

## Book Review

Thomas Burkhalter. 2013. *Local Music Scenes and Globalization: Transnational Platforms in Beirut*. New York: Routledge. 304pp. ISBN 978-0-415-80813-2 (hbk)

**Reviewed by:** Ross Hagen, Utah Valley University, USA  
ross.hagen@uvu.edu

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Ethnomusicology in the twenty-first century faces an almost staggering array of possibilities and challenges that require new ways of conceiving both individual research projects and in some cases the scope of the discipline itself. The increasing connections created by globalization and digital networks especially require an expanding toolkit of methodologies and concepts. Burkhalter's *Local Music Scenes and Globalization* provides a means for approaching these aspects within a study of various musical circles and scenes within Beirut. In this case, Burkhalter approaches these problems by bringing together several different theoretical and methodological concepts to bear in his study of Lebanese musicians. Although Burkhalter's main source of information is an extensive series of interviews spanning the better part of the last decade, he uses music analysis and reception tests to add layers of nuance to his findings.

*Local Music Scenes and Globalization* provides its reader with an intimate view into the networks and lives of musicians in Beirut. Burkhalter limits his focus to musicians born mostly in the late 1970s, during the beginnings of the Lebanese Civil War, and within this generation he singles out musicians who play rap, rock, heavy metal and "experimental" free improvisation music. He leaves out Arabic singing, *maqam*-based pop music or other traditional forms in order to focus on musical styles that have been under-represented in academic and popular literature and which also interface with niche Euro-American networks. Similarly, these genres challenge normative market conceptions of "world music". Indeed, one of Burkhalter's stated research questions is to evaluate whether the musicians he studies push beyond "World Music 2.0", which often retains an exoticizing focus on cultural and musical difference in the Euro-American market (5), to a "multisited avant-garde" in which they stake out new positions and new conceptions of modernity (16-17).

In particular, Burkhalter finds that these Lebanese musicians must negotiate various positions that draw both from their “Lebanese-ness” and their desire to interact and compete with musicians on a global stage. While this problem almost certainly does not manifest equally among all styles of music in Beirut, the musicians that Burkhalter interviews often find themselves in a bit of a bind. They are accused of being overly Westernized within some circles of Lebanese and Arabic musicians and listeners. Yet, when they give concerts or promote recordings abroad, they are often exoticized by Euro-American audiences and promoters. Indeed, they sometimes lose funding or concert engagements because they aren’t “Arabic” enough (239). Because of these challenges, they have to stake out new positions within the global marketplace for music, making them a useful and provocative subject for such a study. Burkhalter also considers that these strategies are an attempt to create new conceptions of modernity that do not hinge on Euro-American ideals.

The book is divided up into five major sections: an introduction to Burkhalter’s methodology, an ethnography of the musicians and scenes in play, an analysis of six key tracks, a history of music and noise in Lebanon, and a section in which Burkhalter reads Lebanese music-making from a variety of different perspectives. I am going to treat each section in turn because these individual sections are often approached as discrete entities that will accrete into a larger understanding over the course of the book.

Part II of the book is primarily ethnographic, and provides details about the various people and musical networks that Burkhalter worked with during his research. In addition to individual chapters detailing categories of experimental and freely improvised music, metal music and classic rock, “urban” music (various styles of “indie” music and electronic dance music) and rap, Burkhalter introduces the networks and hubs these musicians use to connect with each other and with promotional entities and other organizations abroad. The section on music as a media product details the ways in which these Lebanese musicians make records, distribute them, outwit their competitors and secure funding and support from institutions, record labels and music retailers. Finally, Burkhalter explores the cultural backgrounds of the musicians in fairly broad terms, detailing some of the shared family and religious backgrounds as well as the hierarchies of class, taste, social status and gender roles that have helped to shape the lives and careers of these Lebanese musicians.

The third part of the book analyses six representative musical tracks from musicians in Burkhalter’s ethnographies. Burkhalter provides detailed diagrams of many of the songs, using Western terminology where appropriate, along with biographical details and interview excerpts to connect the tracks with the musicians and their diverse experiences. Speaking as a musicolo-

gist, I appreciate the close readings that Burkhalter gives to these tracks, and the inclusion of interview excerpts and other background information about the musicians and their compositions provides illuminating context. In this section, Burkhalter relies on reception tests modelled after Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida (2003) and Yngvar Steinholt's (2005) study of Russian rock music in the 1980s. Burkhalter sent these tracks to a few dozen listeners with no accompanying information about the tracks' provenance and solicited feedback from them. This method provides Burkhalter both with a means of entry into musical styles he is less familiar with and also a way to explore the musicians' use and recontextualization of Western musical styles. The reception test format allows the musical analysis itself to become transnational, including not only the specific details of the individual song but also its relationship to global networks and systems of aesthetic value. For example, in his section on the death metal band Weeping Willow and their track 'Remains of a Blood-bath', Burkhalter (along with his reception test listeners and the musicians themselves) note that the recording sounds thin and lacks the precision and sonic clarity that is usually a hallmark of death metal. Here, Burkhalter uses this point to highlight the limited access that Lebanese musicians have to studios and sound engineers who are able to create a death metal recording that is heavy and aggressive yet clear and distinct.

Part IV explores the history of music and noise in Lebanon in which Burkhalter focuses on a few salient points and trends that have shaped the soundscape of music in Beirut. He begins with the Europeanization of Arabic *maqam*-based music styles, taking the reader through the creation of a "Lebanese" music style in the 1950s and 60s and the casino and cabaret environments that nurtured it. The late 1960s and early 70s saw the rise of dissident cultures in Lebanon and a flowering of psychedelic rock bands that was cut short by the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. Burkhalter's exploration of the sound worlds and memories of the Civil War period from 1975 to 1990 provides some of the most intriguing reading of this section, as he explores the sonic profiles of the propaganda music and broadcasts employed by the combatants and the experiences of musicians on both sides of the divided city. Finally, Burkhalter details the rise of the pan-Arabic pop sound over the 1990s and 2000s and the resurgence of propaganda music during hostilities with Israel in 2006.

Burkhalter's final section approaches Lebanese music-making from six different perspectives, as a way to explore the multiple ways in which it is received and understood by both musicians and listeners. He approaches it from historical, sociopolitical, geopolitical, psychological, aesthetic and Euro-American perspectives. The historical perspective connects the musical practices and scenes Burkhalter explores in Part III to their various heritages,

although he notes that the musicians themselves often did not seem to perceive links to the music of previous generations. The section on sociopolitical perspectives focuses mostly on forms of protest, many of which rely on irony and parody rather than shock, and censorship directed at metal musicians and fans. Many of these musicians currently find that censorship is not an issue so long as they maintain a low profile, although younger and more popular bands are visibly pushing the boundaries of political acceptability by addressing social issues in their lyrics. In the following section on geopolitical perspectives, Burkhalter focuses on the musicians' reactions to the 2006 Lebanon War. Some became activists while others found their creativity stifled by the constant distractions. Their music and art became politically loaded whether they wanted it or not. Burkhalter continues this thread of inquiry in the section on psychological perspectives, in which he examines the musicians' sonic memories of the Lebanese Civil War.

The final two sections in Part V deal with aesthetic perspectives and Euro-American perspectives on music in Beirut and ways in which they are linked. In the first section, Burkhalter examines whether there is anything identifiable as a "Beirut sound" or a thread that might connect the disparate styles he explores. Burkhalter again uses reception tests to expand the range of aesthetic reactions beyond his own. He ultimately notes that the ways in which the musicians often mix-and-match different musical styles and explore new sound terrains via improvisation and self-teaching come closest to creating a common thread (235). Burkhalter's outside listeners and reviewers were not always pleased with the music that resulted from these ideals, although they often commend the musicians for continuing to strive and try new things under trying circumstances. However, this sort of reception is exactly what musicians and fans want to avoid (237). They don't want their circumstances to become an excuse for creating sub-par music, a sentiment that continues in the next section on Euro-American perspectives. Many of the musicians Burkhalter interviews report that foreign journalists and organizations constantly search for political and social subtexts to their work because it falls outside the norms of pan-Arabic pop and the Arabic "fusion" music played by conservatory orchestras. These musicians are understandably frustrated with this expectation because they want their music to be judged on its own merits. However, Burkhalter notes that some musicians are also not above using the expectations and preconceptions of foreign journalists and scholars to get their feet in various doors abroad, trading the exoticism of traditional-sounding music for one based on the sounds and images of warfare. Burkhalter makes special note of instances where his interviewees led with accounts of war and its relationship to their music, questioning whether they were telling him what they thought he wanted to hear as a foreign academic (242).

In the book's conclusion, Burkhalter returns to his initial questions, namely the possibilities for Lebanese musicians to create new and multisited ideological positions within a world of transnational platforms with competing demands. In particular, his experiences challenge the dualisms that often inform pop music criticism and scholarship (mainstream vs. underground, pop vs. art, Euro-American vs. "Alternatives") and conceptions of locality. As an example, Burkhalter uses the re-appropriation of Orientalist "exotica" music by current musicians as a sarcastic parody and satire of the sometimes painful experience of being musically Othered (256). Similarly, Lebanese musicians face a new exoticism based on the sounds of war and violence, showing that the pull of "World Music 2.0" continues to be a factor.

As even more obscure and localized music-making now interacts with far-flung audiences and fellow travellers via digital networks, the consideration of multiple detailed perspectives is vital for attempting to convey the complexities and contradictions of music-making and other social activity. The main difficulty perhaps lies in creating a framework within a sociological or ethnomusicological study that balances the need for variety and detail with the need for coherence and holism (while noting, of course, that lived experience is often remarkably incoherent). In order to map such a complex terrain, Burkhalter provides a structure akin to the series of anatomical transparencies in old encyclopedias that overlay the different systems of the body, allowing the reader to see each individual system and its relationship to the broader whole. On the one hand, Burkhalter's descriptions of these musicians and their lives and goals are remarkably "thick", to borrow Geertz's terminology (1977). Indeed, this "thickness" is one of Burkhalter's primary goals for the study. On the other hand, the thickness of description is pursued laterally across a number of different genres and musical scenes. As a result, the book's sections sometimes feel episodic and disconnected from each other, as if positioned within a reference volume as opposed to a thesis-driven text. I might have preferred an overall structure for the text that explored each music scene in turn, allowing a more focused account of particular musical practices and the people and networks behind them. Another option might have been to use the various perspectives explored in Part V as structural pillars for the entire study. Even so, scholars of popular music, "world" musics of all types and media scholars dealing with digitization and globalization will find much material of use in this text, given its varied approach to its subjects. The methodologies that Burkhalter deploys in the book can certainly be applied to a variety of other music-making practices, although the exact methods would necessarily be determined by the subject and the data. Finally, the book stands as a testament to the often contradictory and uncertain world in which musicians live and work, even those who do not have to

deal with war and strife, and tries to chart a method for research that respects these challenges.

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