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Raghad Al Mashmoum

**Star of the East and Neighbour of the Moon:
Arabic Female Singers' Anti-Colonial
Resistance**



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*Star of the East and Neighbour of the Moon:
Arabic Female Singers' Anti-Colonial
Resistance*

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Introduction



Figure 1: 'Umm Kulthūm (left) and Fayrūz (right), 1966.¹

'I refused to give up to the despair of the Naksa. There remained nothing in front of me except one of two choices: either I stay quiet, and sit in a corner of psychological breakdown, or I go forward with my weapon, which is my voice, putting forward what I can from effort for the battle, and I chose the second.'²

¹ 'Şūra Nādirah Tajma' Jārat Al Qamar Fayrūz Wa Kawkab Al Sharq 'Umm Kulthūm', *Al Yawm Assabi'*, 10 November 2021, <<https://m2.youm7.com/story/2021/11/10/5527513/كلثوم-أم-الكوكب-الشرق-أم-كلثوم>> [accessed 12 April 2025].

² 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Kayf 'Araft 'Abd Annaṣir', *Al Hilāl*, 1 October 1971, p. 44.

The above words were famous Egyptian singer 'Umm Kulthūm's response to the loss of the Six Day War by the Arab forces in 1967. Commonly known as the Naksa (Setback), the defeat marked a huge loss for the Palestinian liberation struggle.³ The following disillusionment in the Arab world has led many scholars to designate this moment as a rupture in Pan-Arabism, a form of anti-colonial solidarity amongst the Arabic people, with some even deeming it the movement's end.⁴ However, this demarcation neglects to consider women's contributions to the construction of solidarity. Departing beyond the traditional narratives of surrender, the story of Egyptian singer 'Umm Kulthūm and Lebanese singer Fayrūz, complicates the literature on Pan-Arabism. This dissertation, seeking to contest current androcentric interpretations, centers both female actors to illuminate women's anti-colonial resistance.

Through an examination of the artists' music on Palestine, this study will examine the construction of Pan-Arabism and solidarity by 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz. Throughout this period of the struggle, both singers produced a large discography of anti-colonial songs dedicated to Palestine, spread in person and through radio. Radio, being a medium that appealed to both the literate and illiterate alike and immensely difficult to censor, had a far-reaching audience base.⁵ More pertinently, both singers had their songs broadcasted on Ṣawt Al 'Arab (Voice of the Arabs), the most popular

³ Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 147.

⁴ Dawisha, p. 252; David McDonald, *My Voice Is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance* (Duke University Press, 2013), p. 80; Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, 'The Rise and Fall of Pan-Arabism', in *Routledge Handbook of South-South Relations*, ed. by Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh and Patricia Daley (Routledge, 2018) pp. 168-176 (p. 175).

⁵ John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 339; Joseph Massad, 'Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 32.3 (2003), pp. 21-38 (p. 21).

radio station at the time.⁶ The station's popularity was so immense, that from its inception, daily broadcasts increased 'from thirty minutes in 1953 to just short of twenty-four hours in the 1960s'.⁷ Hence, the artists' music is a valuable cultural source base for examining anti-colonial discourse.

By giving authority to musical sources, this study sets out to illuminate an incredibly marginalized form of anti-colonial resistance. To fully nuance women's roles in decolonization, we must look beyond the conventional source bases of transnational history. Thus, this dissertation argues for the deconstruction and challenge of seemingly banal or apolitical acts. Moreover, as the first study of its kind to comparatively approach the resistance music of 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz, this study will demonstrate that through female artists' voices, Pan-Arabism was far from being on its last stand. Rather both singers' advocacy helped revitalize and preserve the struggle through its most despairing moment, illuminating music's ability to mobilize and inspire.

Literature Review

This dissertation contributes to the burgeoning field of transnational histories of decolonization. Illuminating the transnational 'imaginaries', 'mobilities', and 'networks' of decolonization has become a clear initiative in recent historiography.⁸ However, despite significant progress, the field remains limited by a traditionalist andro-centric approach.⁹ As scholars such as Su Lin Lewis have highlighted, historiographical accounts of decolonisation have 'long focused on the

⁶ Dawisha, p. 148.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter, 'Introduction', in *The Anticolonial Transnational*, ed. by Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 1-16 (p. 5-8).

⁹ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 226.

state arena, marginalising women and non-state actors'.¹⁰ Similarly, Zeina Maasri and others have called for an extension of our understanding of decolonisation beyond 'interstate diplomacy' and 'official channels' to underscore more 'subaltern' and 'grassroots' solidarities.¹¹ Particularly for historiography on Palestine, it has been largely characterised by two dominant categories of analysis, diplomacy and militancy. Despite the provincial distinctions amongst these histories, their tendency to centre male actors remains almost invariable. Scholars focusing on diplomacy and internationalism have predominately focused on elite male actors, such as the former Egyptian state leader Jamāl 'Abdul Nāssir.¹² Similarly, literature on international conferences, highlighting organisations such as the Palestinian National Congress and Palestinian Liberation Organisation, have largely restricted analysis to that of the male members Yāsir 'Arafāt and Salāḥ Khalaf.¹³ Whilst international and inter-state diplomacy have significantly shaped politics and understandings of decolonisation in the region, the disproportionate foregrounding of male agency and nationalist elites marginalises female actors.¹⁴ In a similar manner, trans-national militancy, although widening historical emphasis to more subaltern individuals, continues to obscure female agency, as with the exception of John Chalcraft's brief mention of female combatants, most studies solely examine male guerilla fighters.¹⁵

¹⁰ Su Lin Lewis, 'Decolonising the History of Internationalism: Transnational Activism across the South', *Transactions of the RHS*, 2 (2024), pp. 345–369 (p. 347).

¹¹ Zeina Maasri and others, 'Introduction: Transnational solidarity in the long sixties', in *Transnational solidarity* ed. by, Zeina Maasri and others (Manchester University Press, 2022), pp. 1–27 (p. 6).

¹² Chalcraft, p. 317.

¹³ Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014), p. 114; Sorchā Thomson, Pelle Olsen, and Sune Haugballe, 'Palestine Solidarity Conferences in the Global Sixties', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 51.1 (2022), pp. 27–49 (p. 31).

¹⁴ Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 7.

¹⁵ Chalcraft, p. 367; Chamberlin, p. 19; Dawisha, p. 147.

Although the aforementioned scholarship holds value in utilising Arabic sources and actors in their discussions, their works fail to sufficiently incorporate female voices into mainstream historiography. This unequal emphasis has led to historiographical debates dismissing women entirely; more specifically, 1967 has been delineated temporally as a rupture in Pan-Arabism and transnational solidarity based solely on male accounts.¹⁶ The vast majority of scholarship simplistically reduces Pan Arabism to either that of the statist cause championed by Jamāl ‘Abdul Nāssir prior to 1967, or the post 1967 subaltern period led by Yasīr Arafat and dominated by image of the guerilla fighter.¹⁷ This strict delineation heavily neglects female actors’ contributions, which this study will show, heavily complicate and challenge this temporal classification.

In recent years, subsequent scholars have aimed to narrow the theoretical gender gap in histories of decolonisation by centring female agency. Yolande Bouka, in her wider work on Africa, contends that there remains a ‘stubborn lack of feminist curiosity’ to analyse female contributions to decolonisation.¹⁸ Although recognising the importance of incorporating women into pre-existing historical narratives, she cautions historians from uncritically placing women into ‘male preserves’, risking essentialising their diverse contributions.¹⁹ In a similar manner, Marral Shamshiri and Sorch Thomson’s *She Who Struggles*, is a particularly significant piece of work aiming to make ‘women visible in history’.²⁰ Critiquing previously masculinist scholarship, the authors argue that ‘it is not enough to use political archives, movement archives or official records’ as these spaces have

¹⁶ Dawisha, p. 257; Chamberlin, p. 15.

¹⁷ Thomson, Olsen, and Haugbolle, p. 30; Chamberlin, p. 20.

¹⁸ Yolande Bouka, ‘Women, Colonial Resistance, and Decolonization: Challenging African Histories’ in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women’s Studies*, ed. by Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), pp. 1295-1313 (p. 1296).

¹⁹ Bouka, p. 1296.

²⁰ Marral Shamshiri and Sorch Thomson, ‘Introduction: She Who Struggles’, in *She Who Struggles: Revolutionary Women Who Shaped the World* ed. by Marral Shamshiri and Sorch Thomson (Pluto Press, 2023), pp. 11-29 (p. 12).

purposefully and strategically marginalised women's voices.²¹ Differing from past feminist scholars' attempts to limitedly adjoin women into male-centred categories, the collected edition is more useful in illuminating the multi-faceted displays of female agency.²² The coalition of narratives ranges from testimonies on female participation in both militant spaces of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and wider participation in global solidarity conferences to more cultural forms of decolonisation such as guerrilla poetry.²³ The volume is incredibly valuable in offering a more holistic approach to decolonisation, but the cultural emphasis remains disproportionately underexamined. As scholar Zeina Maasri highlights in her work on Palestinian visual matter in Beirut, 'the cultural dimensions of political struggle' remain marginalised in mainstream scholarship.²⁴ This is particularly significant within the field of decolonisation, as the dominant trend of historiography has been to naturalise imperial concepts of power such as the primacy of the archive and elite politics.²⁵ In response, Ariella Azoulay and others have proclaimed the need to 'amplify' voices from 'unlikely archives', as conventional methodologies are inadequate to gaining a comprehensive understanding of transnational solidarities.²⁶ Thus by widening the margins of politics, this dissertation seeks to challenge the neutrality of music and heed the call to expand beyond traditional source bases for decolonisation and resistance.

²¹ Ibid, p. 15.

²² Ibid, p. 11-29.

²³ Jehan Helou, 'The Power of Women's International Solidarity with the Palestinian Revolution' in *She Who Struggles*, ed. by Marral Shamshiri and Sorchha Thomson (Pluto Press, 2023), pp. 76-92 (p. 78-79); Marral Shamshiri, 'Marziyeh Ahmadi Osku'i: Guerrilla Poetry between Iran, Afghanistan and India' in *She Who Struggles*, ed. by Marral Shamshiri and Sorchha Thomson (Pluto Press, 2023), pp. 107-123 (p. 108).

²⁴ Zeina Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 6-7.

²⁵ Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), p. 198; Omnia El Shakry, "'History without Documents": The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East', *American Historical Review*, 120.3 (2015), pp. 920-934 (p. 929).

²⁶ Ariella Azoulay and others, 'Against Imperial Knowledges: Lisa Lowe and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay in Conversation', *Parallax*, 29.2 (2023), pp. 154-172 (p. 164, 169).

Music, specifically, continues to receive scant attention from historians of decolonisation. As scholars such as Paul Gilroy have shown, in the field of race and post-colonialism, music, as an 'expressive culture' must be treated as a legitimate source base by historians.²⁷ Despite this, scholarship on 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz is severely underexamined in English and strictly under the purview of musicologists.²⁸ The few historical approaches that do address the singers, tend to prioritise external factors such as material donations and awards, whilst minimising engagement with the actual musical material.²⁹ Although Arabic literature has done a better job in illuminating the female artists as historical agents, authors often follow nationalist and romantic trains of thought, reducing the singers to the role of patriots, rather than the more radical title of anti-colonialist.³⁰ As a result there remains no significant study that has employed discursive theories to analysing the artists' songs as a means of mobilisation and resistance.³¹

Thus, this dissertation aims to further advance scholarship on women's contributions to anti-colonialism and transnational solidarity through analysing the music of 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz on Palestine. Women's participation should not act as 'merely complementary' but also challenge and reframe traditional masculinist narratives, by widening the paradigm of what it means to be

²⁷ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Routledge, 2006), p. 217.

²⁸ Nasser Al-Taee, 'Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East', *Popular Music*, 21.1 (2002), pp. 41-61, (p. 41).

²⁹ Laura Lohman, 'The Artist of the People in the Battle': 'Umm Kulthūm's Concerts for Egypt in Political Context', in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. by Laudan Nooshin (Routledge, 2009), pp. 33-54 (p. 39).

³⁰ Rajā' Al Naqqāsh, *Lughz 'Umm Kulthūm* (Al Masriya Al 'Ammā Lilkitab, 2009), p. 78; Fawwaz Ṭarābulṣī, *Fayrūz Wa Arraḥābinah: Masraḥ Al Gharīb Wa Al Kanz Wa Al U'jūbah* (Rīyad al- Rayyis Books, 2006), p. 8.

³¹ Anastasia Modestou, 'Fairuz as a National Symbol: Popular Music, Folklore and Nationhood in 1960s Lebanon', *The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research*, 13 (2019-20), pp. 172-189, p. 174.

political.³² Thus, by offering a more nuanced, comparative approach, this dissertation ultimately endeavors to shed light on the cultural aspects of trans-national solidarity through discursively analyzing the work of 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz.

Methodology

Scope

This dissertation aims to decolonize the Eurocentric methodologies of transnational histories by prioritizing cultural sources. By analyzing the songs of 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz, it will uncover the ways in which both artists imagined and promoted anti-colonial resistance. The focus is on singers 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz specifically, as they represent two of the most significant 'cultural center[s] of the Arab World', Egypt and Lebanon respectively.³³ Moreover, both artists were the most popular female singers of their time.³⁴ Temporally, this study focuses on their music from the year 1956 until 1975. The year 1956 correlates to the Suez Canal Crisis, also known as the second Arab Israeli War, which served as a catalyst for the production of a wide range of anti-colonial music.³⁵ The year 1975, marks the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, which shifted musical content to more national concerns, leading to a stagnation of Palestine centered songs.³⁶ Thus, the selected period was one of high political events and tension, rendering it a suitable parameter for analysis.

³² Shamshiri and Thompsen, *She Who Struggles*, p. 57.

³³ Kamal Boullata, 'Artists Re-Member Palestine in Beirut', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 32. 4 (2003), pp. 22- 38 (p. 24).

³⁴ Danielson, p. 116; Stone, p. 156.

³⁵ Dawisha, p. 160.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 271.

Music

This dissertation is theoretically guided by Paul Gilroy's 'expressive cultures' theory. As Gilroy has argued, with regards to racial politics, music must be recognized as a valuable historical source in its ability to affirm or protest political issues, not only through its lyrics, but through the spaces of its consumption, and identity of its creators.³⁷ Particularly in the Arab region, music was a highly instrumental resource due to its prominence and accessibility over radio, with daily transmissions reaching twenty-four hours.³⁸ It must be noted, however, that during this period only songs approved by the state were allowed to be broadcasted.³⁹ Thus, although the songs remain valuable to examine their construction of solidarity, caution must be taken to avoid overstating their radicalism. Nonetheless, in order to enrich historiography on Pan-Arabism, this dissertation will take a comprehensive approach that examines the music, its spaces of consumption, and reception.⁴⁰ More specifically, it will follow Lisa Palmer's 'textured reading' approach to discursively analyze music, not only through a political reading, but a gendered one that factors in the singer's gender identities.⁴¹

The main challenge with engaging with Arabic music is that each song is the culmination of the collaboration of the lyricist, composer, and singer. Hence, it can be difficult and somewhat reductionist to solely attribute a song to the artist. However, as personal statements have shown both 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz were heavily involved and believed in their music. When interviewed, 'Umm Kulthūm explained that she personally selected all of her songs and edited them

³⁷ Gilroy, p. 217.

³⁸ Dawisha, p. 148.

³⁹ Massad, 'Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music', p. 31.

⁴⁰ Lisa Palmer, "'LADIES A YOUR TIME NOW!' Erotic politics, lovers' rock and resistance in the UK', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 4.2 (2011), pp. 177-192 (p. 178).

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 191.

as 'it is the artist's duty to elevate their songs'.⁴² Similarly, Fayrūz stated in her documentary that her 'song expresses all of my soul', and that if anyone wanted to know her they should listen to her songs to understand her 'values'.⁴³ Hence, both artists' statements clearly indicate their involvement. More crucially, contemporary praise and criticism toward the music was almost invariably directed at the artists and not any other collaborators of their music.⁴⁴ Thus, to ignore the artists' personal investment and contemporary reception would be to deny their agency and notoriety. More significantly, whereas the work of poets, lyricists, and composers has been engaged with academically, singers remain heavily absent from scholarship.⁴⁵ Hence, this dissertation departs from previous literature to bring to focus the female singers as the face of gendered resistance to offer a more nuanced portrayal of Pan-Arabism.

Magazines and Newspapers

For a more comprehensive analysis, this dissertation will supplement musical sources with digitized print sources. The contemporary Arabic press consistently reported on the reception of artists' songs and their performances, as well as interviews with the artists themselves, which help us better understand their personal motivations. Due to institutional and geographical limitations, this dissertation focuses mainly on the two major Egyptian publications *Al Kawākib* (The Stars) and *Ākhir Sa'ah* (The Latest Hour). As historian Laura Putnam has underlined, digitized media as a primary source base disproportionately favors English language sources, with alternative language sources

⁴² Babikir Elsadig, 'Liqa' Ma'a Kawkab Al Sharq 'Umm Kulthūm 'Ajrāh 'Alī Shammū 1968', Youtube, 4 October 2020, <<https://youtu.be/gO93u4F0ON0?si=dLOBkGGDj3bPp-c2>> [accessed 17 January 2025].

⁴³ Fairouz, dir. by Frédéric Mitterrand (France, 1998).

⁴⁴ Faytwanjī, 'Umm Kulthūm Mathal', *Palestine Newspaper*, 28 July 1968; Kamāl Al Najmī, 'Jumhūr Fayrūz Ayḍan Yuḥib Al ṭarab', *Al Kawākib*, 30 September 1969, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Massad, p. 29; Danielson, p. 116; Noha Radwan, 'Palestine in Egyptian Colloquial Poetry', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40.4 (2011), pp. 61-77 (p. 62).

remaining highly inaccessible or absent entirely.⁴⁶ However, rather than the scarcity of Arabic language sources being a reason to disregard them, it serves as a motivating factor to engage with them in order to begin to rectify this linguistic disparity. Although predominately engaging with Egyptian press sources somewhat limits this dissertation, according to a 1936 review, nearly 10,000 copies of Egyptian papers were sent weekly to neighbouring Arab countries, indicating their influence spread well beyond Egypt.⁴⁷ Moreover, both press sources were part of the more popular canon of the Egyptian press. By 1947, *Al Kawākib* had a total circulation of 120,000 weekly.⁴⁸ On a smaller, but still relatively large scale, *Ākhir Sā'ah* reached 40,000 copies a week.⁴⁹ Thus, whilst avoiding going beyond the scope of this dissertation to meticulously analyse press impact, I have chosen to incorporate print media to enhance the relevance of this study.

Methodologically, to further maximize the value of the digitized sources, I have avoided the use of text mining and key word searches, which have been criticized for their potential decontextualization and reductionism.⁵⁰ Instead, through pursuing an analog reading of the papers, I tried to mimic, as similarly as possible, the physical experience of a contemporary reader. Although more time consuming and taxing, through manually scanning each page of the digitized editions within the relevant time frame, I endeavored to gain an authentic reading of the sources.

Translation

⁴⁶ Laura Putnam, 'The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast', *The American Historical Review*, 121.2 (2016), pp. 377-402 (p. 395).

⁴⁷ Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*, (Oxford Academic, 1995), p. 175.

⁴⁸ Ayalon, p. 147.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Putnam, p. 392.

The focus of this dissertation has required close engagement with Arabic language sources. In order to portray an authentic representation of the primary source material, I have chosen to translate all texts myself, due to the homogenization and ‘Americanisation’ of foreign language sources currently prevalent in academia.⁵¹ As many translation experts have highlighted, upon translation often texts are ‘domesticated’ in order to ensure the comfort of the Western reader.⁵² As such cultural-linguistic intricacies are often diluted to achieve a more ‘globalised’ language, at the expense of non-English modes of expression.⁵³ In order to challenge this and restore agency to the texts, I have attempted to preserve the cultural authenticity of the sources by preserving the nuances of the ‘other’, such as gendered and religious expressions.⁵⁴ Additionally, the romanization has been conducted in accordance to the BGN/PCGN 1956 System in order to unify spellings and avoid confusion. At times, linguistic authenticity can result in a seemingly awkward translation.⁵⁵ However, true solidarity means to recognise the existence of multiple languages and their peculiarities. Although accessibility is important, it should not come at the expense of the Global South, but be a mutually beneficial process that respects and values all parties.

Structure

This dissertation is organised chronologically by artist. **Chapter One** focuses on Egyptian singer ‘Umm Kulthūm’s music from 1956 to 1969, examining the shift in her songs before and after

⁵¹ Carla Forster and Martin Lalpêkhlua Blah, ‘Untranslatability, Multilingualism, and Indigeneity: A Decolonial Reaction to “Translation and Comparative Literature”’, *Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching (BILT) Student Research Journal*, 5 (2024), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

⁵² Friedrich Schleiermacher, ‘On the Different Methods of Translating’, trans. by Waltraud Bartscht, in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Rainier Schulte and John Biguenet (University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 1-16 (p. 6); Roger Allen, ‘Translating Arabic Fiction’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 46. 2-3 (2015), pp. 157–167 (p. 163).

⁵³ Marilyn Booth, ‘Translator v. author (2007) Girls of Riyadh go to New York’, *Translation Studies*, 1.2 (2008), pp. 197-211 (p. 209).

⁵⁴ Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Routledge, 1993), p. 183.

⁵⁵ Booth, p. 201.

the Naksa. Moreover, it will analyse her additional efforts toward the Palestinian cause, and their public reception. **Chapter Two**, on Lebanese singer Fayrūz's music post-1967, adopts a comparative approach to deconstruct the singer's methods in comparison to 'Umm Kutlhūm. Together these chapters aim to illuminate the nuanced contributions of female artists to the anti-colonial struggle.

Chapter One: The Voice of Violence: 'Umm Kulthūm and the Armed Struggle

I am with the revolutionaries

I am one of the revolutionaries.⁵⁶

'Umm Kulthūm

'Umm Kulthūm, commonly known as Star of the East, was one of the most prominent ambassadors of Pan Arab solidarity. For the majority of Arabic people, her voice was a frequent fixture on the radio. At the height of her career in the 1950s, her voice featured so prominently on the station, *Ṣawt Al 'Arab*, it had a cemented spot of five hours monthly, every first Thursday.⁵⁷ Through both recorded and live performances 'Umm Kulthūm produced a repertoire of anti-colonial music that heavily championed armed resistance for the Palestinian struggle. In this chapter, I will analyse 'Umm Kulthūm's anti-colonial music before and after the 1967 Naksa to reveal her increased engagement with the cause. By analyzing her music, interviews, and contemporary reception, this chapter will highlight how music worked to mobilize Arabs, particularly women to support the Palestinian struggle.

The dominant theme of 'Umm Kulthūm's anti-colonial music was violence. It was through her voice, that ordinary members of the public were continuously called on and invited to participate in

⁵⁶ 'Umm Kulthūm, "Aṣbaḥ 'Indī Alān Bunduqīyah", Sono Cairo, 1969, <<https://youtu.be/Tv0WescWeOI?si=2Y0FuT6FBd4MCbMA>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

⁵⁷ Dawisha, p. 143.

the armed struggle against imperialism. In her 1956 song, 'Baṭal al Salām' (Hero of the Peace), 'Umm Kulthūm insinuated the futility of non-violent resistance through her lyrics, 'The return of dignity is not by words'.⁵⁸ This encouragement of violence was more explicit in her later song, 'Wallah Zamān Ya Silāḥī' (I Swear to God It's Been a Long Time, My Weapon) where the listener was directly ordered to 'Hurry and join the lines. Hold (your) life in your palms'.⁵⁹ This call to action was further embedded in the listeners' mind through the Arabic tradition of repetition, in which lyrics are subsequently repeated a multitude of times throughout a song. This particular phrase was sung four times consecutively, emphasizing its thematic significance. However, the singer's promotion of violence, was not universal, but aligned heavily with the gendered expectations of resistance, that historian Joyce Chadya has termed Mother Politics, in which female contributions are framed to support existing gender roles.⁶⁰ This is demonstrated through a call and response in the song that featured the male chorus. In the song 'Umm Kulthūm asked, 'Egypt, the free, who will protect her? Land of the revolution, who will sacrifice (themselves) for her?'.⁶¹ Her query was met with the thundering response of male voices, 'We protect her with our weapons. We sacrifice for her our lives'.⁶² Here 'Umm Kulthūm, as well as the nation, are feminised, occupying a maternal and passive role, whereas the male singers embody a militarised form of masculinity. This gendered delineation is further solidified through the song's chorus which was solely sung by the male choir five times, and only on the sixth did 'Umm Kulthūm join in:

⁵⁸ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Baṭal al Salām', Sono Cairo, 1958, <<https://youtu.be/6uJt0zWAJb0?si=TvISoZaEbqwpKuk>> [accessed 17 Feb 2025].

⁵⁹ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Wallah Zamān Ya Silāḥī' Sono Cairo, 1958, <<https://youtu.be/f9T6CxMrucI?si=KpKORxnCj5yJlEXI>> [accessed 17 February 2025].

⁶⁰ Joyce Chadya, 'Mother Politics: Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Woman Question in Africa', *Journal of Women's History*, 15.3 (2003), pp. 153-157 (p. 153).

⁶¹ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Wallah Zamān Ya Silāḥī'.

⁶² Ibid.

Wallah it's been a long time my weapon

I have missed you in my struggle

Speak up and say I am awake

Oh war Wallah it's been a long time⁶³

Hence, 'Umm Kulthūm does not directly portray herself as an enforcer of violence, but merely its advocate, by avoiding lines that embodied the persona of the male fighter. Similarly shown in her song, 'Ragʿīn Biqūwat Al Sīlah' (We Are Returning with the Might of Weapons), it was the male chorus that personified the role of the male revolutionary singing, 'We are returning with the might of weapons, returning to free the home that must be protected'.⁶⁴ This chorus was met with heavy and reoccurring applause by the audience in her 11 minute performance of the song.⁶⁵ Clapping, a common form of audience interaction in Arabic concerts, is an audible and visual manifestation of delight and appreciation for a performance.⁶⁶ The audience's engagement suggests not only an acceptance, but an open endorsement of violent, armed resistance. Thus, 'Umm Kulthūm's music heavily promoted violence as a necessary act of resistance, but one that was entrusted to men.

Whilst men were described as protectors, women, through linguistic feminization, were characterized as either vulnerable figures or motivators that prompted men's resistance. In her song

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Ragʿīn Bi Quwat Al Sīlah', Sono Cairo, 1956, <<https://youtu.be/amJyI94ICvE?si=1IM1Y6jpcM8dr8eO>> [accessed 17 Feb 2025].

⁶⁵ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Allah Meaak - Umm Kulthum 'Umm Kulthūm Allah Ma'ak', Youtube, 17 January 2016, <<https://youtu.be/ilhjkoYLHjE?si=rSxeEEtclzwide6X>> [accessed 17 Feb 2025].

⁶⁶ Darin Kahel, "'Music is Feeling": Tarab: A Phenomenon of Arab Musical Culture' (Dissertation, Uppsala University, 2021) <<https://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1562058&dswid=7845>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025], p. 22.

'Rag'īn Biqwat Al Sīlah', 'Umm Kulthūm sang, 'Army of Arabism, oh hero, God is with you. How great you are, how wonderful you are, how brave you are!'⁶⁷ Here, 'Umm Kulthūm's voice was one of maternal and feminine support. The singer did not identify herself as a fighter. Instead, she positioned herself as more of a cheerleader for the troops. In the same vein, Palestine, a feminine noun in Arabic, was personified as a passive and victimised woman in need of assistance, mimicking the masculinist politics of the Palestinian nationalist struggle.⁶⁸ For example, 'Umm Kulthūm described, 'The tragedy of Palestine pushes you to the borders. Turn *her* pain into gunpowder in your cannon' [emphasis added], explicitly depicting the nation as a feminine motivator for male violence.⁶⁹ Similarly, Palestine was further described like a separated mother, 'waiting for you longingly. Return to her, and oh woe oh woe to whoever prevents you', underscoring the distinction between male guardian and female ward.⁷⁰ Thus, the singer's music actively reinforced gender roles that portrayed women as victims.

'Umm Kulthūm's gender delineation throughout her music was not static, however, but changed as a result of the escalating struggle. Although many scholars have characterised the post-Naksa era as one of silence by transnational actors, 'Umm Kulthūm's solidarity flourished in this period.⁷¹ In her 1967 song "Inn Fida'īyūn' (We are Revolutionaries), 'Umm Kulthūm used the feminine verb for the first time in a militaristic context, 'So let us *hit* (feminine verb conjugation) with every able palm. And let us *shoot* (feminine verb conjugation) with every fallen soul' [emphasis added],

⁶⁷ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Rag'īn Bi Quwat Al Sīlah'.

⁶⁸ Joseph Massad, 'Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism', *Middle East Journal*, 49.3 (1995), pp. 467-483 (p. 470).

⁶⁹ 'Umm Kulthūm, 'Rag'īn Bi Quwat Al Sīlah'.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ McDonald, p. 80.

portraying for the first time female violence.⁷² Moreover, in contrast to her previous songs, in which solely the male chorus would embody the persona of a fighter, 'Umm Kulthūm directly called herself a revolutionary:

We are Feda'īyūn (commandos)

We spend our lives, rather than be trivial

No, no understanding, no leniency in fighting.⁷³

This subversion and expansion of gender roles was continued in her song, "Aṣḥab 'Indī Alān Bunduqīyyah' (I Now Have a Rifle), where she explicitly personified herself as guerilla fighter:

I now have a rifle

Take me with you to Palestine

I now have a rifle

I have joined the list of revolutionaries

...

I am with the revolutionaries

⁷² 'Umm Kulthūm, "Inn Fida'īyūn", Sono Cairo, 1967, <<https://youtu.be/evkt0mXlBaM?si=ZHISKUu5QthHXbUv>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

⁷³ Ibid.

I am one of the revolutionaries.⁷⁴

Moreover, she ended the song by once again rallying upon all members of the Arab world, singing:

Oh revolutionaries

In Jerusalem, in Hebron

In Bisan, in the Jordan valley

In Bethlehem, wherever you are oh liberated ones

Go forward, go forward, go forward, go forward, go forward.⁷⁵

Thus, far from her resolve being crushed, the recent loss did not weaken the singer's will, but rather motivated her to more firmly champion violence as the sole means of liberation, by incorporating, at least metaphorically, women into violent resistance. Hence, despite scholars often characterising post-Naksa music as that of 'despair', 'Umm Kulthūm's discography directly challenged this. Justifying her continued promotion of violence in this period and refusal to sing music that generated sympathy for Palestinians, the singer shared that she was 'not convinced of the idea of singing of the refugees and victimisation of Palestinians'.⁷⁶ Rather, in her eyes, melancholic music only weakened people's

⁷⁴Umm Kulthūm, "Aşbaḥ 'Indī Alān Bunduqīyah'.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

resolve, in a period where the only way to persevere was to continue to promote direct action. Thus, her music centred violence, as in her own words, ‘nothing will end the struggle except the rifle’.⁷⁷

In order to promote this violence more materially, however, ‘Umm Kulthūm needed to increase her public presence, which prior to the Naksa was quite low profile. Hence, she embarked on a series of concerts in and out of the Arab region to raise money for the war effort. In her first major performance in 1967, ‘Umm Kulthūm performed at France for a wage of 14,000-pound sterling, the highest ever wage given to an artist in Paris, which she publicly donated in its entirety to the war effort.⁷⁸ The popularity of her concert was so extreme, that the organisers had to sell 500 additional standing tickets to appease the demand.⁷⁹ Moreover, this performance was accompanied by her debut TV interview, in which she described the donation as ‘not a lot’ and less than what the cause deserved, to promote others to do the same.⁸⁰ Subsequently, ‘Umm Kulthūm held multiple concerts in Arabic nations to continue the promotion of the Palestinian cause, with the spatiality of her performances heavily affecting their interpretation. For example, in her concert in Libya, on 14 March 1969, the singer performed directly in front of Fatah, the armed wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation’s, logo.⁸¹ The aim of the concert itself, to gather profit for the guerilla fighters, was not

⁷⁷ Muḥammad Qandīl, “Umm Kulthūm Wa Ḥadīth Fī Assiyāsah’, *Ākhir Sā’ah*, 14 May 1969, p. 40.

⁷⁸ Jalāl Al Juwaylī, “Umm Kulthūm Tuqīm ḥaflatayn kul Shita’ Fī Bārīs’, *Al Ahrām*, 18 November 1967, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Moseeqa TV, ‘Ḥiwār Nādir Ma’a ‘Umm Kulthūm’, Youtube, 22 April 2018 <<https://youtu.be/8wAHEIVzP1M?si=KV7-i9-3XhsxYg-m>> [accessed 5 March 2025].

⁸¹ Ahmed Tayeb, “Umm Kulthūm Fī Banghāzī Lībyā - Maqṭa’ Min Al Ḥafl’, Youtube, 6 February 2015, <<https://youtu.be/a4hw4wLHfTY?si=DnjQo6s9NQbNTgSE>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

only bolstered by this visual element, but the concerts' setting in the Benghazi region of Libya, known for its historical struggle against Italian colonisation.⁸²



Figure 2: 'Umm Kulthūm performing in Libya in front of Fatah's logo, 1969.⁸³

More significantly, what separated this period in 'Umm Kulthūm's work from previous eras, was her direct concern for women's participation. Starting off with her concerts, as a female singer, 'Umm Kulthūm's gender identity alone allowed many 'traditional' women to engage and venture into public spaces they were previously discouraged from or personally against.⁸⁴ This was the case in Libya, as the traditionally conservative women often preferred and kept to the domestic space, avoiding staying out at night. Nonetheless, for 'Umm Kulthūm many women came out to

⁸² Abdalrazak Ben Nassan, 'Haflat Assayyida 'Umm Kulthūm Allatī 'Uqīmat Fī Ṭarābulṣ Wa Banghāzī Māris 1969', Youtube, 10 March 2018, <<https://youtu.be/E4FONOMjWYU?si=EY9RLFL7m2WWf4eO>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025]; Al Naqqāsh, *Lughz 'Umm Kulthūm*, p. 80.

⁸³ Tayeb, 'Umm Kulthūm Fī Banghāzī Lībyā - Maṭṭa' Min Al Ḥafl'.

⁸⁴ Abdalrazak Ben Nassan.

support the singer and her anti-colonial venture, with her performance garnering over 10,000 male and female listeners.⁸⁵ In a similar manner, for her Sudan concert, it was reported that, 'Umm Kulthūm's performance united the clashing Sudanese Women's Groups under one cause and space, revealing her ability to unite diverse organisations under the banner of anti-colonialism.⁸⁶ This sentiment was echoed once more, by Egyptian Sa'īdī women, who despite adhering to traditional expectations, exclaimed that they would leave their houses to bake for soldiers of the cause, after feeling impassioned by 'Umm Kulthūm's music.⁸⁷ Thus the artist's gendered presence appeared to domesticate and feminise formerly masculine spaces, transforming anti-colonialism into a more acceptable practice women could engage in.



Figure 3: Female members of Fatah and Libyan Women's Organisations with 'Umm Kulthūm, 1969.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Al Naqqāsh, *Lughz 'Umm Kulthūm*, p. 68.

⁸⁷ 'Ibrahīm 'Āmir, 'Hal Naḥnu Nuḥib Al Kalām 'Akthar Min Al 'Af'āl', *Al Kawāḍib*, 11 July 1967, p. 23.

⁸⁸ "'Umm Kulthūm Tughannī Min Ajal Fatah', *Ākhir Sā'ah*, 1 April 1969, p. 22.

'Umm Kulthūm's uptake in performances was also combined with an increased print and televised media presence targeting women's economic agency. In *Al Kawākib*, 'Umm Kulthūm announced the formation of her National Assembly of Egyptian Women, describing women as a 'powerful resource', and arguing that 'the time has come for the woman to do her duty in these circumstances'.⁸⁹ The Assembly encouraged women to donate gold, money, and clothes to the Palestinian war effort.⁹⁰ 'Umm Kulthūm even personally knocked on people's doors to encourage them to purchase tickets to donate to the struggle.⁹¹ Her efforts resulted in large sums of money being given toward the cause and the reselling of tickets to double the profit of the war effort.⁹² It was even reported that one merchant bought a photo of 'Umm Kulthūm for 250 pounds to donate to the struggle.⁹³ Similarly, in her 1968 concert in Mansūrah, one bride donated her wedding ring to be auctioned, receiving 1,000 pounds.⁹⁴ In that same concert, a young girl sold soil in a silk bag, a symbol of the Arab lands and cause, for 3,000 pounds.⁹⁵ This championing of economic aid was further combined with ideological instruction toward women. In the paper *Ākhir Sā'ah*, 'Umm Kulthūm explained that her goal was not simply to generate as much money as possible, but to 'embody the principle of participation amongst all Arabs'.⁹⁶ More clearly, she highlighted the importance of women as economic agents in the anti-colonial struggle, describing them as 'the ones who buy and create movement in the market'.⁹⁷ As such, she directly urged women to boycott all

⁸⁹ 'Abd Altawwāb 'Abd Al Ḥay, "Umm Kulthūm Taqūd Al 'Amal Al Waṭanī Lilmar'ah Al Maṣriyah', *Al Kawākib*, 18 July 1967, p. 3; Nawwal Al Baylī, 'Lilmar'ah Al Maṣriyah?', *Ākhir Sā'ah*, 19 July 1967, p. 27.

⁹⁰ 'Abd Al Ḥay, p. 3.

⁹¹ Ṭāriq Fawdah, "Umm Kulthūm Taṭriq 'Abwāb Al Buyūt', *Ākhir Sā'ah*, 23 August 1967, p. 32.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Mahmūd 'Awaḍ, 'Umm Kulthūm Allaty Lā Y'arifuha Aḥad (Mu'assasat Akhbar Alyawm, 2016), p. 154.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Qandīl, p. 38.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

products of the 'friends' of Israel, citing mainly the United States and United Kingdom.⁹⁸ Thus, during the post-Naksa period the artist heavily endorsed women's participation in the struggle economically through ideological instruction.

Despite her persistent efforts and support of the decolonisation of Palestine, 'Umm Kulthūm's work was not without its critics. One of the main criticisms directed not solely at her, but at female artists more widely, was her inability to participate more substantially in the war effort. For example, some writers in *Al Kawākib* criticised female artists for not volunteering at the Red Crescent.⁹⁹ One author argued that 'those who sing can also dress wounds', and that 'as the battle continues and the doors remain open' for female artists to contribute more valuably.¹⁰⁰ In the writer's eyes, music was not a valuable enough contribution, rather, women needed to further supplement their efforts by 'visiting hospitals, raising money for the Red Crescent, knitting clothes for refugees, or purchasing gifts for the injured'.¹⁰¹ This notion was echoed outside of Egypt with some Libyan papers attacking 'Umm Kulthūm for singing 'love songs' during her money-raising performance, when the Arab world was at a 'state of war'.¹⁰² Although these criticisms may appear unfounded, when as this chapter has shown 'Umm Kulthūm was an extremely vocal and political artist, they were often a result of the singer's constant de-valuation of her own contributions. When asked at a press conference if she was a political person, 'Umm Kulthūm replied that she was not and merely a regular

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Fūmīl Labīb, "Ayna Fanānātunah Fi Al Ma'rakah", *Al Kawākib*, 11 July 1967, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Al Naqqāsh, *Lughz 'Umm Kulthūm*, p. 78.

artist.¹⁰³ Additionally, she made it clear in interviews that ‘she refused to speak about politics’, preferring to portray her work as fundamental patriotism.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, she made numerous press statements, throughout this period, minimizing her efforts in comparison to the physical struggle. In one example interview, she stated, ‘Our fidā’īyūn (revolutionaries) have gained in one year what our voices could not in 20 years’.¹⁰⁵ Complicating historian Diane Whitelaw’s claims that ‘the devaluing of female-associated tasks is a western academic, retrospective imposition’, ‘Umm Kulthūm’s rhetoric reveals a personal decision to portray herself as apolitical, for both the purpose of modesty and political safety.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, her case reveals the need to deconstruct and challenge women’s contemporary claims of neutrality.

Despite the minority criticisms by the Arabic press, and ‘Umm Kulthūm’s personal efforts to depreciate her work, her contributions remained highly praised and respected by the press, who commended her promotion of female participation in the various dimensions of the struggle.¹⁰⁷ Throughout this decade ‘Umm Kulthūm’s music constantly championed violence as the sole legitimate means of resistance, with ‘the sound of [her] singing turn[ing] into the sound of the cannon’.¹⁰⁸ Although her music, at times, amplified the gendered expectations of resistance by equating violence with masculinity, her feminine presence expanded women’s realms to include the political and anti-colonial spaces of her performances. Moreover, her economic imperative

¹⁰³ Jalāl Fu’ād, ‘Mathal ‘A’lā Lilfannanīn Jamī’an’, *Al Kawākib*, 21 November 1967, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ Qandīl, p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Awaḍ, p. 158.

¹⁰⁶ Diane Whitelaw, ‘Gender and Decolonisation in Zambia: Re-Examining Women’s Contributions to the Anti-Colonial Struggle’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 48.3 (2022), pp. 545-561 (p. 560).

¹⁰⁷ Nawwal Al Baylī, p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Faytwanjī, ‘Umm Kulthūm Mathal’, *Palestine Newspaper*, 28 July 1968.

broadened women's responsibilities, allowing them to engage personally in the struggle, albeit through the language of maternalism and domesticity. Overall, far from being apolitical, 'Umm Kulthūm's music was a significant means of mobilization for the Palestinian cause.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Danielson, p. 116.

Chapter Two: Harbinger of Hope: Fayruz and Epistemic Resistance

'I do not forget you Palestine even as it pulls me, it pulls me, the distance'.¹¹⁰

Fayrūz

Fayruz, a popular Lebanese singer, nicknamed Neighbor of the Moon, released in 1972, just a few years after the Naksa, an album titled *Jerusalem in My Heart*, filled with songs dedicated entirely to Palestine. Not long after the release of this album, she was awarded the key to the city of Jerusalem, in recognition of her work and effort toward the Palestinian cause.¹¹¹ Differing from 'Umm Kulthūm, Fayrūz's discography was not one that profoundly championed armed resistance and violence. Rather her music reflected a subaltern turn to underscore the perspective of Palestinians. Moreover, her activism was more confined to her music, as she refrained from engaging heavily with media to promote the cause. Thus, this chapter, through focusing on Fayrūz's album, analyses the shift from militant pan- Arabism to more subaltern, ideological and epistemic resistance.

Following the 1967 loss, Fayrūz showcased her solidarity through musical films and live performances. Just a few months after the Six Day War, the singer performed in the musical film 'Safar Barlak (Exile)'. This movie, as Christopher Stone has highlighted, was immensely popular, with

¹¹⁰ Fayrūz, 'Sayfun Fal Yushhar', *Jerusalem in My Heart* (hereafter JIMH), Parlophone, 1972, <<https://youtu.be/5-CxnWtq1hU?si=Fb8H09GPXwxo4QAR>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

¹¹¹ Stone, p. 159.

its screening extending beyond Lebanon to neighboring Arab countries that traditionally exclusively showed either Egyptian or Western films.¹¹² It was during the preface of this musical in which her song 'Zahrat Al Madā'in' (Flower of Cities), on the city of Jerusalem, was first introduced to the public. Egyptian writer, Rajā' Al Naqqāsh who attended the premier wrote that, 'everyone who saw the movie... cried real tears'.¹¹³ He further praised the film as 'good nutrients' for the current stage of the Palestinian struggle.¹¹⁴ More notably, he asked the Ministry of Culture to make it available in numerous Egyptian cinemas for all to see, as no matter how hard he attempted to describe it he could 'not give it the true picture that matches its value'.¹¹⁵ Due to its popularity, after its premier, the song 'Zahrat al Madā'in' was played throughout numerous Arabic radio stations for a wider audience.¹¹⁶ Following the success of her earlier musical, two years later, Fayrūz performed Jibāl al Suwwān (Mountains of Flint), a production that figuratively represented the Palestinian cause through a portrayal of a struggle against colonialism.¹¹⁷ Like its predecessor, Jibāl al Suwwān was widely praised by the Arab world. One paper reported that the performance was followed by loud cheers and applause, with the audience demanding Fayrūz to come out and perform solo for them once more.¹¹⁸ Thus, the prominence and popularity of the singer's performances reveals the continuing demand and interest for resistance songs even after the 1967 loss, with audiences engaging with music not just through radio, but in person.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Rajā' Al Naqqāsh, 'Zahrat Al Madā'in', *Al Kawākib*, 14 November 1967, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Stone, p. 159.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Kamāl Al Najmī, 'Jumhūr Fayrūz Ayḡan Yuḡib Al ṡarab', *Al Kawākib*, 30 September 1969, p. 20.

In regard to her recorded music, a destined return was a central message of Fayrūz's songs. Nearly all of her songs on Palestine contained a line about an inevitable return of both the people and peace. In 'Zahrat Al Madā'in', she asserted, 'To Jerusalem peace is Coming', in an unwavering and resolute tone.¹¹⁹ More actively, in her song, 'Sanarji'u' (We Shall Return), she called on the audience, 'Come and we shall return, let us go'.¹²⁰ This definitive resolution was continued in her song, 'Sayfun Fal Yushhar' (A Sword, Let It Unsheathe), where along with the roaring ensemble of the male and female chorus she proclaimed, 'Now now, and not tomorrow, let the bells of return ring'.¹²¹ This phrase was repeated over 10 times throughout the song, emphasising heavily the inescapable liberation of the Palestinian people. Although it may appear little more than rhetoric, to characterise Fayrūz's music as passive, as some scholars have done, is to dismiss its profound psychological impact.¹²² As contemporary writer Majdī Najīb described it, during the difficult 1967 loss of the struggle, Fayrūz's music 'awakens the torch of faith and perseverance and justice'.¹²³ Moreover, as Fayrūz herself understood, her voice was people's 'companion during their worries, in exile, in their moments of joy and at times of fear and terror'.¹²⁴ Thus, although seemingly banal or passive, her music demonstrated what Michalinos Zembylas has termed anti-colonial hope, 'the capacity or drive

¹¹⁹ Fayrūz, 'Zahrat Al Madā'in', *JIMH*, Parlophone, 1972, <<https://youtu.be/ElrJ6YxM2qw?si=doS7U0FCYgk38Mjy>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

¹²⁰ Fayrūz, 'Sanarji'u', *JIMH*, Parlophone, 1972, <https://youtu.be/yClp6sJ6NpM?si=4ZHa4foO_Y8GX5bW> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

¹²¹ Fayrūz, 'Sayfun Fal Yushhar'.

¹²² Salma Yassine and Vicky Panossian, 'Feiruz: Deconstructing a Legacy', in *Transnational Arab Stardom: Glamour, Performance and Politics*, ed. by Kaya Davies Hayon and Stefanie Van de Peer (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024), pp. 99-112 (p. 109).

¹²³ Majdī Najīb, 'Khiṭāb Maftuḥ 'Īlā Fayrūz', *Al Kawākib*, 13 August 1968, p. 13.

¹²⁴ Nora Boustany, 'The Sad Voice of Beirut: Fairuz Sings of a Nation That No Longer Exists', *The Washington Post*, 25 April 1987, <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1987/04/26/the-sad-voice-of-beirut/29f5d2ab-715a-4ece-9fc8-038a824a1a68/>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

of humans for a better future against all odds' in a state of colonialism.¹²⁵ Rather than fixating on the dreadful conditions of Palestine, anti-colonial hope illustrated the dreams and desires of the colonised. Far from being futile, or naïve, hope was a political and ideological act of resistance that aimed to provide comfort and faith for the Palestinians, which Fayrūz's music endeavoured to achieve.

In a similar manner, Fayrūz's songs heavily constructed nostalgia for a pre-colonial Palestine to provide comfort and solace to its listeners. In her song on the Palestinian city Bīsān, she sang, 'We had a long time ago. A beautiful orchard', conveying the temporal distance between the peaceful memory and contemporary instability of the region.¹²⁶ She further added, 'Our village was called Bīsān', emphasising the past tense to solidify the rupture of Palestinian geography as a result of the 1948 Nakba (Catastrophe) and recent 1967 Naksa. Her song continued, 'I remember oh Bīsān. Oh playground of childhood', expressing a deep longing and melancholy for the tranquil past of Palestine through a higher pitched, falsetto tone.¹²⁷ Despite the despair portrayed, however, the song displayed remnants of hope by demanding, 'Take me to Bīsān' numerous times throughout the verses.¹²⁸ This sentiment is echoed in her song, 'Al Quds Al 'Atīqah' (Ancient Jerusalem), where she described how she 'passed by the streets, the ancient streets of Jerusalem'.¹²⁹ Going into further detail of the landscape of the city she sang:

¹²⁵ Michalinos Zembylas, 'Affective and Biopolitical Dimensions of Hope: From Critical Hope to Anti-Colonial Hope in Pedagogy', *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 19.1 (2022), pp. 28-48 (p. 28).

¹²⁶ Fayrūz, 'Bīsān', *JIMH*, Parlophone, 1972, <https://youtu.be/5xnfZOIwf5M?si=eO1BO_KHJxb9PHjd> [accessed 30 December 2024].

¹²⁷ Fayrūz, 'Bīsān'.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Fayrūz, 'Al Quds Al 'Atīqah', *JIMH*, Parlophone, 1972, <https://youtu.be/yClp6sJ6NpM?si=4ZHa4foO_Y8GX5bW> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

There was a land and there were hands that were cultivating

Cultivating under the sun and wind

And then there were houses and windows flowering

And then there were children with books in their hands.¹³⁰

Although the aforementioned lyrics may initially appear despairing and grief-stricken, their significance lies in their epistemic impact. As Farah Aboubakr has shown, through her analysis of Palestinian Folktales, oral transmission is extremely vital for colonised people with little to no alternative means to solidify their cultural and collective memory.¹³¹ Moreover, historically, it has been women who have undertaken this crucial task of preserving tales of the homeland.¹³² Hence, by engaging in spatial nostalgia, Fayrūz's music echoed this female burden of memory to preserve the former landscape, and in effect contest contemporary colonial division of the land. Additionally, as a custodian of Palestinian memory, Fayrūz aimed to provide hope to Palestinians by reminding them of their collective home and right to it. This is more direct in her song, *Yā Rubū' Bilādī* (Oh Places of My Country), where she used the possessive article to sing,

Oh places of my country

Oh most loved places

In the tenderness of my heart

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Farah Aboubakr, 'Peasantry in Palestinian Folktales Sites of Memory, Homeland, and Collectivity', *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, 31.2 (2017), pp. 217–238 (p. 220).

¹³² Ibid.

Lies your love and enthrallment.¹³³

By emphasising possession of the physical spaces of Palestine, Fayrūz affirmed the integral connection between the Palestinian land and people. This mode of knowledge creation was further demonstrated through her description of the villages, where she sang,

In the hills of the elderberries

...

Oh scent of Chrysanthemums

That is exuded in the hills.¹³⁴

Although seemingly romantic, the act of naming specific Palestinian flora and describing the beauty of the landscape, worked to claim legitimacy for the Palestinian people. Through nostalgia, Fayrūz displayed the deep-rooted knowledge of Palestinians to defend their presence as authentic. Hence, as Alastair Bonnet has argued, radical nostalgia should not be understood as solely 'romantic', but rather a form of anti-colonialism through its epistemic interjection.¹³⁵ By demonstrating antiquity through the act of remembrance, Fayruz's music constituted a form of memory-oriented resistance. Through engaging in nostalgia, the singer challenged contemporary disillusionment by emphasising a peaceful and authentic Palestinian past.

¹³³ Fayrūz, 'Yā Rubū' Bilādī', *JIMH*, Parlophone, 1972, <<https://youtu.be/fy6jaZJzDIw?si=tl0wEwbsleIV-VBI>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2010), p. 90.

Fayrūz's music further combined nostalgia with the mythical, to express the message of hope for Palestinians. In her song, she often personified nature into the role of a longing and expectant person, as seen in 'Sanarji'u' where she described, 'Over there at the hills there are hills that sleep and wake on our promise'.¹³⁶ This is maintained in her illustration of the conditions of the trees as 'willows above every water, tired and bowed down.'¹³⁷ By characterising the deterioration of the eco-system as a response to colonialism, Fayrūz portrayed the occupation as unnatural. Moreover, through anthromorphizing Palestinian nature and embedding it with autonomy, she aimed to reinstate agency to the Palestinian people through this intrinsic link. This use of the mythical was further expressed through the description of talking birds. In her song, Fayrūz proclaimed, 'We shall return, the nightingale told me', avowing the inevitability of a post-colonial, peaceful Palestine.¹³⁸ This sentiment was mirrored in her song, 'Ghāba Nahārun' (Another Day Has Gone), which depicted:

A bird bid me farewell, and said

I am moving on to my country

It reminded me of my expulsion.¹³⁹

Using magical realism through talking birds, Fayruz's music challenged contemporary despair and pragmatism by infusing the Palestinian story with power. As Sanabel Abdelrahman has argued, by emphasising subaltern agency through the use of the mythical, magical realism challenges 'Western

¹³⁶ Fayrūz, 'Sanarji'u'.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Fayrūz, 'Ghāba Nahārun', *JIMH*, Parlophone, 1972, <<https://youtu.be/w38-GJuEMWg?si=CmLIIPiuA-2wP7iT>> [accessed 18 Feb 2025].

linearity' and empiricism.¹⁴⁰ This is clear in 'Zahrat Al Madā'in', when Fayrūz sang, 'And you will erase oh river of Jordan the traces of barbaric feet'.¹⁴¹ The aforementioned line exclaimed the alleged power of nature to support the Palestinian struggle and erase the 'unnatural' traces of the occupation. Nature's mythical role in these songs dually served not only to remind people of the continuous practices of colonialism to reinvigorate them but also insist on the inescapable promise of a fateful return. Although, as Masya Shqerat has warned, we need to be careful not to overly romanticise anti-colonial resistance, it is crucial to recognise the role of the romantic and the mythical in combatting epistemological injustice and the realities of colonialism.¹⁴²

Whilst the bulk of Fayrūz's discography centred on hope, violence did play a role in her work, albeit minorly in comparison to 'Umm Kulthūm. In her song, 'Zahrat Al Madā'in', Fayrūz sang with the thundering sound of the male chorus, 'The shining anger is coming. With might and terror it is coming', re-enforcing gendered expectations of violence.¹⁴³ The verse was repeated numerous times throughout the songs ensuring its resonance in the listener's mind. However, differing from 'Umm Kulthūm's portrayal of violence through an armed struggle, Fayrūz's depiction alluded to the inescapable anger and wrath of God toward colonialism. This ethereal depiction of violence was echoed in 'Al Quds Al 'Atīqah', where she belted:

I am screaming in the streets, the ancient streets of Jerusalem

¹⁴⁰ Sanabel Abdelrahman, 'Approaches to Palestinian Liberation: Magical Realism as Resistance Literature', NO IIN, 2023 <<https://no-niin.com/issue-17/approaches-to-palestinian-liberation-magical-realism-as-resistance-literature/index.html>> [accessed 5 April 2025].

¹⁴¹ Fayrūz, 'Zahrat Al Madā'in'.

¹⁴² Masya Shqerat, 'Everyday Resistance and Settler Colonialism in Palestine' (doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2018), p. 220.

¹⁴³ Fayrūz, 'Zahrat Al Madā'in'.

Let the song become a storm and thunder.¹⁴⁴

Here once again, magical realism converges with religiosity to portray the karmic anger toward colonial practice and conditions. Through its attempts to reinsert power and agency into the Palestinian narrative, the use of the mythical in Fayrūz's music is an immensely valuable epistemic contribution.

Interestingly, despite the minority presence of violence in her songs, the reception of Fayruz's music indicates her solidification as a core figure of armed resistance. One 1971 resistance poster by Nathīr Nabā'a, utilised the lyrics of her song 'Zahrat Al Madā'in' on top of illustrations of armed guerilla fighters.¹⁴⁵ The poster read, 'The home is ours and Jerusalem is ours', with the words 'We shall return' at the centre.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, contemporary writer Majdī Najīb, commenting on 'Zahrat Al Madā'in', described Fayrūz's voice as 'a canon of hope... deep in the heart of every Arab'.¹⁴⁷ More substantially, in contrast to 'Umm Kulthūm who passed away in 1975, Fayrūz's enduring existence has distinguished her as a symbol of resistance in collective memory, leading up to the present day. Later interviews conducted by academic Dima Issa revealed Arabic people's heavy association of force with Fayrūz. One Lebanese man Zuhair stated, that when Fayrūz 'sang for Palestine, for Jerusalem, we were all ready to hold our guns and go there... At that time, yes, I was ready to stand and fight for Fairouz'.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Maya, a Lebanese woman, argued that, 'You know, Jamal Abdel Nasser and Yasser Arafat could come back from the dead and tell us Palestine would be free, and we

¹⁴⁴ Fayrūz, 'Al Quds Al 'Atīqah'.

¹⁴⁵ Nathīr Nabā'a, *This House Is Ours*, 1971, Poster, <<https://www.palestineposterproject.org/posters/house-ours>> [accessed 26 March 2025].

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Majdī Najīb, 'Khiṭāb Maftuḥ 'Īlā Fayrūz', *Al Kawākib*, 13 August 1968, p. 13.

¹⁴⁸ Dima Issa, 'Song is the Secret of Existence: Fairouz and the Arab Diaspora in London and Doha' (doctoral thesis, University of Westminster, 2019), p. 123.

wouldn't necessarily believe them. She goes up on that stage and sings one song and I believe her.'¹⁴⁹ Remarkably, the interviewee directly compared and favoured Fayrūz to the top male representatives of the struggle at the time, showcasing her popularity. Similarly, numerous commentators reiterated Fayrūz's position as an emblem of 'hope' for the 'general situation of the Arab world'.¹⁵⁰ Although her music mainly centred nostalgia and longing, it is relatively clear, through interviewees' connection of Fayrūz with violent resistance, that the singer's promotion of hope yielded a significant mobilising impact on the Arab public. Thus, her music cemented her in public memory as a crucial anti-colonial figure.



Figure 4: Poster, the House is Ours, by artist Nadhīr Nab'ah, 1971.¹⁵¹

Despite, the contemporary and current praise however, Fayruz's music was not void of criticism. On the contrary, her portrayal of hope was heavily critiqued by many male poets for being

¹⁴⁹ Issa, p. 123.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁵¹ Nab'ah, *The House is Ours*.

too optimistic and impractical. In response to her music, Syrian Poet Faysul Bulaybal wrote, 'Excuse me and sorry Fayrūz the bells of return will not ring... a stake has driven underneath us, a stake has driven, and it will not come out'.¹⁵² In the same vein, Egyptian poet Tamīm Al Barghūthī articulated,

Excuse me and sorry Fayrūz and Nīzār

For the state now is the worst

...

Scoundrels play with our nation and the flesh of infants

...

Yesterday we had a nation

The bells of return shall not ring.¹⁵³

Similarly disillusioned, Sudanese poet Qays 'Abdulraḥmān wrote, 'sorry to the literaries of our nation, for the state has deteriorated to the worse, for revolution is no longer enough'.¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, whilst the notion of hope appeared to be unanimously disregarded by male poets, female Sudanese poet Sanā' 'Abdul'aẓīm wrote defending Fayrūz asserting,

We shall return we shall return as we once were, and our nation will raise its sails

Fayrūz wait for our return, your bells have almost rung.¹⁵⁵

Here, it is apparent that hope was not a neutral or well-received concept by many male figures. Rather, in this period marked by disillusionment and surrender, many poets disregarded Fayrūz's

¹⁵² 'Ṭawfān Al Aqsá Yā Quds', Al Quds Al 'Arabī, 26 November 2024, <<https://www.alqudsalarabi.co.uk/-طوفان-الأقصى-يا-قدس/>> [accessed 26 March 2025].

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

promotion of solidarity and insistence on victory. Thus, challenging both academics and contemporaries' insistence on 1967 as a period of loss and mourning, Fayrūz's voice emerged as one of the remaining promoters of anti-colonial resistance and hope.

Overall, Fayruz's music, differing from Umm Kulthum's militaristic approach centred the feelings and experiences of Palestinians through an emphasis on the idyllic past and potential future. As beacons of hope, Fayruz's songs, although filled with melancholy and despair, heavily combatted and departed from the contemporary pessimism of the time. Whereas 'Umm Kulthūm viewed nostalgia and longing as weakening factors of the struggle, Fayrūz utilised them to imagine and assert Palestinian liberation, helping revitalise and promote the struggle in people's hearts. Thus, in a period, characterised by pessimism and retreat, to hope was to resist.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz's songs on Palestine, this dissertation has aimed to rectify the absence of musical sources in trans-national histories of decolonization. Pan-Arabism was not an exclusively male initiative. On the contrary, as this dissertation has shown, during the difficult moments of loss and defeat, when many male actors were retreating from the cause, it was 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz who took on the role of promoting Pan-Arabism. Both artists' post-war uptake in music invites a reconsideration of scholar's periodisation of this era. Far from being the end of anti-colonial solidarity, the post-Naksa period, through a women-centered approach, can be viewed as an era of perseverance, action, and hope.

By examining 'Umm Kulthum and Fayrūz's different methods of conceptualizing resistance, this study has aimed to highlight the various dimensions of female participation in the struggle. Chapter One, through its focus on 'Umm Kulthūm explored the singer's heavy championing of violence as the sole legitimate means of resistance. Whilst her music adhered heavily to the gendered expectations of male violence, as a female artist, her performances redefined spatial boundaries, allowing women to engage in previously masculine and political spaces. Moreover, through media, the artist continuously emphasized women's economic agency as a key component of the cause, expanding their roles in society and mobilizing her fan base. In contrast, Fayrūz's chapter demonstrated a shift from physical violence and armed struggle to more ideological and epistemic resistance. By constructing a collective past and identity for Palestinians, the singer took on the feminine role of memory preservation to challenge the contemporary erasure and loss of the occupation. Her radical use of nostalgia combined with magical realism emphasized the inevitability of return, helping to invigorate members of the struggle. Although often in direct contrast to one another, 'Umm Kulthūm and Fayrūz's music similarly worked to promote and maintain the Palestinian cause in the minds of the people.

Overall, both singers, although at times met with criticism, were arguably two of the most dominant advocates, culturally, of pan-Arabism in this period. Music, at its core, was a means of resistance intended to mobilize the public and revitalize the Palestinian cause. Due to time constraints and limited accessibility, however, this dissertation has focused on only two historical actors to highlight music's anti-colonial power. Trans-national historiography would benefit greatly from future work examining further female artists, to uncover commonalities and differences

amongst the gendered expectations of resistance. Rather than reiterate Western historiography's tendency to emphasize the written and conventionally 'political', historians of decolonization must challenge these notions by further uncovering the diverse means of resistance employed by anti-colonial figures.

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