

# FAIRUZ AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL

*Popular Music, Folklore and Nationhood in 1960s Lebanon*

Anastasia Modestou

Near Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures and music

MMus Ethnomusicology

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines and explores the disputes of the religious communities of Lebanon and the ways these communities are unified through the music, as well as through the on and off-stage performances of Fairuz during the twentieth century. As a world-renowned singer and as a Lebanese national symbol of the twentieth century, Fairuz has become pivotal in the formation of the religious, as well as national identities of Lebanon. The cultural characteristics, political affiliation and sense of belonging of Lebanese national identity have been extensively debated and discussed in the relevant academic work surrounding Lebanon. However, the constitution and reproduction of a religious unified Lebanese national identity through music is seldom examined. This study analyses the interrelation of national identity and popular music in Lebanon through the examination of Fairuz as a national symbol, while taking into consideration Lebanon's brief history as a nation-state and the dispute between the different religious communities. This paper further suggests that through her music and performance, Fairuz has become a symbol for multiple identities, not only religious but also national, transcending the restrictive identification of her music and performance with her religious, communal background.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anastasia Modestou completed her undergraduate studies in music at the University of Glasgow in 2019, continuing with a master's in Ethnomusicology at SOAS. Her main focus is Near Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures and music, examining the different expressions of nationalism that are constructed through music. Her dissertation focused on the political music scene of the Republic of Cyprus and the ways that it challenges the ideological narratives of the state. Outside academia, Anastasia also plays multiple instruments including the piano and the oud.

**Keywords:** Fairuz, Rahbani Brothers, Lebanese music, Arab nationalism, Lebanese national identity, Everyday nationalism

## INTRODUCTION

Female singers in the Middle East strongly participate in the construction and reproduction of their nations, often through symbolic identification with nation-states and locally situated national – as well as cultural – identities.<sup>334</sup> This phenomenon can be observed with Umm Kulthum in Egypt,<sup>335</sup> Ofra Haza in Israel and the Jewish Mizrahi identity,<sup>336</sup> as well as with Fairuz (Nouhad Wadie' Haddad) in Lebanon. This paper will examine the on and off-stage performances of Fairuz during her thirty-year collaboration with the Rahbani brothers, and the various ways these performances have constructed a cultural identity that has become synonymous with Lebanon. Further, this paper will explore how Fairuz's music and musical-theatrical performance, particularly during the 1960s, has unified the religious communities of Lebanon, transcending sectarian and religious differences. A historical contextualisation of Lebanon is firstly presented, spanning from the establishment of Greater Lebanon until the end of the civil war, briefly discussing and contextualising the various nationalisms and political affiliations that developed throughout the twentieth century. Following this historical contextualisation, the article moves on to discuss Fairuz's on and off-stage performances – songs and musical-theatrical work – as cultural processes constituting a common identity in Lebanon. Particular emphasis is given on the musical-theatre *The Moon's Bridge* (1962), as well as her songs about Jerusalem. Fairuz will be approached as a national symbol, which constructs a cross-communal identity in Lebanon and beyond.

## THEORETICAL APPROACH

Michael Billig suggested that banal nationalism describes the “ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to reproduce” themselves.<sup>337</sup> These habits are part of everyday life and are not removed from it as the nation is defined by the lives of its

---

<sup>334</sup> Christopher Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairuz and the Rahbani Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2008b): 14.

<sup>335</sup> Laura Lohman, *Umm Kulthum: Artistic Agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend, 1967–2007* (USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2010): 6.

<sup>336</sup> Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro and Omri Ruah Midbar, “Outdoing Authenticity: Three Postmodern Models of Adapting Folkloric Materials in Current Spiritual Music”, *Journal of Folklore Research* 54, no. 3 (2017): 201.

<sup>337</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE Publications, 2014): 6.

citizens.<sup>338</sup> His concept was thus developed to analyse the interconnection and association of employed language and national identification, a process resulting in the continuous reproduction of the nation itself.<sup>339</sup> Expanding on Billig’s top-down analysis, Antonsich suggested that, by focusing on the everyday reproduction of banal nationalism and by approaching it as a bottom-up process of social reproduction, banal nationalism is reproduced on the everyday level of social life, through employed language and the routine usage of deixis such as ‘we’, ‘them’, ‘here’, ‘there’.<sup>340</sup> Therefore, nationalism is reproduced from everyday linguistic signifiers that aim to establish and illustrate a constructed community or state.

Furthermore, the concept of “imagined communities” is employed in this paper to analyse the community that was created under Fairuz and her music. Benedict Anderson developed the concept of “imagined communities” to suggest that, even in the smallest nation, its members will never meet each other, yet they imagine that they live in a communion.<sup>341</sup> He further argued that nationalism should be interpreted through its large cultural systems, which consist of the “dynastic realm” and the “religious community”.<sup>342</sup> Language, geography, and religion are strongly associated with national identification and the creation of imagined communities.<sup>343</sup>

In his historical analysis, Hobsbawm noted that culture becomes important in the establishment of nations, developing the concept of “invented traditions” to describe traditions that were constructed, invented and established formally to reproduce the nation, as well as traditions that emerged in a datable period and established as such in the following years.<sup>344</sup> These traditions include symbolic practices that are repeated, reinforcing a strong relationship and continuity with the past that can be characterised as artificial. These practices constitute “responses to novel situations which take the form of

---

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid: 24.

<sup>340</sup> Marco Antonsich, “The ‘Everyday’ of Banal Nationalism – Ordinary People’s Views on Italy and the Italian”, *Political Geography* 54, (2015): 33.

<sup>341</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso 2016): 6.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”. In: *The Invention of Tradition*. Edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 1.

reference to old situations”,<sup>345</sup> further reproducing nationhood. These concepts are employed to analyse the songs and musical-theatrical works of the Rahbani brothers and Fairuz, in order to identify the ways that a cross-communal identity is established in Lebanon.

The academic literature focusing on Fairuz that is available in English is limited. Nonetheless, a number of academics have contributed to the understanding of Fairuz as a national performer. Christopher Stone, expanding on the struggles that followed the decolonisation period of Lebanon, suggested that Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers were important in exploring and defining Lebanese national identity through their music.<sup>346</sup> Focusing more on the Lebanese-Christian identity, Stone suggested that, through their work, Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers aimed to preserve a folklore that was interconnected with the Christian-Lebanese mountain villages.<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, in his book regarding cultural hybridity, Kraidy expands on the case study of Lebanon and the Maronite community, arguing that the music of Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers was of a “more enduring value, as it encapsulated what was the truest expression of their hybrid identity”.<sup>348</sup>

This paper will expand on this previous work by approaching Fairuz as an expression of everyday nationalism. It further aims to challenge the claims that Fairuz’s work produces a restrictively Christian Lebanese identity, arguing that her music and performances interact and reinforce a Lebanese Arab national identity.

## FAIRUZ: A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Fairuz was born in 1934 in Beirut, in a Christian Lebanese family. Exhibiting her vocal talents from a young age, she often performed for her family and neighbours, consequently studying vocal performance at the National conservatory.<sup>349</sup> While studying in Beirut,

---

<sup>345</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>346</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid: 27.

<sup>348</sup> Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005): 137.

<sup>349</sup> Sawi W. Asmar and Kathleen Hook, “Modern Arab Music: Portraits of Enchantment from the Middle Generation”. In: *Colours of Enchantment: Theatre, Dance, Music and the Visual Arts in the Middle East*. Edited by Sherifa Zuhur, (New York: The American University of Cairo Press, 2001): 316–317.

Fairuz worked as a chorus singer at the national radio where her supervisor, Halim al-Rumi, noted her talent and introduced her to the Rahbani brothers, Asi and Mansour, initiating their thirty-year long collaboration.<sup>350</sup> Fairuz established herself from her debut in the Baalbek festival in 1957, rising to fame throughout the Arab world and receiving honours from leaders of various Arab nations.<sup>351</sup> By combining music in “novel arrangements”,<sup>352</sup> that reflected the cultural trends of Lebanon, Fairuz and the Rahbanis developed a genre that could be characterised as Lebanese, Western, and Arab, marking their audiences throughout the Arab and Western world.<sup>353</sup> The music of Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers was composed of “blends of folk melodies with classical Arabic and modern Western music”.<sup>354</sup> This intermixing of Western and Arabic melodies resulted in the characterisation of their music as Lebanese, as it was seen by the Christian community as the expression of their identity.<sup>355</sup> This strategy was part of the trend that reflected the “cultural phenomenon of that time and place”.<sup>356</sup>

Stone suggested that Fairuz appears as a paradox in her acceptance and fame in the Arab world, like her songs, films and musical, theatrical works:

She participated in an elite national project that spoke primarily to the Christian minority of Lebanon, the same minority that would pit itself against Lebanon’s largely Muslim Palestinian refugee population, among others, at the start of the civil war.<sup>357</sup>

Indeed, most of the work by the Rahbanis and Fairuz focused on the ideal Christian Lebanese mountain village,<sup>358</sup> inevitably reproducing a Christian Lebanese nationalism. It is important to contextualise the politics and space in which the music and compositions of

---

<sup>350</sup> Ibid: 318.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid: 321.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid: 321–322.

<sup>354</sup> Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*: 135–136.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid: 317.

<sup>356</sup> Asmar and Hook, “Modern Arab Music”: 321.

<sup>357</sup> Christopher Stone, “Fairuz, the Rahbani Brothers, Jerusalem, and the Lebanese Song”. In: *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*. Edited by Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad (London: Routledge, 2008a): 156.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid: 155.

Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers developed and formulated. Therefore, the next section focuses on the historical contextualisation of Lebanon.

### *Lebanon: History and the Formation of Conflicting Identities*

Greater Lebanon was established in 1920 under the French mandate, gaining its independence in 1943 with an unwritten agreement known as the National Pact which established Lebanon as a multi-confessional state.<sup>359</sup> The National Pact did not aim to prescribe a unified Lebanese identity, but it was rather based on a compromise between the religious communities, founded on the false political assumption and fears that the “Muslims would ‘Arabise’ the Christians, while the Christians would ‘Lebanonise’ Muslims”.<sup>360</sup>

Within Greater Lebanon, a multiplicity of religious communities and sects are encountered; the most prominent being Sunni Muslims and Maronites, as well as Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic Christians, Shia Muslims and the Druze. The National Pact segregated Lebanese citizens according to their religious and sectarian affiliations, ascribing religion as the primary value for society resulting in an “interplay between religion and politics”,<sup>361</sup> constituting the political system through which the subsequent violent conflicts overshadowing Lebanon developed in the following years.<sup>362</sup> Salibi suggested that the independence of Lebanon and the National Pact resulted in the beginning of a:

Great game of confidence in Lebanon. The game involved a succession of devious transactions between players who invariably pretended to stand for nationalist ideals and principles aimed at the common good, while they strove to outwit and overturn one another, motivated by atavistic loyalties and insecurities for which the professed ideals and principles normally served as a mere cover.<sup>363</sup>

---

<sup>359</sup> Robert G. Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon: The Challenge of Islamism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 1.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*: 15.

<sup>361</sup> Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019): 27.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*: 55.

Therefore, this ‘game’ was based upon the historical disagreements of the religious communities and their claims over the correct history of Lebanon, reinforcing communal claims over the appropriate political control and hegemony that each community aimed to hold in Lebanon.<sup>364</sup> These disagreements escalated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with the pan-Arabist, Nasserist Lebanese Muslims, attempting to overthrow the government of President Camille Chamoun towards the last months of his presidency in 1958. However, this attempt backfired as the Christian paramilitary organisation (Phalange) – who embraced an ideology that strove for an independent Lebanon, developed from Maronite clergymen – took the conflict to the streets resulting in a sectarian struggle that only ceased through a U.S. military intervention.<sup>365</sup> These sectarian conflicts resulted in even more tensions developing through the years, leading to the initiation of the Lebanese civil war of 1975–1990.<sup>366</sup> Furthermore, the continuous interventions from the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation), the neutral stance taken by the Maronite leadership over the Israeli–Arab conflict, and the continuous interventions of neighbouring Syria in the internal politics of Lebanon,<sup>367</sup> resulted in the eruption of sectarian political division, disintegrating the political structure of the state and contributing to the initiation of the civil war.<sup>368</sup> Salibi noted that the 1975–1990 civil war was a dispute that had as a fundamental point the realisation and determination of the “correct history of the country”,<sup>369</sup> and had:

Torn Lebanon to shreds, reduced large parts of the country to rubble, and caused massive movements of population between different regions; but the civil war has failed as yet to destroy the fundamental political and administrative structure of the Lebanese Republic or to put an end to its existence as a sovereign territorial state by removing it from the map.<sup>370</sup>

---

<sup>364</sup> Ibid: 50.

<sup>365</sup> Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon*: 20.

<sup>366</sup> Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*: 189.

<sup>367</sup> Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*: 117.

<sup>368</sup> Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon*: 22–23.

<sup>369</sup> Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*: 201.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid: 219.

In 1990, the Taif Accord (Document of National Understanding) was signed, leading to the end of the civil war and sectarian strife, establishing the continuation of the National Pact.<sup>371</sup> The Taif Accord agreed to an equitable representation of the religious communities in politics and in the parliament.<sup>372</sup> Furthermore, it was established that the executive power of the country would be allocated to the Council of Ministers, which is usually led by a Sunni, representing the largest community in Lebanon.<sup>373</sup> The Taif Accord finally settled that in the political sphere, Lebanon is “Arab in belonging and identity”.<sup>374</sup>

Therefore, the Lebanese national identity became highly contested by “secular, religious, progressive and reactionary” factors,<sup>375</sup> as well as historical narrations and constructions that were ascribed to the identities of each religious group.<sup>376</sup> Tense disagreements between the various Christian and Muslim communities regarding a claimed unified Lebanese national identity have spanned since the establishment of Greater Lebanon, intrinsically connected with the histories that each community ascribed to Lebanon, with Christians usually affirming a unified Lebanese identity; whereas the Muslims tended to deny it, subsuming it under a pan-Arabic, and occasionally a pan-Islamic understanding of Lebanon’s belonging.<sup>377</sup> Christian elites promoted and identified with Lebanism,<sup>378</sup> a political position established prioritising a sovereign Lebanese state with an accompanied sense of Lebanese national identification.<sup>379</sup> In contrast, the Muslim community identified with Arabism<sup>380</sup> and Arab nationalism, an ideological current developed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that aspired to establish a pan-Arab state under the hegemony of either Egypt or Syria.<sup>381</sup>

The Lebanese identity is still disputed today and is considered as “partly mythical and partly constructed”,<sup>382</sup> therefore marking the struggle for a unified Lebanon also as a

---

<sup>371</sup> Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon*: 1.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*: 89–90.

<sup>373</sup> Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*: 117.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*: 116.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>377</sup> Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*: 3.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*: 182.

<sup>379</sup> Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon*: 27.

<sup>380</sup> Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*: 182.

<sup>381</sup> Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon*: 37.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.



conflict over the definition of a common identity. As national identities are created and maintained through a “common sense of political community [...] that share a common vision of their past”,<sup>383</sup> it has remained important for the Lebanese to define their common historical past. Salibi suggested that today there is a rising ideology claiming that all Lebanese share the same national identity defined regardless of other religious or sectarian affiliations,<sup>384</sup> creating a new, compound Lebanese “supranational identity”.<sup>385</sup>

## POPULAR MUSIC AND NATIONHOOD IN LEBANON

Popular culture is an undoubtedly significant aspect of modern nationhood and contemporary national identification. Popular music, in particular, offers an everyday cultural terrain through which the relationships between individuals, groups and places, are routinely articulated.<sup>386</sup> Music does not simply reflect individuals or groups, but it rather constructs experiences and identifications, including that of ethnic, national, religious or gendered identities.<sup>387</sup> Kraidy suggested that, through their musical understanding, Lebanese Maronite youth identified the “Arab world with tradition and the West with modernity”,<sup>388</sup> establishing a binary understanding and experience of popular culture.<sup>389</sup> Stone suggested that Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers were pivotal in this struggle over the definition of a unified Lebanese national identity, particularly in a period of increased migration and civil strife, their songs and musical-theatrical works becoming prominent within Lebanon, marking their importance in Lebanese nation-building.<sup>390</sup>

### *Folklore, Popular Music and Nationhood*

The Baalbek festival was a pivotal point for the career of Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers, as it was where Fairuz established her fame as a singer of the Arab world.<sup>391</sup> The Baalbek

---

<sup>383</sup> Ibid: 216.

<sup>384</sup> Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*: 3.

<sup>385</sup> Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon*: 145.

<sup>386</sup> Martin Stokes, “Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music”. In: *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Edited by Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997): 3.

<sup>387</sup> Simon Frith, “Music and Identity”. In: *Question of Cultural Identity*. Edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: SAGE Publications, 2011): 109.

<sup>388</sup> Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*: 129.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 1.

<sup>391</sup> Asmar and Hook, “Modern Arab Music”: 318.

festival created a symbol for Lebanon that was based on the narration of a “glorious past, but also a past that was very much connected, through its folklore, to its present”,<sup>392</sup> and was formed under an “elite nationalist project that aimed to highlight the Christian European face of the new nation”.<sup>393</sup> Baalbek, as a historical site, acquired a symbolic meaning of its own; it invoked a Phoenician past that for the Christian Lebanese acquired the meaning of the nation and a connection with modern Lebanon.<sup>394</sup> The project of the “Lebanese Nights” in the Baalbek festival, where the Rahbanis and Fairuz participated, aimed to establish and depict a folklore that was associated with the propagation of an image of Lebanon that the Maronite elite wished to project; “a westward looking nation that had reclaimed its original Phoenician role as a cultivation of culture and civilisation”.<sup>395</sup> Consequently, Fairuz and the Rahbanis participated in the construction and representation of a Christian Lebanese folklore, which interconnected an ‘imagined’ Phoenician past Lebanon with a new westward “potentially glorious future”.<sup>396</sup> Therefore, the Rahbanis’ and Fairuz’s musical-theatrical works reproduced the invented Christian traditions and folklore of Lebanon, by prescribing in their works an image of the Christian Lebanese mountain village as a symbol that actively participates in the establishment and reproduction of a Christian past in Lebanon.<sup>397</sup>

Fairuz herself perfectly fitted the role of the female performer that participated in postcolonial nationalism, by enacting the image of the Christian Lebanese mountain girl, as well as her “Virgin Mary-like chastity”,<sup>398</sup> both on and off-stage. Thus, Fairuz became a symbol that reproduced the conservative role often ascribed to female singers as participants in nation-building projects through their performance.<sup>399</sup> Furthermore, by combining Christian Lebanese folklore and colloquial Lebanese Arabic, the Rahbanis and Fairuz participated in the reproduction of the nation through its strong association with language, folklore and culture. It is identified that the nationalism reproduced through

---

<sup>392</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 19–20.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*: 3.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid*: 18–20.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*: 25.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid*: 36.

<sup>397</sup> Christopher Stone, “The Ba’albeck Festival and the Rahbanis: Folklore, Ancient History, Musical Theatre and Nationalism in Lebanon”, *The Arab Studies Journal* 11/12, no. 2/1 (2003): 31.

<sup>398</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 142.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*: 145.

Fairuz and her performance was encouraged by the Maronite elite, who elevated the French, westward-looking Christian culture and civilisation.<sup>400</sup>

Through their works, the Rahbanis and Fairuz participated in the “propagation of the myth of Lebanon as primarily a Christian country”.<sup>401</sup> Their musical-theatrical works were modelled around an imagined fantasy that the conflict is always caused by an outsider, an ‘Other’, and is only resolved by music, love and miracle.<sup>402</sup> *The Moon’s Bridge*, performed in Baalbek in 1962, *The Holiday of Glory* (1960), *The Night of the Lantern* (1963), as well as *The Ring Seller* (1964) represented the Christian Lebanese mountain village, where trouble is caused from the outside and is resolved with love and song.<sup>403</sup> It is suggested that the fact that Fairuz and the Rahbanis were Christian Lebanese should not overdetermine their work; however, Stone noted that “they repeatedly claimed to be a symbol of national unity, or had the claim made for [them]”,<sup>404</sup> marking their works as important in their symbolisation.

Specifically, the plots of their musical-theatrical works, as well as Fairuz’s characters, can be interpreted as a metaphor of the nation and ideal nationhood, as propagated by the Maronite elite.<sup>405</sup> Fairuz’s characters are marked as symbols of an everyday Maronite Christian nationalism project that developed in Lebanon, consequently being interconnected with her public persona as the characters became a metaphor for herself.<sup>406</sup> *The Holiday of Glory*, performed in the Baalbek festival in 1960, is a representation of how the works of the Rahbani brothers became symbols of everyday nationalism. It is worth noting that Fairuz did not perform that year in the Baalbek festival as she was pregnant; however, *The Holiday of Glory* is marked as one of the pivotal works by the Rahbanis and as a great representation of their work.<sup>407</sup> When an outsider falls in love with the female protagonist, she answers to his declaration of love;

Our heart is not your heart

---

<sup>400</sup> Ibid: 142.

<sup>401</sup> Stone, “Fairuz, the Rahbani Brothers, Jerusalem, and the Lebanese Song”: 157

<sup>402</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 142.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid: 56–58, 70.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid: 38.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid: 144.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid: 58.

## Our road is not your road

(Translation from *The Holiday of Glory*).<sup>408</sup>

The female protagonist uses the deixis ‘our’ to distinguish between the village and its people from the outsider that does not belong in their village, marking the work with symbolism. Stone suggested that *The Holiday of Glory* is a work that participated ideologically in the nation-building project, illustrating the Chehabist ideology<sup>i</sup> of the time.<sup>409</sup> Therefore, it represented a bottom-up reproduction of everyday nationalism distinguishing between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’, through the usage of ‘our’ and ‘not your’.<sup>410</sup>

Furthermore, *The Moon’s Bridge*, a musical-theatrical work performed in the Baalbek festival in 1962, is an illustration of the way Fairuz becomes an expression of everyday Christian Maronite nationalism through her characters. The plot is concerned with a conflict between two villages, which is solved by Fairuz’s character. The female character is held captive on the bridge between the two villages and reveals that there is a hidden treasure beneath it, proposing that the villagers should work together to find the treasure instead of fighting.<sup>411</sup> The two villages are distinguished by the deixis ‘we’ and ‘them’, with their conflict being resolved when Fairuz’s character appears as a mediator between them, solving the problem – by introducing the idea of a common heritage: the treasure. *The Moon’s Bridge* can be identified as a representation of Lebanese society; the two villages representing the two growing nationalisms, the pan-Arab and the Lebanese one, with the conflict being resolved by their common heritage which can be identified as the geographical Lebanon as well as Lebanese culture.

Furthermore, *The Moon’s Bridge* can be seen as an example of the way Fairuz, as a symbolic figure in popular culture, represented an imagined community that unified Lebanon regardless of religious or sectarian affiliations. Merabet notes that Fairuz’s performance on stage became a symbol of national representation, creating “an imagined community

---

<sup>408</sup> Ibid: 59.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid: 58.

<sup>410</sup> Antonsich, “The ‘Everyday’ of Banal Nationalism”: 33.

<sup>411</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 56.

called Lebanon”.<sup>412</sup> Fairuz constructed an image of Lebanon that despite sectarian and religious affiliations, “congregated in search of a common ground”.<sup>413</sup> Therefore, for Merabet, Fairuz became a representation of an imagined Lebanese community.<sup>414</sup> People from all religions unified under her music as it encompassed the different aspects of Lebanese culture; combining “folk melodies with classical Arabic and Western music [...] their music is seen as a mixture of Western and Eastern influences”.<sup>415</sup>

Stone suggested that the music of the Rahbanis and of Fairuz not only represented a unified, imagined Lebanese community, but that it further acted as a representation of the Palestinian diaspora<sup>416</sup>. Fairuz performed throughout the Arab world and Europe. When she performed in London, it is noted that she sang *Ana Lubnan (I Love You Lebanon)* as well as the Lebanese national anthem, performing and dedicating her songs to the Lebanese diaspora.<sup>417</sup> Although Fairuz initially represented the Christian Lebanese imagined community, she increasingly became a paradox to Maronite elites, as she further participated in the growing sentiments of pan-Arabism by performing songs about Jerusalem and the strife between Israel and Palestine.<sup>418</sup> Stone suggested that most Arab singers have performed songs for Palestine and Jerusalem, arguably noting that Fairuz’s songs for Palestine have become the most popular throughout the Arab world, placing Lebanon on the side of the Palestinians in cultural representation.<sup>419</sup> Indeed, the song *The Flower of the Cities* has become the most distinguished song by the Rahbanis and Fairuz, as it described the city of Jerusalem in great detail – the city is “described from afar, it is remembered”.<sup>420</sup> *The Flower of the Cities* is one of the few Rahbani songs that is sung in Classical Arabic, rather than the Lebanese dialect, marking its importance throughout the Arab world.<sup>421</sup> Further, *The Flower of the Cities* was the introductory song in the Rahbanis’ musical-theatrical work, *Exile* (1967), a pivotal point for Fairuz’s career, as it was the

---

<sup>412</sup> Sofian Merabet, *Queer Beirut* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014): 202.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid: 203.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*: 134–135.

<sup>416</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 90.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid: 166.

<sup>418</sup> Nasser Al-Tae, “Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East”, *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (2007): 44–45.

<sup>419</sup> Stone, “Fairuz, the Rahbani Brothers, Jerusalem, and the Lebanese Song”: 155.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid: 159.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid: 160.

musical-theatrical work that young non-Christian Lebanese – and further people from other Arab countries – began listening to her music.<sup>422</sup> The song begins by describing Jerusalem from afar;

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city of prayer, I pray

Our eyes travel to you every day

Moving about the hallways of the temples

Embracing the old churches.<sup>423</sup>

Stone suggested that, at the beginning of the song, Jerusalem is being remembered, as the voice of the narrator describes the city from afar.<sup>424</sup> Additionally, the song comments on the struggle between Israel and Palestine;

For those made homeless

For the children without houses

For those who defended at the gates and were martyrs.<sup>425</sup>

Through this song, the Rahbani brothers and Fairuz established an imagined community with the non-Christian Lebanese by advocating for the Palestinian struggle. As the Muslim Lebanese community developed an Arab identity, the support that was created through *The Flower of the Cities* for the Palestinian cause represented the feelings of Lebanese Muslims as well as of the Palestinian diaspora. The work of the Rahbani Brothers and Fairuz in the early 1960s represented and illustrated an everyday Maronite Christian nationalism that emphasised the imagined Phoenician past of Lebanon. Nonetheless, by later allying with the Palestinian cause they constructed, through their songs and musical-theatrical works, a cross-communal imagined community within and outside of Lebanon.

---

<sup>422</sup> Ibid: 158.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid: 159.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

Merabet suggested that Fairuz became a common icon for Lebanon and projected:

an immaculate image, into the ever-embattled national stage that allowed for the hardships of the present to be repressed and for a future to be imagined as a space which the Lebanese would be saved from seemingly irreversible decline.<sup>426</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Through her musical-theatrical work and performance, Fairuz became a symbol representing a multiplicity of identities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shifting from communal Maronite nationalism to a cross-communal imagined community, representing in this way a unified Lebanese national identity. This encompassed not merely the various religious communities in Lebanon, but also the political struggles through which the communities have come to associate themselves with. However, Fairuz became a prisoner within this cross-communal nation-building project, as she was “entrapped by the Lebanon that she enacted and embodied”,<sup>427</sup> thus binding her representations with the Lebanese nation-state.

Both the Rahbani brothers and Fairuz can be described as some of the most influential families in Lebanese popular culture, attempting through their production of popular music the construction of a Lebanese sense of nationhood that unified the religious communities of “Lebanon and beyond”.<sup>428</sup> Their shift from Maronite Christian nationalist representation to a cross-communal representation of Lebanese nationhood can be argued to be reflective of a broader social process, slowly giving rise to a more unified and less fragmented notion of Lebanese nationhood; a view that is certainly further supported by the recent cross-communal anti-establishment protests in Beirut. Nonetheless, sectarian divisions remain, reinforced both by a communally allocated political system, as

---

<sup>426</sup> Merabet, *Queer Beirut*: 204.

<sup>427</sup> Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*: 166.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid*: 1.

well as by deep divisions within the communities of Lebanon, reinforced through the contradictory narrations and understandings of Lebanon's recent traumatic past.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Chehabist ideology refers to the period that Camille Chamoun was president. The growing ideology of that period was Lebanism that was developed from the Maronite elite who strove for an independent Lebanon.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benedict, Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2016.
- Christopher, Stone, “The Ba’albeck Festival and the Rahbanis: Folklore, Ancient History, Musical Theatre and Nationalism in Lebanon”. *The Arab Studies Journal* 11/12, no. 1/2 (2003): 10–39.
- Christopher, Stone, “Fairuz, the Rahbani Brothers, Jerusalem, and the Lebanese Song”. In: *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*. Edited by Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad. London: Routledge, 2008a: 155–167.
- Christopher Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairuz and Rahbani Nation*. New York: Routledge, 2008b.
- Eric, Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”. In: *The Invention of Tradition*. Edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 1–14.
- Kamal, Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2019.
- Laura, Lohman, *Umm Kulthum: Artistic Agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend, 1967–2007*. USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2010.
- Marco, Antonsich, “The ‘Everyday’ of Bana Nationalism – Ordinary People’s Views on Italy and the Italian”, *Political Geography* 54 (2015): 32–42.
- Marianna, Ruah–Midbar Shapiro and Omri, Ruah Midbar, “Outdoing Authenticity: Three Postmodern Models of Adapting Folkloric Materials in Current Spiritual Music”, *Journal of Folklore Research* 54, no. 3 (2017): 199–231.
- Martin, Stokes, “Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music”. In: *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Edited by Martin Stokes. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997: 1–27.
- Marwan, Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.
- Michael, Billig, *Banal Nationalism*. London: SAGE Publications, 2014.
- Nasser, Al-Tae, “Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in The Middle East”, *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (2007): 41–46.
- Robert G., Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon: The Challenge of Islamism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Sawi W., Asmar and Kathleen, Hook, “Modern Arab Music: Portraits of Enchantment from

the Middle Generation”. In: *Colours of Enchantment: Theatre, Dance, Music and the Visual Arts in the Middle East*. Edited by Sherifa Zuhur. New York: The American University of Cairo Press, 2001: 307–332.

Simon, Frith, “Music and Identity”. In: *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: SAGE Publications, 2011: 108–127.

Sofian, Merabet, *Queer Beirut*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.