initiated by the headlining band whose leader Nader Sadek, is also known for his art installations and other creative endeavors. The stage looks beautiful. It is decorated with tree branches positioned on each

side of the stage as well as hanging off of a big, round, medieval style chandelier located above the center of the stage. There are also lights placed on the chandelier and the whole set up reminds me of a melancholic winter landscape. The crowd seems to be enjoying the show and Mephostophilis sounds very good although apparently I arrive at the very end of their show. They play their last song, the lights are switched back on motivating listeners to go back outdoors.

Stanislaw and I take a seat at one of the outdoor benches and we talk a bit about our musical tastes before we are approached by two guys who I immediately recognize as the guitarist and leading vocalist of the famous Egyptian independent death metal band Crescent. The band just came back from Norway where they performed at Inferno Metal Festival and had an opportunity to meet a lot of renowned black and death metal artists. I was actually following their endeavors on Crescent's Facebook page where their regular posts kept their home fan base updated and proud. I have been familiar with Crescent's music for a while now being very much impressed with the quality of their performances and actual recordings. In May 2014, they won a first place at the battle of the bands held at the Ghenina Theater, which granted them entry to perform in the band competition at one of the biggest and best known Wacken Metal Festival in Germany. They also performed at the most recent Metal Blast Festival held in Culture Wheel where also Polish embassy presented one of the emerging Polish metal bands called Materia.

The two artists know Stanislaw, as many other local metal bands do, mainly because of his active support of the Cairean metal scene. They tell us about meeting Negral, Polish black metal artist and a leader of Behemoth, one of presently most successful worldwide black metal bands. I am was always interested in Negral's open criticism of Roman Catholic Church authority influencing socio-political landscape of Poland. Black metal has been always associated with Satanism and Behemoth's concerts are usually surrounded with controversy. Black metal music genre originated in Norway, initiated by a small group of individuals making frequent lyrical references to the figure of Satan who in this context tends to symbolize rebellion and active opposition to the dominating rules, laws, and authority of the Catholic Church. According to Gry Mork, scholar of metal music and Satanism "In general a member of the black metal scene may be seen as an example of the late-modern human being who wants to perceive, think and live on their own terms, and who trusts their own experiences instead of institutionally based, lifeless dogmas."(2011, p.126) While in the past some artists express their rebellion against hegemonic system in drastic church arsons

majority of black metal performers do not affiliate themselves with the so-called Church of Satan and express their social-political dissatisfactions through incorporation of grotesque and mythological images within the lyrical content of their songs. In few rather extreme cases a small number of churches located on the grounds of former Norwegian pagan sites, were burned down by black metal fans and for a certain period of time the music genre suffered bad reputation. In spite of this, with time and greater exposure to the black metal bands, which regardless of the troublesome associations only begin to grow in numbers taking a hold of Scandinavian, European and finally North American music markets, the genre was slowly accepted and bands such as Ulver were commissioned to compose and perform the Mass at the National Opera House in cooperation with the Arctic Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra while Satyricon, another well known black metal group, performed alongside the Norwegian National Opera. Most recently Black and Death metal has been largely popularized in South American, Asian and Middle Eastern music markets, initiating another set of troublesome incidents reflective of the socio-political environments within which its listeners are situated. As I already mentioned Egyptian independent metal artists were not spared accusations of blasphemous practices, which not only stagnated the metal scene for few years but also created misconceptions about its participants.

The conversation with Crescents' musicians continues as we joke around about having Stanislaw invite Behemoth to perform at next Metal Blast. I see people hanging out right on the banks of the Nile where, when if lucky enough, one can actually get away with smoking a cigarette at this smoke free venue. None of the faces look familiar. Besides Stanislaw and Crescent I do not see any other metal artists or fans I would actually know in person. Nader Sadek show is about to start so we go back inside the venue where the only subtle light is directed on the stage while Attila's opens up the performance with his deep sounding voice engaged in meditative chanting. After few minutes the rest of the band joins Attila on stage and the calm atmosphere of the chanting is interrupted by the growling sounds of the vocalist and heavy sounds of the guitars. The atmosphere throughout the show is great. Most of the audience is head banging and small mosh pit circles are sporadically erupting in front of the stage. Surprisingly nobody from Al Saqias' event coordinators intervenes by trying to break off the mosh pits, as it was frequently the case during previous shows. I am glad to see Egyptian metal fans fully engaged in this traditional metal show experience, wondering at the same time about all the anger and anxiety they must be shedding off in this mosh pit space, which to many 'outsiders' seems to be filled with meaningless aggression and unnecessary

destruction. I also appreciate the smooth flow of the concert without unnecessary speeches, long breaks between songs or other interruptions that very often obliterated the atmosphere created by music. From my perspective, which is largely embedded in the Western experience of the metal scene in Poland and in the United States, this is one of the best metal events I have attended this far in Cairo. Bands such as Crescent, Scarab, Nader Sadek and others who performed internationally demonstrate confident and professional stage charisma, which affects their audiences and offers a great concert experience. Musicians' stage presence and interaction with the listeners is equally important to the sound quality and the actual music output. Stanislaw has to leave while I decide to stay until the end of the show mesmerized by the amazing energy encompassing the River Hall.

Benjamin Harbert in the article "Noise and Its Formless Shadows"(2013) describes his experience of metal concert held in 2006 on the outskirts of Cairo "The rebellion typically associated with metal was muted. The fans self-policed one another. When the mosh pits got too violent, the fans broke people up and calmed them down. It was a challenge to spot a bottle of Stella or Heineken. Nowhere was there a whiff of hashish. Occasionally, a contingent of fans would go behind a building to pray. I wondered: was the reemergent metal underground going to remain soft in the shadow of the 1997 arrests?"(2013, p.240). Harbert's observation of the uncommon practices at the event aligns with my excitement at the sight of mosh pit, a visible characteristic of a metal show ambiance frequently experienced abroad. Our observations of the Cairean metal shows are evidently partial and filled with specific expectations. Harbert expresses his understanding of this particular metal show dynamic by saying that "Egyptian prisons do not make for exciting stories, only tragic ones. I wondered why anyone post-arrests risks so much to play metal."(2013, p.240), while I would like to focus on the notions of transgression and mundanity within metal scene addressed in the work of Keith Kahn Harris(2004) and relevant to the understanding of metal concert experience in Cairo.

According to Harris metal, and all other types of music offer the possibility of transgression (2004, p.110), which may create extreme actions such as the church arson in Norway which almost destroyed developing black metal scene. However the mundane, 'everyday' practices of some of the black metal artists focused on creating professional labels and quality recordings prevented the transgression from overpowering mundanity therefore guaranteeing the continuation of the scene during its biggest struggle to survive. The transgression was still experienced within the songs, associated imagery and during

performances but the mundane ‘everyday’ experience of the scene by its members (Harris, 2004) who work in the metal music industry as well as in other fields, have families and range of other hobbies, would keep the trajectories of the metal scene in balance. Consequently keeping in mind the problematic position of metal music in Egypt the transgression already evident in metal music might be possibly balanced by prevention of mosh pit and acceptance of prayer during the show. The emphasis on mundane characteristic, the insistence on ‘normal’ behavior, absence of alcohol and drugs during shows may present metal artists and fans with a way to avoid the reemergence of negative connotations that almost destroyed the scene in the 90s.

The final stage on which independent music artists are often invited to perform is not set in any specific location but on the contrary, just as in the case of corporate concerts it travels through events organized by numerous embassies and foreign cultural centers. Centers such as British Council, French Cultural Center, Austrian Cultural Forum and Goethe Institute are few among many other foreign organizations involved in the cultural and social life of the city. Events organized by these institutions are financially supported by their governments and dedicated towards cultural dialog and social awareness. Frequently independent music artists apply for a variety of grants offered by these cultural centers and participate in workshops organized by them in cooperation with professional Egyptian or foreign musicians. Embassies who are able to allocate budgets dedicated to cultural affairs very often support concerts and festivals featuring local and foreign musicians. While the main goal of such institutions is to promote their representative cultures in Egypt a number of them such as Polish embassy supports Egyptian metal scene while embassies of Denmark and Netherlands are helping to finance some of the performances taking place during Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF). Many of these cultural centers and embassies cooperate with Egyptian commercial entities involved in the independent music scene. British Council organized concerts and workshops in cooperation with 100 Copies, GIZ collaborated with Cairo Jazz Club Agency, while D-CAF is an initiative of Al-Ismaelia company aiming to transform Downtown Cairo into a culture center.

The above described performance stages are most active within the independent music scene yet they do not present an exclusive list of all possible avenues through which independent musicians can showcase their work, earn income and gain exposure. Independent music concerts at Fel Park events, most recent Musix Expo, El Nahda Jesuit Center, Sofar and multiplicity of sporadic individual initiatives, present musicians with a range of opportunities

to perform. It is also important to note that these activities and stages became more numerous and accessible to the independent musicians after the January Revolution when independent music gain on significance and wider recognition. Independent music artists are also hired to play their music during weddings and privately organized parties. Some of them work as session musicians recording tracks for Arabic pop stars, TV commercials, locally produced movies and TV series, an employment most desirable due to the significant income offered by the mainstream music sector. Whenever opportunities arise some of the independent musicians with higher level of institutional cultural capital are hired by popular Arabic stars to perform during their shows in Egypt as well as abroad. I will elaborate on this subject further in the following chapter, however I find it necessary to mention at this point in reference to the local work prospects independent musicians are presented with.

Conclusion

Mapping of the different performance stages available to the Cairean independent music artists brought to surface the significant involvement of the commercial sector within the continuously developing infrastructure of the independent music scene. In many different ways live music venues, cafes and music studios are actively engaged with the independent music scene while major corporations are involved in the sponsorship of events presenting independent music artists. Essentials such as stage set up, backline equipment, lights, marketing of the event, location and all the necessary permits require significant funding most often provided by international and local companies in exchange for visibility and customer engagement during the event. Local expertise of the commercial entities such as 100 Copies, CJC Agency, Vibe Studios, working in the independent music field are very often welcomed by national and foreign NGOs as well as international institutions who relay on the experience of the business sector while setting up an event involving independent music acts reflecting what is to be known as third sector economy. The third sector market largely prevalent in the neoliberal economy “includes voluntary and community organizations, charities, faith groups, social enterprises, cooperatives, and mutuals both large and small”(Isserman, 2013, p.120), which fulfill many of the roles and practices that not long ago were realized exclusively through governmental initiatives. Collaborations between commercial and cultural entities in Egypt provide opportunities for furthering the development of the independent music scene without the direct involvement nor support of the state.

As I have previously mentioned Bourdieu suggests that alongside material production of art by the artists other varying agents within the field of cultural production shape the value of art as well as its progressive expansion and the “balance of forces between social agents who have entirely real interests in the different possibilities available to them as stakes and who deploy every sort of strategy to make one set or the other prevail”(1993, p.34) creates a dynamic environment where interlace of commercial competition, philanthropic inclinations and appreciation of independent music validates its value. Agents produce consumers of art, and therefore each performance taking place at the above described stages exhibits potential to acquire new followers convinced of the artistic value presented by a particular band or musician. While independent music artists rightfully claim their independence from mainstream music industry, their position within the market is undisputable. Independent music bands and artists gain value and visibility by participating in culturally and commercially oriented events. Accordingly notions of ‘selling out’ that local independent bands frequently are being accused off after participating in TV commercials and corporate events, do not make sense within constrains of the neoliberal economy and politics governing Egypt. Raymond Williams suggest, “Elements of emergence may indeed be incorporated, but just as often the incorporated forms are merely facsimiles of the genuinely emergent cultural practices.”(1977, p.126), therefore what remains important is that bands such as Massar Egbari, Wust El-Balad and Cairokee are still producing their albums independently, retain artistic freedom within their newest compositions, remain accessible to audiences representing wide rage of socio-economic backgrounds while possibly at the same time “finding new forms or adaptation of form”(1977, p.126) of the emergent independent music scene within the local music market. I suggest that enhanced visibility of some of these bands does not indicate termination of their subcultural belonging to the independent music scene, as it was suggested by some of the interlocutors in the preceding chapter, but that it rather presents the economical realities within which they are being situated.

Chapter Four: Traveling Sounds

Introduction

Some time ago I was renewing my Polish passport at the Polish Embassy in Cairo. While filling out the necessary paperwork I was asked to provide permanent address from where my expired passport was acquired. Since I migrated from Poland over twenty years ago and left the United States about eight years ago this ordinary question became rather problematic as I realized that there is no clear answer to the actual location of my permanent address. It could be my old home address in Poland where I was raised and where my parents are presently residing, it could be my friends' home address in the United States where my jury duty requests are continuously posted, or it could be my present home in Egypt where I receive my bank statements and all other mail relevant to the typical functioning in a society. Additionally, I begin to recall statements made by friends I've met in Egypt pointing out that I am not really Polish, as the other Polish individuals they have met, nor truly American but surely Americanized, adding jokingly that after years of living in Egypt most likely I must be also a little bit Egyptianized. While I am certainly aware that my story is not in any way unique in the largely globalized world, I choose to mention it at this point because the transnational experiences and networks I am constantly participating in, strongly affected my relationship to the Egyptian independent artists traveling abroad as well as my own perspective evident in the final pages of this work, on the stereotypical imposition inflicted on us by the man made borders. Questioning the possible influences of my multiple residencies led me to reflect on how those similar transnational experiences of the Egyptian artists may manipulate foreign audiences expectations and perceptions of the Egyptian independent music. Additionally followed by an inquiry into how transnationalism may exert impact on the actual local music production.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Cairo presents variety of stages where independent music can be performed. Since the January Revolution local independent music artists gained wider recognition and the increased value of independent music subcultural capital presented new range of opportunities utilized by musicians to obtain recognition and to generate feasible income. At the same time independent music artists express interest in showcasing their work outside of Egypt where novel experience and exposure to diversity of audience could provide them with such benefits as further work opportunities, occasions for collaboration on new projects and social networking, remittances, artistic growth and

development as well as an active participation in and better understanding of the music industry. These are only few among many other reasons for which Egyptian as well as foreign independent music artists visiting Egypt choose to participate in the transnational flows resulting in a web of networks further enhanced by contemporary cyberspace activities.

In the below discussion of transnational practices and their subsequent impact on the Egyptian independent music artists, the notion of transnationalism is understood to indicate “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states”(Vertovec, 2004, p.1). In the following paragraphs I present how these linkages are expressed among Cairean independent musicians and supporting entities. Following the work of Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof I employ their multi-dimensional mapping where movements are described with the help of hub metaphor “which gives us both a horizontal perspective of channels of movements and their clustering at particularly salient points, as well as vertical perspective of these clusters, where people, places, and institutions relate top-down as well as bottom-up in particular potent ways.”(2011, p.6) The human, spatial, institutional and accidental hubs presented in this work provide a basic infrastructure based on which addressed independent music artists shape their music production along with the transnational networks.

Human Hub

Kiwan and Meinhof open up their discussion of transnational hubs with the notion of human hubs where significant individuals “are the main agents who provide the focus for everyone in the network and it is they who know and are known by everyone, even though the other members of the network will not all be familiar with one another”(2011, p.4). While in the process of my research and general familiarity with the local music scene I did not learn about a solitary individual serving as a reference point when transnational networks are concerned, several musicians and cultural activists are often initiating and organizing festivals and events held in Cairo. With the help of personally constituted transnational connections established during their travels abroad or even by basic socializing on musically relevant social media outlets these individuals open up avenues for transnational interaction and resemble the notion of ‘human hub’ identified by the authors.

MEM in the previously described Mixing Signals: Cairo event was aspiring to connect the network of events he participated in while in the United States with additional branch based in Cairo. Mixing Signals was a concept that traveled through different American cities

showcasing upcoming electronic independent music acts while constructing a network between artists, listeners and venues across multiple states. MEM acquired organizers permission to develop Mixing Signals in Cairo, however, as previously noted the event was not very successful. Nader Sadek is also presently trying to situate Egypt as the Middle Eastern capital of extreme metal. While promoting his own band Nader Sadek: In the Flesh, composed of Egyptian and foreign artists Nader is also inviting international acts for locally organized concerts. Nader's aims to monopolize the local metal scene were met with high level of contempt as well as support depending on agents' position within the metal music field. However the artist is still hoping to introduce new foreign acts to the local independent metal scene hoping that Egyptian metal artists will be more motivated to practice their art and take their musical career more seriously³⁹. At the same time Nader is providing a chance for metal listeners who are unable to attend metal shows abroad to see their favorite bands in their home country. Amro Salah who is the organizer of the popular Cairo Jazz Festival presents another example of 'human hub'. Since 2009 with the support of numerous participating embassies Salah invites to Cairo international Jazz musicians who along with the Egyptian Jazz bands entertain Cairean audience for three consecutive days.

Spatial Hub

Cairo is a spatial hub where resident artists and those arriving from other Egyptian governorates engage in translocal and transnational practices. In the preceding chapter I described some of the cultural and commercial stages available to the independent music artists by offering them work prospects, exposure and potential for career developments. Consequently while cities of Alexandria and Mansoura also figure on the national map of independent music and gave us such bands as Massar Egbari, Mascara and Luka Blue, most of the local independent music infrastructure is concentrated in the Egyptian metropolis, recognized as a place of opportunities for musicians. According to Andrew Hammonds' work on popular culture, Cairo is also a career starting place for non-Egyptian nationals representing various Arab countries, who are hoping to achieve international recognition. Author claims that "Some Lebanese stars are producing their albums in Beirut again, but those with big ambitions go to Cairo to market their work" (2007, p.174). The capitol city serves as a spatial hub to both independent and mainstream artists, where constant interaction between national and foreign organizations and individual agents presents potential for multi-sited

³⁹ Interview with Nader Sadek, May 2015

exposure. In their discussion regarding capital cities Kiwan and Meinhof argue “These cities through their infrastructure and the concentration of ‘human’ and ‘institutional hubs’ within them can offer national recognition to aspiring musicians, function as hub for translocal touring and offer the potential to access the national and transnational music industry, and act as international jumping board and nodes for returnees”(2011, p.5). Cairo’s vibrant cultural life where most of the musically involved individuals, venues, cultural centers and NGOs are situated along with the capitals’ central position within Egyptian music industry clearly resembles the idea of ‘spatial hub’ described by Meinhof and Kiwan(2011).

Nada El Shazly: Transnational at Home

During our discussion Nada El Shazly made an interesting point about her experience of transnationalism while describing development of her musical career in Cairo. While attending the German catholic school Nada begin to sing in choir. Following, she joined a punk rock band which provided her with an outlet to express personal difficulties she was dealing with at the time. While being in a punk band she continued her work with the school choir. Once the band split up Nada discovered the world of musicians who earned their living performing mostly jazz standards in hotels. This was the first time when she earned income out of music, however, dissatisfied with singing covers and yearning to perform her original compositions Nada decided to quit working at the hotels. While trying to develop her own music Nada realized that her experiences while performing in the choir, punk rock band, and singing multiple genres at the hotels, produced a sense of confusion where it was hard for her to decide which musical route to take in order to further develop her work. With an advise of a friend Nada created a band called Shourba (Soup) where she could mix all of the different influences and sing in Arabic and English. This new concept gave Nada a temporary solution, although she felt that Shourba offered her an expression of experience, the skill she gained through all the different encounters, rather than the sounds of her inner voice she was hoping to access and share with the world. Frustrated with Shourba, Nada made a decision to work on her own and she took a music production course focused on the electronic music genre. Her explorations of the electronic music sounds and techniques led her to develop a set she was able to perform with. After the first solo concert Nada felt more confident about this new direction while coming into realization that electronic music genre finally gives voice to her inner self. In Nada’s case all of the above described experiences and musical experiments took place in Egypt where the Cairean spatial hub granted her exposure to diverse musical styles. Singing simultaneously at the German school choir and punk rock band, followed by

performances in front of multinational hotel audience and finally mixture of genres and languages in Shourba demonstrates Nada's involvement with music styles from different parts of the world. Therefore by sharing with me the story of her musical career Nada was trying to illustrate how some of the independent music artist may experience transnational influences while actually never crossing the borders of their country.

Cyberspace: "The Whole World is Out There"

Cyberspace made the locally experienced transnational interactions described by Nada available to extensively diversified range of artists and audiences. Since early 2000s Egypt obtained widespread access to the Internet, which opened up new avenues for independent music artists to share their work and participate in transnational networks. According to Andy Bennet "Internet functions as a creative resource for young people in their symbolic negotiation of everyday life."(2004, p.168) In Cairo DIY independent metal music activities are largely supported by social networks made available through internet. Considering the fact that besides the occasional concerts, music studios and social gatherings among groups of friends Cairean metal artist do not enjoy a particular space designed specifically for metal fans to socialize. Cairo does not offer metal cafes or bars where artists and fans could regularly congregate and share their views on music or any communal matters while enjoying the ambience brought on by their favorite music and fellow listeners in a place that embraces and supports their subculture. Consequently they resort to social media activities where public group such as Metal Station 'Egypt' provide a platform on which international and local metal songs, events, albums reviews, relevant publications and any matters of concern are being shared by artists and supporters alike.

Previously mentioned Luka Blue was first recognized by the audience and largely popularized among independent music listeners through their visibility on social media. Sharmoofers reached their fame through youtube channels. Facebook, Soundcloud, YouTube, Dandin are only few among numerous other social media platforms where artists can share and promote their work, discover latest musical projects and acquire new skills through online learning material. Online communities such as Black Metal Nation, Egyptian Metal Scene and Arab Metal Society allow musicians and fans to socialize on the internet, discuss and share music tracks and give feed back to attended performances. Nazmi's youtube recordings viewed by Dutch band Fula's Call resulted in his performance with the band upon their arrival in Cairo. Mascara, all female metal group from Alexandria, gave an online acoustic live

streamed performance their fans could watch on wireless electronic devices from anywhere in the world.

Institutional Hub

Number of cultural and commercial institutions based in Cairo present independent music artists with multiple transnational opportunities while performing the role of institutional hubs. According to Kiwan and Meihof “A third parameter which links human and spatial hubs in a multi-layered way is provided by particular key institutions and organizations that either help organize or are themselves integrated into artists’ networks.”(2011, p. 6). Al Mawred al-Thaqafi supports projects initiated by independent music artists. The organization frequently provides funding for album recordings mixed abroad or towards musician’s participation in relevant workshops in Egypt or other parts of the MENA region. Eka3 is another Cairo based platform catering to the Arabic independent music of the region directing its focus towards shaping and empowering local independent music infrastructure. According to previously introduced Bassem Abuarab managing Al-Moharek booking agency division at Eka3, the platform is aiming to connect Middle Easter independent music artists and eventually also introduce them to the Western music market. Eka3 participation in Visa For Music and Womex Music Expo offered Bassem better understanding of the music market demands and presented him with an opportunity to promote local artists.

West in the East

Cairo Calling is a project which aims to unite Cairo’s Electro-Shaabi or Mahraganat music with the electronic music scene in London. The project is managed by 100Copies and Rinse FM London based broadcaster while being financially and logistically supported by British Council. The initiative helped local artists to gain experience and exposure while performing in London while British music producers who visited Cairo offered their knowledge on more practical aspects of music production therefore contributing to the developing infrastructure of the Egyptian independent music scene.⁴⁰

During our discussion Cathy Costain expressed great concern over reaching more diverse demographic of the independent music scene as well as reshaping the purist attitude towards free, noncommissioned music production. Since the formal audience demographic sketch is not possible, Costain resorts to the informal way through which BC could get the sense of the

⁴⁰ Interview with Cathy Costain, British Council, May 2015

audience. This is usually achieved by cooperation with agents who are already involved with the targeted sector of population. Consequently her organization is frequently involved with 100Copies where the production of Electro-Shaabi music takes place attracting audience and participants from low income neighborhoods where this music genre first originated. Costain's support of the Retune Music Academy exemplifies the position of BC towards professionalization of the independent music production in Egypt. She supports 100Copies idea of internships provided in the England or somewhere else in the world where Egyptian sound engineers or event managers could spend few months learning their trade with a completely different team. British Council support initiatives that help artists acquire work skills especially when related to the professionalization of the local music market.

Retune Music Academy (RMA) is a project involving 100Copies in collaboration with an Italian NGO Ricerca e Cooperazione (RC) funded mainly by the European Union and few cooperating partners. The driving idea behind the RMA is to assist in career developments of the independent music artists and according to the RC statement it is also "aiming to increase job opportunities by developing and promoting a cultural hub for the professionalization of young Egyptians in the independent music industry." (Ricerca e Cooperazione, 2016). As per RC website the project executed over three years will grant thirty emerging musicians or bands residency in Cairo, one track recording, artists media profile developments, skill enhancement workshop and participation in a concert organized at the end of each season where outcomes of the collaboration are shared with Cairean audience. RMA also offered workshops dedicated towards artist, stage and event management. I had an opportunity to take part in one of the five days long artist management workshops along with CJC Agency team. The workshop took place at 100Copies Studio and was presented by John Stevens, one of the main collaborators of the UK based Qu Junktions booking agency. Stevens is also a UK booking agent for Islam Chipsy, one of the most popular Electro-Shaabi music artists. Workshop participants included one of the Metal Blast Festival organizers, manager of Suezy another Electro-Shaabi artist and individuals interested in artist's management field but not affiliated with any organization or institution. Arabic translator was present throughout the workshops helping out participants who were not fluent in English. During the duration of the seminar we have learned the basic structure through which agents can support their artists, on what basis artists and managers choose to work with each other, PR and marketing of events, tour booking, tech and hospitality rider details as well as the standard contract arrangements.

While the workshop was very informative it also presented the British perspective and experience of the independent music market, which at this point would be very difficult to

implement on the local music scene operating according to its own and constantly changing rules. According to Alexander mainly foreign artists performing at CJC and Cairo based festivals work on contract basis and share their technical riders before arriving in Egypt. Occasionally during larger events organized by CJC Agency and featuring Egyptian independent music artists contracts are being implemented for legislative purposes. However, daily performances at CJC would require at least fifty contracts per month which is not very feasible especially when some of these artists perform every month and visit the venue since its initial emergence. At this point independent music scene works on much friendlier basis and if the professionalization of the scene will eventually take place it will need to accommodate to the socio-cultural norms of the Egyptian society. Referring again to Nagla Rizk article discussing the relevance of copyright to the Egyptian alternative music scene author suggests that “The generous and pervasive gift culture typical to Egyptians means that it is socially unacceptable to refuse to loan or share a possession with a friend, or to refuse a request to copy an admired CD”(2010, p.492). Author suggests that implementing copyrights reflecting standardized international agreements may be disruptive to the Egyptian social norms as well as those of other participating countries. To sum it up RMA workshop thought us how to manage artist abroad while it remains up to the participants to make these lesson relevant and applicable within the local framework.

Stanislaw Gulinski also organized workshop during the visit of Polish metal band participating in Metal Blast Festival. These artists offered basic lessons addressing the numerous drums and guitar techniques while also sharing with attendees their knowledge of the metal music market in the West. While Gulinski never received musicians feedback on this workshop according to his observations such events create an opportunity for foreign and local artists to socialize rather than acquire new skills. The direct contact with the visiting artists and ability to share different perspectives on metal seemed most important to the Egyptian artists. According to Gulinski “It is difficult to distinguish how much of an influence on the local independent music production comes from the visiting artists and how much of it comes from the Internet.”⁴¹ The technical skills shared by the visiting musicians are also accessible on youtube videos and what seems to be preferred during such workshops is the interaction allowing musicians to get to know each other and share their experiences of playing metal. During the following edition of Metal Blast Festival the workshop was substituted with an

⁴¹ Interview with Stanislaw Gulinski, Polish Embassy in Cairo, April 2015

unstructured jamming session giving Polish and Egyptian musicians freedom to engage with each other in the preferred and more organic manner.

Monika Chrobak-Budzinska another Polish national who during the time of my fieldwork was handling the organizational logistics of international performances taking place at Al-Saqia offered different perspective by suggesting that workshops can be quite motivating for the local artists towards developing their skill as well as conviction that playing music professionally presents many advantages. Monika believes that Jazz workshops specifically offer local musicians opportunity to learn new skills and ways to interpret and benefit from Western music.⁴² While international concerts at Al-Saqia are mainly initiated by the embassies or cultural centers wanting to showcase invited artists, Monika believes that local musicians themselves should initiate workshops. According to Monika if the local artists would express an interest in a workshop featuring particular visiting musicians Al-Saqia would be happy to accommodate them and cooperate with the supporting embassy on logistical arrangements. However, more often than not musicians do not seem very interested in workshops and the essential initiative is frequently missing. None of my interlocutors mentioned attending workshops at Al-Saqia and although I did not have an opportunity to clarify this point it is possible that their particular musical interests might not necessarily correspond with Al-Saqia's musical repertoire.

Workshops organized by CJC Agency before the first edition of Artbeat Festival materialized in the form of collaborative music set arranged by the German duo Robert Fischer & Zaebo and individual Egyptian independent music artists. This freshly composed set was showcased during Artbeat performances in Cairo and in Al-Minya but cooperation ended with the last day of the festival. German and Egyptian musicians may have gained new understanding of their instruments and techniques while the final performance in front of diverse Egyptian audience attending the festival offered them a unique shared experience. Just as in Gulinski's case mentioned above it is difficult to judge how beneficial this collaboration truly was for the local independent musicians. At the same time Nazmi, who worked at CJC Agency fulfilling the role of musical consultant and one of the festival organizers, also took part in the actual performances by joining Fual's Call during their Artbeat performances. This collaboration proved to be more fruitful and further benefited Nazmi when he was invited to rejoin the forces with Fula's Call during their performances in Holland. During his four months stay in Europe Nazmi was able to set up professional connections and socialize with

⁴² Interview with Monika Chrobak-Budzinska, Al Saqia, April 2015

artists from different parts of the world. I will discuss Nazmi's experience abroad in the next section of this chapter but I choose to mention it at this point in reference to the notion of institutional hub where employment at CJC Agency gave the artist an opportunity to interact with various visiting musicians and followed by opportunity for transnational networking.

My close involvement with CJC and personal interactions with musicians produced another form of opportunity for furthering the transnational connections. During one of the visits to the United States I met Lukasz, Polish national and experimental electronic music artist who was very interested in an opportunity to perform in Egypt. Lukasz reached out to the Polish Embassy in Cairo while I also put him in contact with CJC Agency. The dialog among the three parties materialized in Lukasz's arrival in Cairo supported by the embassy and followed by three performances organized by CJC Agency at Darb 1718, 100Copies and CJC. The event which took place at Darb 1718 entitled "Fused, A Short Circuit of Electronic and World Music Acts" encompassed music acts by artists from Poland, Denmark, Egypt and Austria and gave them an opportunity to socialize and discuss possible future cooperation. Specifically Lukasz's project Aabzo and MEM representing Egypt in this particular event opened up a conversation about organizing Moog event in Cairo. Moog is a well established synthesizer brand, which granted MEM Moog Artist status during one of his visits to the United States. Possibility of such event would offer local electronic music artists a great opportunity to become more familiar with newest synthesizer technology and it would place Egypt's name on the electronic music map, which could result in further exposure opportunities for local artists.

East in the West

Lukasz's visit to Cairo initiated another set of discussion, which took CJC Agency to the city of Poznan in Poland. Invited by the Marshal Office of Wielkopolska region through a cultural exchange program operated by this governmental institution, CJC Agency took part in a week long set of events and meetings promoting Egyptian independent music artists among Polish festival organizers, musicians, live music performance venues and culturally involved agents. Most of these individuals were familiar with either Egyptian folklore or oriental music and knew very little about the diversity of genres within the Egyptian independent music scene. At the same time CJC Agency was able to learn more about the practical aspects of promoting artists abroad as well as the present demands of the music market. Significance of online (youtube videos, websites, soundcloud) and physical (CDs, tshirts, pamphlets, stickers) material, which quality presents artists professionalism and dedication towards his or hers

professional career and plays a decisive role in organizers response to particular artist, was one of the main points frequently highlighted during meetings. While the musical content is exceptionally significant, artists' self-representation and professionalism is also highly values. What is also important to mention is that while one of the local event organizers suggested Polish-Egyptian collaboration on a possible festival held in Poznan and focused on showcasing Egyptian independent music artists, the project was put on hold because of the recent political developments in Poland. At the end of 2015 Poland witness a political shift where right wing political party took control of the parliament. Consequently the cultural budget was now allocated to projects promoting national and religious identity and to a large extends falling into the traps of xenophobia highly present in many European countries following the Syrian refugee crisis. Since the project was supposed to be supported by the Marshall Office along with other commercial sponsors under these new circumstances Polish organizers became incapable of securing the adequate budget which could cover the costs of this three day long event. Unfortunately the political atmosphere of any country may have a big impact on the prospects of developing and sustaining transnational networks.

Another across the border perspective, this time from the American market presents additional professional viewpoint of the requirements facing local music artists who hope to perform abroad. College Media Journal (CMJ) is a US based commercial entity focused on promoting upcoming independent music bands and artists throughout the United States. The goal of the organization is to connect new musical acts with industry professionals and audiences. The CMJ Music Marathon event serves as the main platform where the targeted foundations of the company are expressed although CMJ also supports organization of tours for individual artists. While visiting the United States I had a chance to meet with Lisa Hresko⁴³, the editor in chief of CMJ.COM, and discuss some of the expectations of the US music market from the visiting artists. According to Lisa CMJ is either contacted by the agent of the independent music artists or as it is most often the case by international cultural centers or embassies' cultural affairs departments who support visiting musicians. CMJ staff offers support by assisting with the required traveling paperwork, providing the artists with local agent and managers, managing PR on musicians' behalf and booking performances at local venues and festivals. According to Lisa organizing a successful concert in New York is very challenging for artist coming from abroad and unfamiliar with city's independent music scene

⁴³ Interview with Lisa Hresko, CMJ, June 2015

dynamics. Accordingly CMJ allocates musicians to the spaces and venues where their particular music genres would be most welcomed and appreciated by its regular attendees.

Independent music scene in New York is saturated with abundance of creative musical acts creating a highly competitive environment anticipating high standards from the visiting artists. Consequently CMJ is selective about artists they choose to assist and base their decision on a set of criteria musicians should demonstrate on their record. Visiting artists are expected to present their CV listing achievements obtained in their home countries. Their national visibility, quality of recordings, music videos and general image are all put into consideration. According to Lisa acquiring this information provides a better understanding of musicians dedication, effort and eagerness to offer a good quality performance and to join the international independent music market. Lisa also pointed out that singing in English is usually more welcomed by New Yorkers, however this would be also largely dependable on the featured music genre. According to Lisa the greatest benefits foreign musicians gain from this experience are a much better understanding of the American independent music market, chance to network with industry professionals as well as an opportunity to improve artists stage presence while performing in the unfamiliar setting for foreign audience.

Accidental Hub

Above example presents also the notion of accidental hub where the researcher may play an effective role in the continuously shaping transnational networks under study (Kiwani & Meinhof, 2011, p.7). Meeting Lukasz in the United States initiated a trajectory of events in which I was actively involved. Additionally while conducting interviews interlocutors would also inquire about particular websites or literature I've mentioned, which seemed interesting or relevant to either their preferable music genre or Middle Eastern music scene in general.

Transnational Artists: Personal Itineraries

Karim Terouz: DIY in Canada

Karim Terouz⁴⁴ moved to Montreal, Quebec in pursuits of musical career. Although he was a successful art director while living in Cairo, Karim's work and future prospects did not fully satisfied his ambitions. While his musical interests were largely influenced by Western folk, rock and blues artists Karim believed that engaging in musical career while singing in

⁴⁴ Interview with Karim Terouz, September 2014

English did not make sense in Egypt. Consequently, while already being a Canadian citizen Karim decided to try his chances abroad. While in Montreal Karim's first step was to attend open mic sessions held at numerous bars and cafes during slow weekday nights where he had an opportunity to jam with musicians and at the same time meet session artists willing to work on his project The Rising Few. His work as a bartender allowed him enough income to cover the rehearsal space and the time musicians spend working on his songs while his illustrator skills were put into use while designing logo and bands website. The Rising Few was shaped very much in accordance to the DIY subcultural method although Karim hopes to eventually sign a record deal and be more dedicated to his art rather than the logistical details he is handling up to this point. When the Landmark Events (LME) showcase competition was announced Karim decided to participate and The Rising Few took the first prize winning over 200 participating bands. This unexpected victory and support of fans and jury convinced the band of their readiness to record their first album entitled Sinners on St-Laurent. The album was produced by Glen Robinson who mixed and mastered songs of many renown stars such as David Bowie, Keith Richards, The Ramones among many others. The recording experience taught Karim all the necessary album production details and it gave him a better idea on his singing capabilities. Karim realized that atmosphere and emotion embedded within each of his songs was much easier to project during his vibrant stage performance, while at the recording studio the same had to be achieved and expressed only with his voice. Consequently recording was very challenging for him and he took a lot more time working on numerous takes than the professional session musicians in his band. At the time of our interview Karim was preparing to work on the material for next album while continuously performing for small audiences at multiple local venues and hoping to eventually organize The Rising Few Tour in the Middle East.

Karim's decision to move to Canada was largely influenced by his passion for particular genre of music and conviction that with enough effort and persistence he will be able to realize his dreams. Karim's Canadian citizenship saved him the bureaucratic troubles and allowed him to work and invest his income into the rehearsal time and space. His determination, enthusiasm and most importantly his understanding of Montreal's multicultural environment paid off. During our conversation it was clear that Karim is a talented artist and a great self-producer. His first album talks about his migrant experience, international diversity of his new hometown and the busy night lifestyle of the street where he first lived in Montreal. The Rising Few is a collection of artists coming from different parts of the world. The lyrics accompanied by the folk melodies are pretty catchy and easy to enjoy. The songs are

appealing to both the multinational migrant community as well as to the outgoing locals who enjoy time out on St-Laurent, the name of the street also featured in the title of Karim's album. According to the artist, The Rising Few music can be appreciated by the listeners of all different genres and singing in English in predominantly French speaking Montreal does not negatively affect audience's relationship to his work. Consequently Karim has great hopes for reaching the Egyptian independent music audience with the support of his Cairean friends representing the initial fan base group in Egypt.

Karim believes that the biggest milestone for his band was participation in the LME competition. Just as in the case of CMJ Music Marathon the LME aims at introducing the upcoming acts to the listeners and music industry professionals. The judging criteria such as tightness and professionalism, stage presence and performance, originality, creativity, song structure followed by crowd engagement and reaction constitute the demands of the Canadian independent music industry and a point of reference for Karim's band. Fulfilling these criteria reinforced The Rising Few's understanding of the local market as well as bands thus far successful position within its parameters. In Canada his Egyptian nationality does not seem to be of much relevance other than being a part of multinational band formation. However while considering touring in the Middle East he believes that a Canadian band featuring Egyptian front man could positively affect the hype and interested in the band. Bearing in mind Karim's familiarity with the Cairean music scene and knowledge of the Canadian independent music industry artist suggests that the scarcity of live music performance platforms does not allow the local independent music scene to reach its full potential. He believes that musicians themselves need to put more effort into organizing events and reaching out to locales that could open up their floor to live music acts. Karim's proactive attitude allowed him to reach his dream, therefore artist believes that with enough motivation and effort local musicians could further develop the Egyptian independent music scene and shape the local industry by taking into the account the standards of the Canadian industry where live music platforms are the predominant means of exposure. At the same time it becomes apparent that the dynamics of the Canadian independent music industry exert significant influence on the trajectories applied by The Rising Few on their route towards recognition.

Ahmed Nazmi: Transnational Challenge

Ahmed Nazmi was born and raised in Mansoura, where he begin studying music in his early teens first as Koran recital student, then as a keyboardist finalizing his musical focus on bass guitar. Following, Nazmi's trans-local lifestyle while frequently traveling between

Mansoura and Cairo, exposed him to diversity of music genres and already artists participating in the local music scene. As I already mentioned during the early phase of his solo career, Nazmi's transnational experience was initiated by his work at CJC Agency and opportunity to perform with Fula's Call during Artbeat Festival. However, it is also important to point out that prior to these events Nazmi was performing with Yahia Khalil's in Egypt as well as abroad. His work with Khalil helped him enter the Cairean independent music scene, learn how to appreciate and play jazz music and take professional approach towards his musical career. During one of the festivals attended with Khalil in Cape Town, South Africa, Nazmi met a lot of renowned Jazz artists whose welcoming manner encouraged him to eventually join their ranks and reach worldwide fame. At the same time performing internationally convinced Nazmi that his growth as an artist who at the time favored West African bass technique requires greater exposure to other musicians interested in the same style and displaying global performance experience. Nazmi believed that he would not be able to further develop his skill in Cairo among artists who in his opinion require more international experience. His main source of inspiration and technical skill improvement came from listening to music recording and youtube videos featuring concerts of Jazz musicians.

Returning back to the original point, Fula's Call featuring multinational artists performing European influenced African music admired Nazmi's bass technique and invited him to join them during Artbeat. Few months later Nazmi rejoined band members in Holland where they performed multiple shows for European audience. During these small gigs as well as occasional jamming sessions Nazmi was asked to perform something from his home country but he did not know how to do it. His passion was directed strictly towards West African bass technique and he had no knowledge on how to play oriental sounds on bass guitar. Due to visa restrictions Nazmi had to return to Cairo where shortly after Fathy Salama asked him to play bass guitar in his band Sharkiat (Easterners) focused on the oriental music genre. While listening to Sharkiat's album recorded with a Turkish bass guitarists Nazmi felt challenged once again and begin to consider learning oriental style. Nazmi was greatly encouraged by Fathy who surprised by his lack of familiarity with oriental bass technique convinced Nazmi to join a workshop offered by Al-Mawred Al-Taqafi in Aswan. The workshop was dedicated towards oriental music and attended by a range of international musicians. After the workshop Nazmi purchased fretless bass guitar commonly used when working with oriental scales and dedicated himself fully towards practicing this technique.

Soon after the January Revolution Nazmi was approached by one of the artists he met during visits in Europe and was invited to participate in an international project funded by

local festival organizers. Each of the contributing musician were composing a piece that was performed, recorded and placed on an album featuring the full collaboration under the name “6 Spoons 1 Kitchen”. Nazmi dedicated one of his newest compositions towards this project, however, in order to resemble the general atmosphere of the whole record he rearranged the music making it more suitable for this world music recording. On his first solo album *Ethbat Hala*, funded by the “Arab Fund For Arts and Culture” (AFAC), the same composition is presented in its original format and in perfect unison with its overall oriental sound and ambience. During our conversation Nazmi expressed a sense of relief when he was finally able to master oriental bass, gaining more confidence and a sense of artistic identity supported by oriental music background. The January Revolution further affected Nazmi’s relationship to oriental music and in the album he was expressing his feelings towards ongoing changes, painful events and disappointments he was experiencing at the time. The album release party took place at CJC attracting a large group of artists supporting Nazmi’s work.

Nazmi’s journey towards oriental music was instigated during his travels abroad, encouraged by Fathy Salama and finally materialized in the released album. Realizing the dynamics of the music market and the potential of cultural capital, the artist decided to engage with the genre technically unfamiliar to him prior to his travels. While abroad Nazmi recognized the complex and competitive nature of the music industry where, considering his particularly preferred music genre, national background produced expectations he was finally able to fulfill as well as to gain a unique position and certain level of prestige among Western audiences.

However, putting into account the socio-political and economic climate in Egypt Nazmi’s decision to take on oriental bass might have taken place regardless of the above mentioned persuasions. This newly acquired skill gave Nazmi more work opportunities in Cairo during a difficult economical period, as well as in Lebanon where he was frequently performing with renowned composer Ziad Rahbany. Knowledge of oriental music resulted in increased confidence supported by a feeling of completeness and flexibility while being able to navigate comfortably between different music genres and playing techniques, again presenting him with a variety of work opportunities. During our discussion Nazmi described his experience in terms of a challenge to his artistic integrity and he never considered Western expectations to be indicative of their orientalist attitudes. As an ambitious and talented artist Nazmi chose to confront his artistic limitations and therefore explore all sorts of possible avenues through which he could further develop his career.

Continuing above discussion I would like to present Fathy Salama's point of view on them matter of oriental music and transnational practices. In agreement with Lisa's statements on CMJ requirements Fathy believes that Egyptian independent artist hoping to travel abroad should be prepared to face strong competition and therefore exhibit exceptional skills and distinctiveness in their preferred music genre. During our conversations Fathy would frequently suggest that Egyptian independent music artists who intend to perform abroad should know oriental music because that would be expected of them while performing for the foreign audience. While he understands that some of the local artists may not be interested in oriental music Fathy believes that familiarity with oriental sounds grants them a level of uniqueness which could eventually lead to more appealing career opportunities. However, considering Karim and his musical career in Montreal this may not always be the case and local artists experimenting with new music genres don't have to play or know oriental music in order to reach audiences based only on their Egyptian nationality. In the most recent interview published by Mada Masr, Ramy Abadir interviewed Zuli, Cairean electronic music artist who experienced similar orientalist perceptions while touring in Europe. After one of the performances Zuli was confronted by one of the attendants asking him why he doesn't play Egyptian instruments and music. While I do not know what his direct reply was in the published interview Zuli was expressing his frustration with the orientalist indications claiming, "So fuck the idea that you have to play a certain kind of music because you're from a certain country. We're all on the internet, we grew up using it. The whole world's out there."(Abadir, 2016). Zuli is aggravated by assumptions that Egypt may not be up to date with the technological developments and that his nationality should bond him to compose certain music styles. He wants to be recognized for the quality and uniqueness of his art, which, with the present day technology, speaks in multiplicity of languages and diversity of globally produced inspirations.

As already mentioned Cairo, just like many other world metropolis, is a spatial hub where, as earlier presented in the discussion with Nada El Shazly, artists can experience transnational influences while never leaving the country. While Nada contributes her transnational exposure to the multiplicity of agents and environments she was involved with in Cairo, Zuli points out the magnitude of cyberspace and equal ability of internet users to gain familiarity with new trends, technologies and variety of latest arts' techniques. Music affective force is unstoppable and modern technology supports its comfortable passage above man made borders. Nevertheless, considering Nazmi's and Fathy's position it becomes apparent that Zuli's attitude is not equally shared by all independent music artists. Fathy's previously

addressed institutional cultural capital, his long-term appreciation and dedication to oriental music as well as personal experiences while living abroad make him more inclined to support the idea that Egyptian artists should be familiar with oriental music. Nazmi's focus on career developments and dissatisfaction with any possible shortcoming pushed him towards decision to acquire a skill that would help him excel. Consequently while there is no denial that Western music industry and audiences' expectations may largely resemble orientalist preconceptions, the subjectivity of individual visiting artists may exert a significant influence on musicians' final relationship and response towards such presumptions. In the following paragraphs I will present yet another perspective on the topic.

Ismael Attallah: Localizing 'Pharaonic' Metal

Ismael Attallah, front man of Crescent, Cairean independent death metal band, shared with me his set of experiences and observations while performing abroad. Band's first European tour was organized in cooperation with Flaming Arts Management and Booking Agency, where Crescent joined other upcoming extreme metal bands on ten day tour around few European countries. During the tour Crescent members learned how demanding and chaotic 'on tour' lifestyle can be. For ten consecutive days they had to present their music in its best quality. For the first time they experienced a scenario when they had to self set up the backline before each performance and learn how in the quickest possible way collect their equipment during switch over so the audience does not have to wait very long for next act. They learned how important it is to support other participating bands and keep good communicational flow while on tour. However, most importantly they learned how to interact with audiences, which according to Ismael differed from country to country. He pointed out that during the show in Munich audience seemed especially aware of the technical details expressed in their music while listening to Crescent for the first time. According to Ismael "in Munich, the audience is more mature then other places, so they can really grasp the whole song structure because they applaud in certain parts although they hear the song for the first time, but they know what this song is about or how does it evolve, and this adds to you as an artist in how you compose later because you know that kind of riffing works and at which point in the song can the peak be"⁴⁵ Audience interaction offered Crescent the necessary feedback to the song details that according to Ismael usually go unnoticed during their shows in Cairo. He believes that Egyptian metal audience is very young representing the range of 14-

⁴⁵ Interview with Ismael Attallah, August 2015

25 years old and rather immature musically therefore unable to provide constructive criticism. While he appreciates Crescent fans and support they have shown the band, their comments after each show may boost his self-esteem but do not provide the evaluation every evolving band truly requires. Ismael expressed regret about the general lack of support from other metal artists and older generation listeners who used to participate in the metal scene. However, he also hopes that with greater exposure to international acts performing in Cairo the fans will achieve a level of maturity that will challenge the creativity and professionalism of the Egyptian independent metal bands

In the early spring of 2015 Crescent performed in the Norwegian Inferno Metal Festival among many renowned metal bands. Crescent received great reception at Inferno and to the great surprise of the artists and for the first time in their musical career Crescent's album was completely sold out while merchandise salesman pinned a note on band's t-shirt saying "Much better than Nile". Nile originating in the United States is a very popular death metal band that throughout its long career based its imagery and lyrical content on pharaonic hieroglyphics, art and mythology. The band is also frequently sampling Middle Eastern instruments within their compositions. While Ismael is not particularly happy about such comparison since in his opinion Nile is much more technical, less melodic and illuminating very different aura than Crescent he cannot deny that this association pays certain complements to their own work. Nevertheless Ismael claims that these comparisons are rather shallow and rooted in basics such as similar heaviness in sound, utilization of the harmonic minor scale and pharaonic theme employed by both bands.

Ismael admits that Crescent's involvement of pharaonic artwork and history illustrates bands fascination with Ancient Egypt and at the same time it also suggests a distinctive, commercially appreciated image. Polish artist incorporate Slavic imagery, Scandinavian black metal bands build their musical themes around Norse and Viking mythology, while members of Crescent address Pharaonic history in their work. This is a rather common practice in metal as well as in other music genres where desire to localize a particular music style, such as Egyptronica (MEM) or Egyptian death metal, runs in parallel to distinguishing position within independent music industry. Additionally Ismael points out that in Crescent's lyrics he incorporates events from the pharaonic history, which to a certain degree resemble present political and religious realities of Egypt. Ismael claims that the ambiguity of the song's lyrical content allows him to speak openly about notions usually removed from public discussion. Consequently assimilation of pharaonic metaphors provides Crescent ability to express

personal interests and political concerns while at the same time localizing the Egyptian death metal scene within independent extreme metal industry.

Conclusion

While the mapping of independent music scene demonstrates the ongoing collaboration between the commercial and non-profit oriented entities, the study of transnational hubs and reflections on artists engagement in transnational practices, brought to surface the significant role and influence of the international independent music market. I must agree with Gulinski on the fact that cyberspace makes measurements of possible transnational influences very difficult. Artists who engage on social media platforms learn a lot from diversity of online networks, structure their connections through Facebook interactions, group chats, and are constantly updated on the newest technological developments affecting latest music production. 'The whole world is out there' and Egyptian independent music artists are certainly part of that cyber world. Based on the narratives shared by my interlocutors the maximum impact of transnational practices comes in the form of better understanding of the independent music market, which to a certain degree shapes artists music and self image production. While expectations of the foreign audiences may also play a certain effect on local musicians the outcome of such preconceptions may vary according to individual artists' position within the field. Reflecting back on the topographies presented above as well as in the preceding chapter the dominance and influence of the international music market becomes rather clear. This might be the point where Judith Butler's (1999) notion of performativity becomes relevant to the study of transnational experiences of Egyptian independent music artists and helps us examine the performativity of the independent music market evident in the dynamics described on the above pages.

Chapter Five: Challenging Conclusions

“Akher Oghneya” (“Last Song”)

My speech is not only against the regime, but also against the followers
 If a hundred thousand regimes fell, we would still be at the same place
 There are things, questions and customs that turned into impairments
 Traditions needs to renew and history keeps repeating
 There is a war against freedom and freedom is banned
 All the minds are retrograde their word is the heard
 We’ve been raised on (the believe) that the walls have ears
 So go down with the music and make them hear with the full strength of your voice.

If this is my last song
 I would keep on singing about freedom
 Sing along with me loudly
 “Freedom!”

Above excerpt is from the newest song by Cairokee released on Youtube in March. “Akher Oghneya” talks about the states’ position towards freedom, the negative impact of outdated societal norms and the continuous efforts of the Egyptian youth to challenge these limiting notions and abandon the fears on which the older generations grew up. The song quickly popularized by social media was opening controversial discussions among fans as well as the criticizers of the band. While I do not claim to belong to either of the two opposing camps I do appreciate the combatant tone of the song. I also believe that “Akher Oghneya” perfectly illustrates the point I was making in the first chapter of this work. Independent music in Cairo exemplifies much more than the standard disassociation with a major record label commonly accepted in the West. Within the local context the desire for socio-political change is expressed by the Egyptian youth in the sounds and lyrics of independent music. Varied and at times contradictory identifications articulated in the multiple discourses constituting

independent music in Cairo suggest its distinction from the standard categorizations of music genres. This is one of the reasons why most of my interlocutors experienced difficulty trying to give a straightforward answer to the question asking them to explain what constitutes independent music in Cairo. The logic of the music industry and the realities of local experiences prevent stable definition of the term and rather suggest reflection on the point of its emergence. Independent music in Cairo forms a subculture, which in conjunction with numerous other youth groups, is reacting to the social norms, which are no longer fulfilling the Egyptian youth's longing for change that reaches beyond banishment of a dictator.

According to Mahmmud Rafaat "at this point in history we should destroy all the structures and all the terminology to understand the new platform."⁴⁶ However, the foundations of the new platform, the shifting meaning of the 'independent' and its present connotations grant a significant weight to the term and shape the contemporary infrastructure of the independent music scene in Cairo. Regardless of the DIY nature of the independent music subculture, the scene requires an infrastructure that will ensure its continues growth. Consequently in the second chapter of this work I was focused on the independent stages constituting the field of cultural production and organized by participating agents where artists perform, practice and share their work with audiences. The significant role of all of the mentioned stages rests in their ability to support independent music artists by providing spaces, which are not only nurturing independent music subculture but also providing means of sustainability for the artists and the youth envisioning a different future articulated in their music. Most often then not the above described stages provide avenues through which local artists establish transnational networks and enter international independent music market.

Evident relationships between commercial and cultural entities involved in the Cairean independent music production are very much reflecting the neoliberal economy structuring the globalizing processes where newly build paths are directing the future steps (Tsing, 2005, p.6). In the third chapter I address the multiple hubs through which independent music artists engage in and experience transnational connections. Karim, Nazmi and Ismael offer a more detailed inside on the actual transnational trajectories that in undeniable ways influenced their artistic performance and music production. According to Arjun Appadurai "...culture becomes less what Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification and representation, the

⁴⁶ Interview with Mahmmud Rafaat, May 2015

latter often to multiple, and spatially dislocated audiences”(1996, p. 44). Transnational artists addressed in this work illustrate this argument by presenting how each of them discovered ways to navigate the transnational pathways and expectations of the music industry.

During one of the Tuesday night evenings at CJC I was listening to the newly established band called Ritza with previously mentioned Mai Waleed on vocals. According to the band’s facebook self description Ritza performs electropop music genre with lyrics sang in Arabic. The band attracted a fairly large audience gathered up right in front of the stage and happily interacting with the performing artists. The atmosphere at the venue was very nice, playful, with guests dancing next to their tables or at any random spots. While listening to Ritza I realized that the ambience created by the band and the audience felt very familiar and customary among numerous other venues located in different parts of the world and featuring independent music artists. Ritza could easily be performing at that moment in one of the hipster Williamsburg venues in Brooklyn or Jersey City, or Polish city of Poznan where clubs such as Las or Meskalina catered their entertainment to the independent music followers. Considering minor disregard of the cigarette smoke, at the time of Ritza’s performance I could imagine myself being in any other of the mentioned venues located in distinctive countries yet still experiencing the same atmosphere and energy encompassing CJC on that night in Cairo. While I would prefer to believe that the above description suggests some form of artists and unifying universal language what this example could also indicate is that independent music is very much reflecting the performativity of the international independent music market.

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