

# Mashrou' Leila's Musical Affective Politics: Queer Resistance in the Egyptian Social and Political Uprising

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*On June 14, 2020, queer Egyptian Sarah Hegazy died by suicide in Canada, where she was exiled shortly after her release from prison in Egypt for raising a rainbow flag during a Mashrou' Leila (ML) concert on September 22, 2017. Following the concert night, Egypt saw widespread arrests of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals amidst an imposed media block-out on the queer community. Soon after, a transnational response came from queer groups around the world as they mobilized in solidarity with the Egyptian queer community. Inspired by this concert and its aftermath, this article offers an analysis of ML's music (lyrics), videos, images, interviews, fan base, and other opinions and perspectives of them. Within this analysis, to assess ML's sociopolitical significance, I posit the concert as a distinctively unique culmination event generative of queer affective politics of resistance for the Egyptian queer community since the 2011 uprising. In doing so, this article contextualizes state-sponsored homophobic violence as an intrinsic component of the new regime's political transition using a musical queer analysis that is entangled in Egypt's body politics, international diplomatic relations, and domestic legal and sociocultural perceptions on morality.*

## Introduction

On June 14, 2020, Egyptian queer activist Sarah Hegazy died by suicide in Canada, where she was exiled shortly after her release from prison for raising rainbow flags together with queer Egyptian Ahmed Alaa during a Mashrou' Leila (ML) concert on September 22, 2017 (Walsh 2020; Ghoshal 2018; Arraf 2018). That night, when the Lebanese alternative indie-rock-pop Arabesque band—of which two of the four members are openly queer—performed at the Cairo Festival City, seven attendees were arrested for encouraging homosexuality (Michaelson 2017; Egypt Independent 2017a). Next, Egypt saw widespread arrests of queer individuals amidst an imposed media blackout on the queer community; the arrests and the anti-queer

rhetoric went viral on social media and attracted a peculiar, unprecedented attention (Egypt Independent 2017b; Human Rights First 2017; The New Arab 2017). In a moral panic, the media explained the foreign/Western threat of homosexuality on Egyptian culture, in the context of which only a month after the concert, Egyptian member of parliament Riyadh Abdel Sattar introduced a bill receiving parliamentary majority that would have criminalized homosexuality in the country with up to five years in jail (Avery 2017a; Albawaba 2017; Human Rights First 2017).

Jolting the queer struggle at its core in Egypt, ML is a noteworthy case. First, it enables examination of queer rights, being a typically neglected and outlying issue of the Arab Uprisings. Second, from 2008 until September 14, 2022, when ML announced they were disbanding due to political and cultural repression, ML was a social and political justice-oriented band that crafted conscious music that speaks to pressing issues—some of which are constitutionally or culturally outlawed—across the Arab world, in a quest for an alternative democratic future (*Sarde After Dinner* 2022). These issues include political corruption, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, religion, patriarchy, militarism, freedom of speech, climate change, and migration (Haddad 2017a; Salfiti 2013; El-TaHER 2015; Wetmore 2019). Queer rights are only one component of ML's music, yet they have often received the greatest public attention, revealing a correlation between sociocultural and political factors that shape queer resistance in Egypt.

This cultural and political correlation materializes as significant in two ways. First, the opposition to ML in the Arab world's public sphere (Egypt included) is rooted in homophobia that is saturated with cultural values that deem queer existence as impossible. Second, the various issues ML sings about are central to the revolutions of 2011 across the region, which explains why ML emerged as a threat to political leaders including Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's regime, leading to ML's ban from Egypt (Mada Masr 2017). Against the backdrop of these two interlocked catalysts, consequently, ML's case allows for contextualizing cultural homophobia as the foundation on which state homophobic violence thrives and ultimately became an intrinsic component of the political transition, regime stabilization, and ascendancy in Egypt since Hosni Mubarak stepped down in 2011. This, I argue, uncovers a double-edged queer resistance that ML and their fans illuminate.

Such state-sponsored violent homophobia, during Mubarak's era and post-2011 revolution, aims at obliterating, controlling and terrorizing queer

people. Such violence aptly reflects the socially and politically constructed division between the public and private spheres, and the extent to which this division heteronormatively informs how Egyptian society and state view and treat queer Egyptians. By attending the concert and raising rainbow flags, Hegazy, Alaa, and others entered the public terrain believing in their right to exist in this space and refusing to be merely sexualized symbols of threat to state-defined morality and ethos. Indeed, I argue that when queer individuals assert their right to be in the public space by acting or appearing in a way that society and the state deem a violation of heteronormative propriety, they are committing an act of resistance which in the ML case, as opposed to previously known anti-queer crackdowns, happens to be musically generated and therefore especially noteworthy seeing its novelty in queer politics in the region.

Not the first of its kind in Egypt, the anti-queer crackdown following the ML concert is uniquely distinctive in that it generates affective politics of resistance; the power that music can hold towards producing an oppositional discourse and building alternative communities (Roy 2010; Freeland 2009; Zaslow 2010) such as that of ML's queer and queer-ally fan base. Besides the flag raising in the concert space, such power is evident in that musically induced acts of resistance and the Egyptian state's response to them drew a transnational response soon after the concert, as queer activists around the world mobilized in solidarity with the queer community and protested in front of the Egyptian embassies (BuzzFeedVideo 2017). The aftermath of the ML concert was covered in international media, and several solidarity protests occurred globally. ML's case is also the first musically motivated case of queer resistance within the noticeably larger recent resistance-music phenomenon that has grown in Egypt since 2011 (LeVine 2015).

## Method

As new media, cellphones, and the internet played an essential role in the Arab Uprisings' coordination, mobilization, and dissemination, they became some of the most documented international conflicts (Lynch 2012). For this reason, to contextualize queer Egypt, ML, and the concert events, I utilized the social movement online research methods approach as it provides possibilities for media content analysis, while being mindful of its advantages and disadvantages (Mosca 2014). One advantage of this approach is that the internet's role in mobilizing resistance has been growing, 'even changing its

logic and organizational forms' (Mosca 2014, 397). Following the distinction some scholars make, I rely on the internet as a source of information and not as an object of study (Rogers 2009).

The internet allows collecting information on groups' history, claims, organization, actions, and other characteristics using documents, posts, individual blogs, websites, and social media profiles of groups and activists (Mosca 2014). Access to such content allows the internet to 'facilitate individualized identities—diffuse, reticular, and fragmented movements; issue networks; and loose coalitions, as well as novel forms of social aggregation being the material infrastructure of new forms of contentious politics' (Mosca 2014, 397). Yet, this approach also entails challenges of archiving and sampling when collecting and analyzing online data. These include the lack of exhaustive lists of protesting actors, and the unknown populations of collective and individual mobilizing that are strictly 'intertwined with the offline environment' and therefore make sampling even more problematic (Mosca 2014, 401).

To investigate what makes ML a sociopolitical resistance force against queer oppression, and what ML's concert case discloses about resistance in post-uprising Egypt, for queer rights and beyond, I reviewed hundreds of public online sources in both Arabic and English. Using a qualitative in-depth analysis, these sources were divided into four categories. For each of the four categories, there were hundreds of thousands of search results, most of which were published between 2008 and September 2022. At every stage, I selectively picked sources based on their headlines, the publishing platform/source, and their potential to add more information and insights to the designated category. I stopped reviewing results for each category when saturation was reached, after I received minimal or no new information and insights in consecutive 50 sources. To illustrate this purposive sampling, full details of the sources provided as examples throughout the article are listed in the Appendix (includes news articles, social media posts, podcasts, blogs, etc.).

In the first category, using the search words 'LGBTQ Egypt,' 'Queer Egypt,' and 'LGBTQ Arab Spring', I collected website and social media news, and human rights reports about the Egyptian queer context to create a comprehensive scope of anti-queer violence pre- and post-uprising. To build a timeline of this violence, I coded 150 sources that based on the headline seemed to address state-sponsored crackdowns, police violence, public

statements from politicians, state-owned media coverage, and attempted constitutional changes against the queer community. This included surveying queer pages mostly in Egypt but also around the Arab world to create a full picture. The searches in this category made it clear that a complete capturing of the matter would be incomplete without ML and their concert events at its center, which led me to the next two categories of the searching process.

In the second category, using various search words including 'Mashrou' Leila,' 'Mashrou' Leila albums,' and 'Mashrou' Leila interviews,' I coded 90 items of ML's music (lyrics), videos, images, interviews, fan base, and other opinions and perspectives of them. These include 38 songs making up their 4 studio albums and 6 single-track releases. I coded the music, videos, and image library for sounds, silence, wording, symbols, fashion, and explicit and implicit messaging that could be associated with possibly causing or calling for sociopolitical contention. I replayed ML's musical audios and videos numerous times in slow motion to obtain as many details as possible. I did the same with the band's public interviews and statements in both video and text formats.

Focusing on the concert and its aftermath, the third category inevitably emerged from the searches of the first two. In a similar fashion, I reviewed website and social media news, podcasts, and blog posts about the concert night and its consequences. This stage included a review of public statements in video and text, podcasts, blog and social media posts by Sarah Hegazy—and other activists—as her resistance continued in Canada after she left Egypt.

Finally, I conducted an extensive screening of the musical scene in Egypt to identify music, musicians, and bands socio-politically active in the post-uprising climate.<sup>1</sup> This stage is necessary for situating ML's case in the overall music resistance context that emerged in post-uprising Egypt. For this category, I started the search with the words 'revolutionary music Egypt,' 'Arab uprisings music', and 'Egyptian uprising music'. Here too, I reviewed sources until saturation.

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<sup>1</sup> On the personal level, without formally implementing autoethnographic elements in this paper, I followed ML's official pages and work for years as a fan. As a self-identifying queer-Arab myself, I followed queer social media pages and news in Egypt and the region for the last 15 years.

## Before ML:

### The History of Anti-Queer State Violence in Egypt

State-sponsored anti-queer violence in Egypt—mostly against gay men and transgender women—happens in the absence of an explicit law criminalizing homosexuality (Berkouwer, Sultan, and Yehia 2015). Using vague and insidious morality laws, however, in recent years the authorities increased their use of the 1951 law against prostitution, 1961 law against ‘debauchery’, and Article 178 of the Criminal Code that outlaws producing, possessing, or distributing materials that violate ‘public morality’. These laws, some in place since the British mandate and prior to independence in 1953, have been used by previous regimes for exposing, prosecuting, and putting queer people on trial (Mohamed, 2015; Abdella, 2015; Pratt 2007), including the crackdown following the ML concert. Such hefty reliance on a nonexistent palpable legal stance on homosexuality has been possible due to the moral discourse that nationally sells the queer community as a threat to the unimpeachable religious, patriarchal, and heteronormative ‘manhood of the nation’ and the respectable image of the state and its security (Long 2016; El Hourri 2018).

The decades under Hosni Mubarak, who came to power in 1981, are most documented. Under Mubarak, there was a ban on queer issues in the media, crackdowns at queer meeting points, and online spaces were used for plotting meetings prior to arrests. The largest raid known in Hosni Mubarak’s time was in 2001 when 52 people were arrested on Queen Boat, a queer club on the Nile River; 21 of these people were sentenced to three years in jail (Pratt 2007). This case marked the first time that gay men had been put on trial, leading to a public acknowledgment that homosexuality existed in Egypt.

When the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) ruled Egypt from March 2011, and later from June 24, 2012, when the Muslim Brotherhood was elected to replace the SCAF, queer people were publicly disregarded in a temporary quiescence. That is due to the density of the political climate, protests, and widespread disobedience at the time (Abdella 2015). Nonetheless, privately, revolutionists and human rights activists most commonly faced charges of homosexuality or expressing opinions supportive of queer people. After Al-Sisi took power in the military coup of July 4, 2013, starting in October 2013 the police targeted gathering points for queer people and raided houses where queer people threw parties. The Egyptian Initiative of Personal Rights reported in November 2017 that 232

queer people were prosecuted on 'debauchery' charges. Relying on a deeply culturally instilled anti-queer stance that is also rooted in perceptions around human nature, heteropatriarchal, and religious intersections, most of these state-sponsored anti-queer crackdowns drew minimal to nonexistent outcry in comparison with ML's case (Ghoshal 2018).

In April 2014, four transgender women were arrested. These four women were arrested in their own home according to a report by *Mada Masr* (2017). Three of them were sentenced to three years of jail, while the fourth was sentenced for eight years for being the apartment owner. A procedural error in their first arrest allowed them to win their appeal and they were released. In May 2014, a month later, another group of four transgender women were arrested. The local newspaper *El Youm 7* published a video of these victims in the police station, where they were humiliated and forced to admit that they were sex workers (Abdella 2015). This newspaper is known for its good relationship with the Egyptian authorities and for spreading hate speech against queer people. One of the four women was sentenced to 12 years in jail, one to five years, and two to seven years.

In September 2014, after becoming viral on social media, the local press shared a video of a gay wedding that showed a couple exchanging vows with friends on a boat on the Nile. Eight of the attendees were sentenced to a year in jail, and the couple went through 'anal tests' that showed they did not engage in homosexual relations (Kingsley 2014). In December 2014, an estimated 25-30 men were arrested for practicing 'debauchery' in a bathhouse in the Ramses area of Cairo. The media sponsored this crackdown, as Mona Iraqi from the pro-government *Al Kabera Wal Nas* channel knew about this arrest beforehand and was present to film the entire raid. Iraqi later aired it on her investigatory program *El Mostakhabi*, presenting the dangers of homosexuality as being the top reason for HIV-AIDS. In April 2015, in so-called protection of the public interest and religious and social values, the Egyptian court issued a ruling that queer foreigners can be deported or banned from entering the country.

These cases may create an impression that there is an assemblage of laws and prosecutorial procedures based on a constitutional sexual and/or gender minority status, but not only do detainees face legal framings that do not recognize their queerness explicitly, they are often deprived of recourse to defense rights and adequate legal aid. As part of the state's broader systematic use of torture in prisons, these cases are handled through inhumane

interrogations that rely on sexual assault, verbal abuse, and electrocution within obscure relations between the legislative and executive arms of the state (Human Rights Watch 2018; Hegazy 2020). The only case law that permits precedents in handling such cases—including the ML concert detainees—is the previous cases that posit queer individuals as a national security threat to the government, religious authorities, human nature, and traditional sociocultural fabric. By keeping a vague morality interlocked with the state's legal power, the use of police and military forces, media incitement, and social media exploitation results in a legal manipulation that does not only deny the civil, legal, or citizenship rights of queer people, but encourages their persecution.

Aside from the legality and state's motives behind them, these cases show that queer resistance in Egypt mounts to a 'social nonmovement', a concept that refers to 'collective actions of noncollective actors' originally developed to describe the everyday resistance of Egyptian women (Bayat 2013, 20). A social nonmovement occurs when individuals 'carry out similar everyday forms of resistance separately from one another' (Elmeligy 2020, 23). While social nonmovements typically refer to public acts of resistance, I argue that because individuals are not deterred by the potential of severe legal state-sanctioned aggressions against their normally privately lived—or publicly in the case of the ML concert—queer lives, the queer community in Egypt has been living as a social nonmovement for decades. The queer resistance generated by ML is a simultaneously similar yet unique moment; while it is an unprecedented case of public resistance (the intentional raising of the flags) to state and sociocultural values, the concert attendees did so after living as separated nonmovement actors in a community that has been forced to remain publicly invisible.

## The Queer Band: What's Worth the Ban?

ML started in 2008 as a four-member band; (queer identifying) Hamed Sinno as the lead vocalist; (queer identifying) Haig Papazian on the violin; Carl Gerges on the drums, and Firas Abou Fakher on the guitar (Haddad 2017b). While their songs are entirely in Arabic, ML have been performing in non-Arabic speaking countries for years, granting them an outreach both in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) and transnationally (Faber 2019). As their music continued to gain popularity, they made four studio albums; the

first in 2009 was eponymously titled, followed by *Elhal Elromansi* (2011),<sup>2</sup> *Raasiik* (2013),<sup>3</sup> and *Ibn El Leil* (2015)<sup>4</sup> (Wetmore 2019; DW Jaafar Talk 2017).

Various modes of analysis exemplify how MLs ideology and vision of WANA transpire in their craft and actions. Songs such as Tayf, Radio Romance, Imm El-Jacket, and Shim El-Yasmine focus on gender and sexuality and illustrate a comprehensive understanding of anti-queer oppression as a recurring theme in MLs work. Tayf<sup>5</sup>, for instance, talks about a crackdown on a nightclub and its closure due to its frequenters' sexuality (Haddad 2017a). The song alludes to classical poets, Sappho (Greek) and Abu Nuwas (Arab and lived during the Abbasid Caliphate), who wrote about their homosexuality and the injustices they faced in the verses 'Our hips translated Sappho and Abu Nuwas in the tongue of oohs and aahs. On bed sheets embroidered with the same oohs and aahs we chanted at the picket line.' Using such renowned names in poetry sends a message that MLs struggle follows a long line of historic queer existence and resistance, especially against claims around the foreignness of queerness being a Western importation imposed on Arab cultures (Massad 2007).

The song Imm El-Jacket<sup>6</sup> describes a harshly-judged gender-nonconforming girl being mistaken for a man because of her short hair, not wearing make-up, and opposing conventional women's looks and behaviors in her society. In the song Shim El-Yasmine<sup>7</sup>, the speaker calls on his boyfriend to 'remember to remember' him, in a society that does not allow same-sex relationships. The song describes what their life would look like had they not been separated forcefully, imagining introducing him to his parents or

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<sup>2</sup> Arabic for 'The Romantic Solution'.

<sup>3</sup> Arabic for 'They Made You Dance'.

<sup>4</sup> Arabic for 'Son of the Night'.

<sup>5</sup> Lyrics available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiTcUoNUamU&ab\\_channel=Mashrou%27Leila](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiTcUoNUamU&ab_channel=Mashrou%27Leila)

<sup>6</sup> Lyrics available at: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/imm-el-jacket-%D8%A5%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%AA-girl-jacket.html>

<sup>7</sup> Lyrics available at: <https://www.fikalam.com/arabic-music/shim-el-yasmine-mashrou-leila>

living an ordinary life (Haddad 2017a). The song *Radio Romance*<sup>8</sup>—the 2019 animated music video starts with the statement ‘to those who have not given up, love is resistance’—shows further musical affective and topoi entanglements as it centers a queer couple in an urban city (likely Beirut); they try to desperately hold on to each other but keep being pulled apart by external forces (*Mashrou’ Leila* 2019b). Trying to kiss but failing on multiple occasions, this song talks about a life lived against one’s wishes and calls for finding one’s love to keep the desire to live.

Other songs and music videos are not directly queer in their messages, but still carry nonconforming and counterhegemonic perspectives. The 2017 song *Roman*,<sup>9</sup> at the intersection of gender and race, celebrates what the band calls a ‘coalition’ of Muslim and Arab women, as a response to the dominant global white feminist narrative in which Muslim and Arab identities are a misfit. The band members also stated that the female music video director and producers regressed them as the heroes of the plot, subjecting them to the female gaze and showed them as individuals who take the backseat (literally, in the back of a truck) as the coalition makes progress. The lyrics, they said, talk about betrayal, conflict, and struggle, but the video is meant to show that oppression can be a ground for organizing and mobilizing resistance, rather than a site of victimhood. The 2009 song and video *Fasateen*<sup>10</sup>—‘Dresses’—talks about a young couple from different religions who are unable to marry because inter-religious marriages are taboo in the Arab world, so they decide to stay friends (*Mashrou’ Leila* 2010). In the music video, different characters prepare for a wedding in different places, and they all fail; one prepares a bouquet and ends up putting them in a food blender, another makes a cake and drops it on the ground, and a

<sup>8</sup> Music video and lyrics available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpbC\\_XZQNQ8&ab\\_channel=Mashrou%27Leila](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpbC_XZQNQ8&ab_channel=Mashrou%27Leila)  
<https://genius.com/Mashrou-leila-radio-romance-lyrics>

<sup>9</sup> Lyrics and music video available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF\\_\\_cpsDmZk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF__cpsDmZk)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF\\_\\_cpsDmZk&ab\\_channel=Mashrou%27Leila](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF__cpsDmZk&ab_channel=Mashrou%27Leila)

<sup>10</sup> Lyrics and video available at: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/fasateen-%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%86-dresses.html>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HqHdBlQe8&ab\\_channel=Mashrou%27Leila](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HqHdBlQe8&ab_channel=Mashrou%27Leila)

third—male presenting—wears a white bridal dress and puts on makeup but tears the dress into pieces as he wears it.

Not gender or sexuality related, other songs carry vigorous political messages. The song *Lil Watan*<sup>11</sup>—‘For the Motherland’—critiques political leaders’ control of their populations, describing how citizens can be brainwashed into fearing criticizing their own governments and lives (Haddad 2017b). The song describes how being forcibly returned to the ‘herd’ is always the destiny of contradicting mainstream thinking or behavior. To convey this message, the music video shows a transgender woman belly dancer in an almost empty lecture/political speech hall to represent the ways governments distract the people from truly urgent issues. The people are physically absent from engaging with the political message in the song and dance, but this is only revealed with a shot showing the empty hall at the video’s conclusion. The band stated that the song ‘discusses the way we are taught to acquiesce to the status quo, and the apathy we are rewarded for in Lebanese politics’. This message is especially visible in the verses, ‘Every time you demand change, they make you despair until you sell out all your freedom. They tell you to stop preaching and come dance with them’.

Politically as powerful, the 2019 song and video *Maalik*<sup>12</sup> (*Cavalry*) discuss machismo, militarized oppression and its presence in urban spaces and domestic life (*Mashrou' Leila* 2019a). The band stated that ‘Cavalry is an ode to putting up a fight, even when the odds are stacked against us. It’s a song about not letting political fatigue destroy our willingness to speak truth to power’. It addresses their struggle as a band possessing political power and being banned from performing in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon (Ekaterina, Gormley, and Poulton 2022; Khomami 2016), while finding themselves at the center of yet another human rights polemic.

Furthermore, the song *Kalaam*<sup>13</sup> (Arabic for ‘Speech’) discusses political and cultural limitations on romance and relationships. To enforce these

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<sup>11</sup> Lyrics and music video available at: <https://www.lebanesearabicinstitute.com/mashrou-leila-lil-watan/>

<sup>12</sup> Lyrics available at: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/cavalry-cavalry.html>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GdAtxcTuhw&ab\\_channel=Mashrou%27Leila](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GdAtxcTuhw&ab_channel=Mashrou%27Leila)

<sup>13</sup> Lyrics available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iey2FAeGqk&ab\\_channel=Mashrou%27Leila](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iey2FAeGqk&ab_channel=Mashrou%27Leila)

limitations, the speaker alludes that nation-state building projects use the body, the skin, and the flesh to draw and clarify the nation's literal borders and values through shaming and denouncing certain bodies, consequently achieving full control. Additionally, in terms of Arabic syntax a sentence typically uses a single gender, whereas the song delivers a message of bodily resistance by using mixed-gendered sentences that address male-gendered words and female-gendered words in others. This breaks linguistic normalcy while asking his/her comrades/lovers to use their body, despite the pain, to break away from shame and to freely feel while drinking whiskey, a widely religiously forbidden drink in WANA.

In addition to these examples of songs and videos, ML's album covers demonstrate further their work's distinctiveness. The album covers of their third album *Raasük* comprise a pink background and animated images of the band members exhibiting a gender non-conforming sentiment. The visuals of the most recent album *Ibn El Leil*—rich with themes and metaphors of nighttime, wine, gods, drugs, and the weaponized body—are a collection of images of a hyper-masculinized-sexualized man with angel wings wearing a horse mask and covering most of his cracked face (El-Taḥer 2015). The man is wearing what looks like a piece of cloth around his private parts, in a design inspired by Icarus from Greek mythology. The album includes a song called 'Icarus' built around themes of a desire to break free, death, and courage, just like the Greek story of Daedalus and his son.

Besides expressing their views within their art, ML spoke about their values at any public opportunity. ML worked closely with Arab activists, including queer ones; they released a video to the 'generation of the revolution'; played fundraises for Syrian refugees; campaigned for sustainable environmental projects in collaboration with Greenpeace; and advocated for sexual health (Papazian 2020). Accordingly, they sometimes received more press and popularity for their activism than their music. Their outspoken support for queer identities, and flamboyant Sinno's rare outness as a public figure, got the band into much trouble. According to band member Firas Abo Fakher, they were accused of being immoral and 'incit[ing] a revolutionary feeling in people', for deliberately sparking controversy using their lyrics, to which the band expressed on multiple occasions that they sing about issues relevant for the new generation (Faber 2019). Discussing the necessity of the song topics they choose, Sinno said 'we go down those roads when we feel it's necessary' (Salfiti 2013). The band's alienation through mainstream WANA

media's accusations resulted in their ban from playing in Jordan twice, in Egypt following the 2017 Cairo concert, and even in Lebanon in 2019 due to blasphemy allegations (Safeddine 2019; Khomami 2016; Ekaterina et al. 2022). Being unable to perform to their largest fanbases resulted in serious financial loss, although such hostility did not stop ML from keeping their voice heard; in 2013 they had crowdfunded their album to avoid censorship and control of record companies (Salfiti 2013).

Another area of resistance is revealed by the band's transnational impact in dismantling misconceptions of life in WANA. In the current political climate, in which 'Islamic fundamentalism and terror' is the way many people relate to the Arabic language, Sinno sees a 'political victory' in people associating Arabic with 'going to a concert' (Faber 2019). The band also demolishes Western misunderstandings of queer life in WANA. Finding himself a spokesperson for the Arab and Muslim queer community of WANA, Sinno said 'it can't be that absurd to the Western imagination that there are many liberal Arabs inclined towards gender and sexual diversity' (Faber 2019). Resisting these ideas, he thinks that Western media does an 'extreme injustice' when it writes off these people due to the lack of free speech in their countries, projecting the band's progressive politics as non-exceptional in WANA (Faber 2019).

## The Concert and Its Aftermath

In September 2017, Sarah Hegazy and Ahmed Alaa raised rainbow flags as ML performed in a tri-band Cairo event including the Jordanian band El-Morabaa, and the Egyptian band Sharmoofers (Mada Masr 2017).<sup>14</sup> In the series of arrests that followed, first detained were Hegazy and Alaa, in addition to five others who 'encouraged homosexuality' (Egypt Independent 2017a). Next, Egypt's Music Syndicate banned ML from performing in a televised interview with the Deputy of the Syndicate Reda Ragab on the *Al Assema* channel (Egypt Independent 2017a; BBC News 2017). The week following the concert, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) issued an order banning any support for the queer community in the media (Avery 2017b). The statement that released this order also called homosexuality a 'shameful disease'; SCMR head Makram Mohamed Ahmad called for the 'appropriate ways of raising children', encouraged confrontation of the 'hazards of spreading of such a phenomenon' and

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<sup>14</sup> All three are indie rock, alternative bands.

ceasing attempts to ‘categorize the queer presence as a kind of a human right’ (Egypt Independent 2017b; Whitaker 2017).

Reports stated that between the September concert and January 2018, the number of queer people arrested exceeded 85, with more than 40 having received prison sentences; most were targeted for being perceived as effeminate gay men or transgender, and some endured anal examinations and torture (Egypt Independent, 2018). The Facebook page *No Hate Egypt* announced on January 2, 2018, that the Egyptian security prosecution ordered the release of Hegazy and Alaa on a EGP2000 bail. However, on January 22, 2018, Human Rights Watch published a report saying that Alaa was still in pretrial detention after more than three months (Ghoshal 2018). On June 14, 2020, Hegazy died by suicide in Canada, where she was exiled shortly after her release from prison in Egypt, and had been granted asylum (Walsh 2020). Ahmed Alaa ultimately joined her there (Arraf 2018). According to public interviews with Hegazy, articles by her, and her lawyers’ statements, during detention officers questioned Hegazy’s religious beliefs and virginity (Hegazy 2020). During questioning, she was blindfolded, interrogated, tortured, placed in solitary confinement, and sexually assaulted. She was fired from her job as a software developer and was rejected by some family members.

The implications of the raising of the rainbow flags, including Hegazy’s death, are musically and politically affective, and they allow for operationalizing ML as a vehicle of queer resistance of a social nonmovement against legal, state, and sociocultural oppression, years before the concert and its fallout. As ML kept associating themselves with resistance to cultural and political injustices, band member Haig Papazian (2020) said in July 2020 on the loss of Hegazy that, ‘our Arabic lyrics tell stories of love, hope, loss, inequality and corruption, speaking to the ills that plague our region’ (2020). Putting such messages in a critical (sometimes satirical) frame, according to Papazian, is what makes their concerts a space of ‘dreamers holding signs, waving flags, laughing, screaming, and singing their hearts out. Collectively, we—band and fans—do what the Middle East’s leaders won’t: create a home for all of us. Class, race, sexuality, gender, politics, and religion’ all disappear during the concert (2020). This feeling—perhaps utopian—is what he considers ‘a version of what the Arab world could be [and it] is a powerful rebuke and a threat to what the dictators, Islamists and sectarians have been offering us instead for decades’ (2020).

Describing the mere act of raising rainbow flags at the concert, media outlets said Hegazy and Alaa were beaming with joy, leading to an unabashedly absent-minded moment caught on camera (Walsh 2020). This incident becomes more complex and noteworthy, however, considering what casts the band's space as appropriate for bringing pride flags in the first place. The nature of ML and everything known publicly about them, coined with the personal contentious agency of Alaa and Hegazy (Hobson and Hagan 2019), makes the flag-raising an act of resistance that results from efforts aimed at creating a space that is also dialogic and affective; these efforts have been in the working through ML's music long before the concert and symbolize the counterhegemonic speechmaking of a youthful aspiration and the yearning for new politics of dissidence and difference that exceed queer rights.

As it birthed these aspirations, ML's music has arguably been a factor that helped overturn Needham's notion of activism from the closet, or at least brought new hope for it going forward (2013). By politicizing the queer body in their music, like the case of women's bodies in Latin America in feminist activism, ML has been able to denaturalize both the assumption of a universal form of rationality and subjectivity to inhabit the world, and the version of politics from which queer people are naturally excluded (Souza 2019). This denaturalization process is a major outcome of the form of resistance ML and their fans pursued. Where ML's music allowed the fans to imagine new queer possibilities, the concert came to briefly allow public engagement with these imagined prospects of a new gender and sexual order, thanks to music's ability to facilitate such a process (Austin 2017). In ML's space, by refusing to hide, Hegazy and Alaa insurgently disrupted the government's anti-queer strategies, granting them what resistance-music scholars call emotional courage, pride, and sense of capability in public (Kruger 2001).

Moreover, as the peak outcome, Hegazy's death shows further nuances of ML's resistance-music. This death, not a straightforward case of depression and anxiety leading to suicide, is a necropolitical one engineered by the state and its practices within the plan of population management using queer bodies. Within gendered necropolitics, Hegazy's death fits in Mbembe's call to carefully notice the need to politicize death and understand how it can become the prominent descriptor of the political (2003). In such politics, gender/sexual identification becomes the condition for the acceptability of death in biopolitical regimes, by politics which operate through 'the work

of death' where the production of (hetero)normative life allows for the daily reproduction of non-normative dead bodies as the normalized condition (Souza 2019, 97). Hegazy's fatal emotional and mental experiences are not a product of personal circumstances, but rather a state-designed product aimed at keeping the queer community's resistance weaker and compliant with the state's status quo (Matouk and Walkm 2020).

Situating the violated body at the center of the political struggle was prominent to the Egyptian revolution since it started in 2011 (Sorbera, 2016). The case of women's bodies, including the virginity testing performed by Egypt's intelligence military, is an example of locating the control and abuse of the body as a reason and way to resist (Khalid, 2015; Sorbera, 2016). Writing about violence in political transition in Colombia and South Africa, Serrano-Amaya shows the centrality of homophobia to the gender and sexual dimensions of political violence (2018). This function of homophobia occurs under what he calls the 'productive power of violence' as emergent governments produce their power through bodily anti-queer violence (47). Such power operates and appears through the materiality of queer bodies, which are rendered as territories to be removed and conquered in the search for salvaging sovereignty over the nation's territory (Souza 2019, 101). Besides the queer bodies themselves, the space in which they exist, such as the ML concert space, calls for a reassertion of that sovereignty and therefore is treated similarly.

Related to street politics, the public space, and mass demonstrations such as the ones Egypt saw, Judith Butler argues that bodies are sites of resistance capable of making claims to delegitimize the state by simply appearing and acting in refusal to their conditions (2011; El Said 2015). Rather than being passive, bodies are spaces of interpretation and defiance that can ally and engage in action. Bodies are more likely to take such role upon receiving the support they need through 'modes of sociality and belonging' in certain environments and conditions (Butler 2011). Hence, bodies can create a new space between and with the help of acting others in the process of building resistance. This explains why it is critical for the state to govern bodies such as those of musically inspired queer resisters who made themselves public in Egypt even at the cost of loss of life. The state remains informed on its citizens' sexuality as a public issue and a net of discourse, knowledge, and analysis based on which some state rulings depend (Abouelnaga 2015).

Following the trail of ML's forms of organization reveals 'a rearticulation of political resistance' and therefore that an entire political framework has been under way through musical queer expressions in Egypt (Souza 2019, 90). Such developments in queer articulations introduce new nuances in the political practices in the region and in the imagining of alternative democratic futures. The flag-raising act did not appear in a vacuum, knowing that the band believes that 'having queer voices and public representation in the region is so important as we seek compassion and courage to unite us in our dangerous, often lethal, fight to be ourselves' (Papazian 2020).

## Discussion: Resistance Through Music

Cases such as ML are perhaps scarce in WANA, but instructive to understanding them is the global scholarship on the ways that music has continuously contributed to cultural and political resistance (Reed 2005; Pratt 1990; Korczynski 2015; Schumann 2008; Laachir and Talajooy 2013; Rosenthal and Flacks 2013). As an enabler of resistance, music is a discourse that entails a relationship between the sounds and the symbolic meanings that individuals, groups, and institutions create for them personally, socially, and politically (Roy 2010; Monson 2007). Music is a dialogue rich with ideas that listeners and musicians perceive as capable of substantively showing human feelings and experiences (Reed 2005; Monson 2007). Yet, music's power is often dismissed due to its association with entertainment and pleasure (Austin 2017). The association music has with feelings, however, is particularly what gives it (and other arts) an 'affective power' that constitutes processes of 'standardising, normalising, and universalising' ways of existing in the world (Austin 2017: 11; Zaslow 2010). Thanks to these processes, multifunctionally, resistance music generates and negotiates ideologies with opposing political and social potential in which the listener can imagine multiple possibilities of a new world order (Rosenthal and Flacks 2013; Kong 1995; Austin 2017; Zaslow 2010).

ML also shows that music can be critical for constructing solidarity in groups, enhancing unity, building alternative communities and sense of belonging, consequently intertwining music and resistance due to the recreation of new consciousness (Roy 2010; Freeland 2009; Zaslow 2010). In this paradigm, music is a 'cognitive praxis' that contributes to the creative building of ideas that those who resist produce and offer to challenge the social and cultural climate around them (Korczynski 2015; Eyerman and

Jamison 1998: 21; Roy 2010). Within this contribution, music becomes a form of both 'knowledge and action' allowing resistance to link culture and politics and restoring both (Eyerman and Jamison 1998: 24). Similarly, ML's music allows for challenging the narrative around the invisibility and/or impossibility of queer resistance, and uncovers the missed opportunity resulting from studying resistance in post-uprising Egypt without its musical creations.

Illustrating the relationship that music has with revitalizing cultural and political resistance, the most suitable comparisons with ML are perhaps those of Queercore and RiotGrrrl. Queercore is musical subcategory that combines the essence of punk rock music with radical queer politics (DeChaine 1997). In the 1980s and 1990s, Queercore traversed marks of race, religion, gender, sexual preference, and even artistic expression by challenging or shattering those marks in the music making process. Queercore is a subaltern group for which music surfaced 'as a strategy for locating gaps in the cultural fabric', and to specify ways in which music offers the possibility to depart the traditional, oppressive power structure (DeChaine 1997, 12). Like Queercore, by creating spaces to 'resist and subvert the materials of the dominant culture', ML's music allowed for deconstructing and problematizing of the inside/outside binary and offers a temporary liberation from shrouding ideological oppression (DeChaine 1997, 12).

ML is also like RiotGrrrl, the 1990s feminist political subculture that used punk music to address women's issues at a time women were expected to be silent and passive. RiotGrrrl was perceived as loud and angry and did not shy away from issues such as rape, domestic abuse, sexuality, and racism by literally asking women to scream using music, spoken word, and zines. RiotGrrrl became a space of community and emotional support for many girls. RiotGrrrl, like ML, 'although remaining staunchly political, also pays attention to the personal and the everyday' (Rosenberg and Garofalo, 1998). Their focus was on the individual and the emotional rather than on marches, legislation, and public policy, which created a community and participation in it as a form of resistance. Writing and publishing, in musical and other forms, allowed them to transgress and challenge issues without feeling alone in disagreeing with the cultural majority.

ML's work employs such goals that Queercore and RiotGrrrl engaged with in their musical organizing and mobilizing. As evident in their ban in Egypt and other countries in WANA, ML's music is inherently and

consciously one of resistance and protest as it gives voice to stories and experiences of culturally and politically dissenting Egyptians (Egypt Independent 2017a; BBC News 2017; Whitaker 2017). In an initially implicit and unpopularized way, ML's music was part of their fans' daily lives while increasingly and continually presenting a critical perspective on their oppression that climaxed on the concert night and its aftermath in a nonmovement fashion.

Furthermore, the implication of ML's musical case and the role queer resistance plays in understanding resistance studies broadly, fits in the 'reflexive individualism' phenomenon, defined as a continuous maneuvering of the individual within the surrounding political and social structures in hope of finding a certain emancipation from it (Hanafi, 2012: 203). In this negotiation, individuals resist out of self reference, recognizing the socialization and politicization forces and altering their place in them. ML's fans recognized this socialization and politicization through ML's music and turned it into an act based on self-reference in the concert. This type of agency, arguably applicable to other resistance contexts, is useful for 'peripheral' (Khalid 2015) marginalized groups such as the Egyptian queer community who resist dominant political discourses from a place of absence (Hanafi 2012).

Whether concerned with queer rights or other issues, there is negligible scholarship offering in-depth analysis of musical items (songs, lyrics, musicians, album covers) in the context of resistance in Egypt. In the rare cases when scholars such as Mark LeVine (2015) studied music, their analysis merged all arts—graffiti, poetry, music, amongst others—and all Arab states that saw uprisings in one discussion. In the Arab uprisings, LeVine frames the case of revolutionary arts, including music, as important in the absence of space for civil societies to protest or challenge the power of repressive regimes (2015). These arts, he says, not only have to highlight and heighten discord, but they must also promote a vision and create an accord between the people who must act in harmony to seriously challenge the oppressing systems (LeVine 2015).

However, giving examples such as the Tunisian rapper El General who became famous for his rap song '*Rais Lebled*' (Arabic for 'President of the Country'), LeVine analyzes songs and lyrics that emerged in the physical space of the major protests during the uprisings and had explicit revolutionary demands and anti-regime messages (2015). Such songs were

powerful enough not only because they got their owners killed, tortured, imprisoned, or exiled, but they expressed the overcoming of fear as the essence of the generation of Arab uprisings (LeVine 2015). Contrary to this genre of protest music that evolved on the streets, however, queer resistance through ML's music started from a less explicit and more intimate and private space (a social nonmovement space) for Egyptians whose lived experiences were at the margins of the uprising and remained unrepresented in the public sphere despite the aggressions against them.

Speaking specifically on the revolutionary music in Egypt, LeVine demonstrates the case of singer Ramy Essam as the best case to illustrate the changes of political music in the Arab world in the last decade (2015). Essam was physically present in Tahrir Square leading protesters' chants, and he wrote the song 'Irhah!' (Arabic for 'Leave!'), which became an anthem of protests not only in Egypt but across WANA. Describing the power of singers like Essam and El General, LeVine argues that their presence and performance is what he calls 'the theater of immediacy', which confronted any possibility of repression of the music or its message by the government (2015, 1281).

Soon enough, however, Essam was increasingly persecuted both under Mursi's rule and even more so after the military coup of 2013. His music was banned and in 2014 he was exiled to Sweden. Functioning as organic intellectuals and sociopolitical conductors for a revolutionary generation, when musicians like Essam continued producing under extreme restrictions and while banned from the revolution's local space, their ability to challenge the balance of power on the ground grew near impossible (LeVine 2015). Indeed, from exile, Essam continued to produce music. In February 2018, he released the song '*Balaha*', (Arabic for 'palm date') that mockingly told Al-Sisi that his four years in office are over (Middle East Eye 2020). In March 2018, the cinematographer and music video director of the song, Shady Habash, and the lyricist of the song, Galal El-Beheiry, were imprisoned. On May 1, 2020, Habash died in Tora prison in Cairo. The reason for the death has not been determined, but reports suggested it was avoidable (Middle East Eye, 2020). As protest musical cases, such processes of exile, ban, and repression are similar yet different to what ML and their fans faced. One major difference is that ML's case reveals further layers on the role of music that speaks to those, such as queer Egyptians, whose liberation was not prioritized during the revolution or in post-uprising Egypt.

Besides, viewing ML as part of a resistance-music regional phenomenon helps understand the scope and gravity of the attacks against queer resistance that ML created in Egypt. While they are probably the brusquest case in WANA, ML are not a stand-alone instance in their resistance or in the attacks on them (LeVine 2015). Since the uprising ruptured in Egypt, there has been an increased mainstreaming of communicating the political and social events and the people's demands in popular culture across the region. Artists such as the rapper Zap Tharwat; the band Cairokee; and the singers Ramy Essam, Mensna Hussein, Amina Khalil, Malikah, the director Shady Habash; and even the satirical Egyptian puppet character Ablah Fahita, put into songs and videos the topics of human rights, justice, poverty, freedom, women's rights, anti-sexual-assault campaigns, corruption, democracy, and freedom of the revolution's political prisoners. These Egyptian artists are part of an even broader rebellious surge of artists in the entire WANA, including bands such as El Morabba3 from Jordan and Zeid and the Wings from Lebanon. Each of these artists and their work could be a case study like that of ML, showing the broadness and transnationality of the phenomenon as a vital component of the post-uprising climate across WANA.

## Conclusion

This paper joins the literature on current and future opportunities for resistance through musical affective politics in post-uprising Egypt beyond queer rights or ML. Thanks to its affective musical nature, the ML case contributes to the discourse on queer resistance and the alternative unexpected outlets it evolved through in post-uprising Egypt. Despite queer Egyptians enduring numerous state-sponsored aggressions of crackdowns, arrests, torture, and death since 2011, research on the reverberation of the uprising has mostly disregarded them. This paper also contributes to scholarship from the Majority World that spotlights dissident groups under cultural and political authoritarianism, including queer individuals that resist and rearticulate the public/private, deviant/normal, moral/immoral dichotomies for an alternative democratic future of queer life in WANA and beyond.

As Egypt saw a greater visibility of music addressing the issues of the uprising and its developments as the regime changed twice, music evidently became worthy of resistance scholars' attention for two reasons. First, it serves as a site that allows for the continuity of processing, shaping, and responding

to the political and social climate (i.e., continued spirit of the uprising), and second; the fact that this musical phenomenon evolved substantially as soon as Mubarak stepped down, only to be harshly attacked by the new regime. Inspired by the region's political and sociocultural developments, these artists emerged with a powerful impact and a voice no longer accepting the status quo, much like ML's song *Wa Nueid* (Arabic for 'We'll Keep Repeating'), a plea for a never-ending blossoming spring. Silencing musicians through an exemplary grand attack like that on ML, and the queer community being a convenient victim, sends the message that these artists could face the same fate and therefore better not be as powerfully resistant through their artistic creations.

Additionally, ML's case shows the necessity of resistance and politics that go beyond international human rights advocacy; since the network of relations<sup>15</sup> between Egypt and the West (mainly the U.S.) has been disregarding Egypt's anti-queer aggressions under the pressure of the human rights discourse, other types of resistance have been emerging (Long 2016; El Hourri 2018; Ghoshal 2018). Egyptian public authorities are not held accountable for the crimes they commit against queer Egyptians. Queer resistance such as ML's raises questions about their political legitimacy and their rhetoric of security and stability as endorsed by the Egyptian regime and its international allies to legitimate their power. Furthermore, the Egyptian elites weaponize the West twice in their beating of queer life; they rely on the Western financial and militaristic framing, and then they deploy the foreignness of homosexuality to the Arab world and culture as a dangerous Western imported value that must be combated using all means available. This is precisely what brands ML and their music as a ground of resistance; they resist hoping to defeat this duality by first rejecting it, then exposing it.

Effectively or not, consequently, the resistance that ML enabled brought transnational attention to queer oppression in Egypt and shed a negative light on the Egyptian government (No Hate Egypt, Facebook; Solidarity

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<sup>15</sup> Activists' lack of hope that Western governments would meaningfully react to Al-Sisi's regime originates, partially, from the prioritizing of the mutual 'economic and military interests' between the Egyptian and the West, mainly the U.S. (Long 2016). Al-Sisi wins the U.S. silence by ensuring the regional stability and security that serves U.S. interests, disguised as the so-called 'war on terror' in the region (Long 2016; El Hourri 2018; Ghoshal 2018).

with Egypt LGBTQ+, Facebook 2017).<sup>16</sup> ML's music disrupted the status-quo even if only at the level of exposing/shaming the Egyptian regime and its queer exploitation tactics. Since there was a temporary increased activist-led transnational scrutiny on queer and other civil rights in Egypt since the concert night, then it is perhaps arguable that while ML-inspired resistance does not prevent future aggressions against queer Egyptians, it has temporarily restrained and reduced them from worsening even further. ML's discourse gained a transnational traction in queer mobilizing and activism and disrupted traditional accounts of the historically scripted political role for queer Egyptians. While this disruption is controllable in its effects and resignifications and has not yet found the way to defeat long existing structures of power, it did establish entry points for transitions aimed at reinventing methods of resistance for some communities. Instead, this musical disruption provided a conceptual tool of novelty to identify and think articulations focused on the recreation of political representation through difference.

Challenging the narrow 'activism from the closet' discussion on the limits and risks of resistance in the queer Egyptian context (Needham 2013), ML's musical case reveals that queer resistance in Egypt continued even after the hopeful initial perception that the Arab uprisings offered faded. As this hope transformed into anxiety, the political transition in Egypt clung to anti-queer violence; the same patterns of militarized hypermasculine human rights violations continued under the military rule in 2011, under the Muslim Brotherhood between mid-2012 and 2013, and later under al-Sisi in power (Mohamed 2015; Kreps 2012; Needham 2013). The queer resistance in response to these policies emerged to signal that Egypt's broader post-uprising resistance, like the rest of WANA, is better researched outside of rights advocacy or the framework of entangled international diplomacy. Rather, it must be studied within the complexity of body politics and resistance from the margins through alternative spaces, such as ML's music and concert, and their relationship with masculine, religious, heteronormative, and nationalist efforts. This framing of queer resistance, too, could be applicable to other resistance contexts in which queer and other groups are deemed inevitably invisible and incapable to resist.

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<sup>16</sup> The Facebook page that made this call and other updates on the events has since been removed from Facebook.

Fourteen years after the Egyptian uprising, the common perception has been that it has failed to meet its broader goals, and possibly even deteriorated the lives of the people there considering the new regime's actions to stabilize itself (Haas and Lesch 2017; Bishara 2022; Khan, Mahmood, and Salim 2020). Regardless of the accuracy of this statement, ML's musical case exemplifies an alternative tool of resistance for negotiating knowledges, truths, and identities with the elitist discursive and political power of the state (Khalid 2015). Additionally, this queer resistance is significant for understanding the broader resistance studies field as it illustrates how underrepresented groups, such as women and queer people, engage and resist through 'non-institutional activism' including non-mainstream public and online spaces. Such spaces are safer because they allow these groups to resist within a narrative and self-representation constructed on their own terms (Khalid 2015).

Additionally, ML and the other cases mentioned here illustrate how music contributes to some scholars' efforts of the recent years who have been increasing their focus on everyday resistance, non-movements, and infrapolitics (Brown 2020; Abdelhamid 2020; Elmeligy 2020). This shift has been crucial for framing post-uprising Egypt beyond universal anonymous forces, such as modernization, capitalism, or imperialism, or to powerful individuals and enigmatic leaders, which often disregarded resistance that does not amount to movements. To expand resistance theories beyond assumptions of rational actors in creating political opportunities such as the one that ML created, resistance scholars have also been considering emotional conviction (Brown 2022) and cultural defiance generally but also within music. In this consideration, music is part of the ongoing reconstruction of culture (Eyerman and Jamison 1998), yet in Egypt (and WANA) it has only recently been examined directly due to the focus on bigger and immediate political changes (Robertson 2015).

Resistance studies must pay attention to smaller scale resistance moments such as ML's and deem them noteworthy even when they bring greater violence and repression against those resisting. Of course, there is significant work to be done before the articulations of queer resistance bring significant transformations to the queer community in Egypt. However, these articulations carry today's most powerful promise of constructing alternative spaces of political production and democratic ethos that are transferrable and can be in conversation with other queer sites of resistance, musical or not.

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