

ARTS OUTREACH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

After centuries of debate and discussion regarding the value and appropriateness of arts in the Middle East, specifically music, many indigenous people have recently pursued active roles in championing indigenous and international arts toward social reform, identity formation, and spiritual development. This shift in use and function of the arts has been reflected in some groundbreaking attempts of using arts in contextualized forms that have impacted spiritual communities. This study is designed to compare two specific case studies that exemplify these shifts: the “School of Worship and Music” and the “Creative Center”. These organizations will be analyzed and compared in order to discover the ways that music is used in their outreach practices to outside members of their local and regional communities. Finally, this study will offer suggestions regarding future approaches to arts and outreach within Middle Eastern culture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the past century the field of ethnomusicology has emerged from the disciplines of cultural anthropology and musicology as both a historical and practical science. In the largely Islamic nations of the Middle East, where it is officially and theoretically illegal to openly declare or share about any spiritual beliefs apart from Islam, a new era of ethnomusicology has begun. Music and the arts have recently been used to communicate spiritual concepts and ideas in ways that are more permitted in the culture than other form of direct communication.

The research setting for this particular study is an extremely sensitive area of the Middle East. My advisors and I believe that the safety of the participants and organizations involved with this research is of the utmost important. We have therefore concluded that the specific nation and people involved in this case study should not be disclosed. If these sources were cited, the details would be too revealing and could lead to a dangerous dilemma for the participants. This limitation has not hindered field research in any way but does limit the ability to express the details that have been discovered pertaining to the immediate geographical area and the cultures affiliated with that area. In fact, prior to the publication of this research, though not as a result of it, some of my participants have already felt compelled to leave this region for fear of religious persecution. I am writing the thesis, not to highlight approaches within a specific country, but with an eye toward being relevant to multiple, various Middle Eastern contexts. The information gleaned from my study will be assimilated into the broader environment of arts outreach in the Middle East.

Need for the Study

This study is partly necessary because I have been unable to locate both past and present research on this topic. Little to nothing has been written on the topic of music outreach in this particular nation, which shall remain nameless to protect my participants. This topic is not simply justified because of the lack of research. In many areas of the world, the topic of arts outreach has been studied in much greater depth.¹ This shows that there is a desire for such research to be commenced but there are difficulties in this particular region involved with this task. These difficulties and safety issues will be briefly discussed in the “delimitations” section of the introduction. Proving that no sources exist in this area of research is not difficult. By looking at the region’s inner turmoil and rising chaos, investigators have no trouble understanding why writers have no desire to enter this territory. An ample amount of sources detail the regional music, which will be explored in the literature review. A few highly limited and vague writings deal with past and present outreach, but will not be cited here due to safety reasons. I have come to find that anyone brave enough to actually share the gospel here has either not produced any work of a scholarly nature, is too afraid to post anything about his or her ministry, or is too involved with daily activities to record what is happening at all.² Numerous evangelists work in the country, but they are highly persecuted because of their open-air strategies. The only immediately valuable sources that I have located are casually written reports in the form of websites or ministry email updates. Further research must be carried out to answer this significant and groundbreaking question of what methods of arts outreach are effective in this nation.

¹“Redeeming the Arts: Restoration of the Arts to God’s Creational Intention,” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 46. Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, 2004, 31.

²Joshua Project: “Unreached Peoples of the World,” U.S. Center for World Mission. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/> (accessed December 2, 2012).

Group seventeen of the 2004 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism presents a compelling argument for the challenging task of arts outreach in the world today. On the matter of the choice of participating in the redemptive work of care and compassion through the arts, the committee writes, “Withdrawal is not only contrary to the cultural mandate, but also to the gospel invitation to be salt and light in the world.” The committee continues more directly: “If we view cultural engagement as off-limits for the Christian, we support the sub-biblical idea that God is interested only in the church and is not at work in our world. The call for the church to take up engagement with the culture in which it is located is a call to be the embodied, active healing and redemptive presence of Christ in the world.”³

Background

The cultural and geographical location for this study on arts outreach is an un-named country in the Middle East in which the majority religion is Islam. This country has experienced political, religious, and social turmoil since its beginning. It is still in a state of searching for a sense of national identity. Nearly half of the nation’s history has been marked by military rule.

The Middle East has great diversity in its music cultures, but a few central themes run throughout most of them. First, music is identified with the peace for which the people are longing. The *rabab*, for example, is a spike fiddle with three melodic strings and around twelve more sympathetic strings and is often called “an instrument of love, affection, peace, and tranquility.”⁴ In fact, it has become a sort of motto for the tribal people of the eastern areas of the region to put down their guns and pick up their rababs. Secondly, the national music is reflective

³“Redeeming the Arts: Restoration of the Arts to God’s Creational Intention,” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 46. Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, 2004, 31.

⁴Abdullah Jan, “Rabab is an Instrument of Love and Affection,” *Central Asia Online* (2010), http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/pakistan/2010/07/14/feature-01 (accessed April 20, 2012).

of the cultural, social, and religious beliefs of the people, as is true for nearly every nation or culture group. Therefore, it is extremely important to recognize and understand the connection between music and people. Finally, the national music has the potential to be an incredible force for future change and reform in the entire region. Secular scholars in several areas of the arts have proposed this view, but most will not be cited in this paper for the sake of safety. This force for change indicates a possibility for effective evangelistic efforts through the medium of the arts, and specifically music.

“The School of Worship and Music”, referred to by this name for our purposes, is currently using music to share the gospel. The only written, aural, and visual accounts of its ministry are casual blogs and videos that only infer its methodology. Secondly, a man whom will be referred to as “Phil” works to communicate the gospel to tribal groups country through music and dance. His vision is groundbreaking and creative but almost completely undocumented. The “Creative Center”, a vision pioneered by Phil and supported by a local church denomination, exhibits the best model to study but at this point has no written records of its work. Additionally, a few documents offer valuable information pertaining to the effectiveness of musical communication. Literary resources from the following areas must be gleaned: regional music, religious music, and other uses of the arts in social reform and education.

The topic of this study is exceptionally relevant and timely because of the developing interests and conflicts in the developing nation. The study primarily consisted of working with “Phil” and the Creative Center as well as with “Aaron” and his School of Worship and Music during the summer of 2012 and observing their practices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this comparative case study is to investigate the methodologies of arts outreach that are currently being employed in a Middle Eastern nation as facilitated by the School of Worship and Music and the Creative Center. These approaches will then be discussed and further research recommended.

Research Questions

The following list comprises the most central research questions. The first question is the broadest and most important question, and the ones following are meant to guide the general research question in more specific directions. These questions are meant to flow in a logical way through the following progression: general survey of national arts outreach, observation and evaluation of specific approaches, and exploration of future possibilities. Using this flow as a research guide, the ultimate goal of gauging the effectiveness of particular methods of arts outreach should be realized. Furthermore, these critical analyses may lead towards a more unified future direction amongst all groups attempting to evangelize through the arts.

What are some of the methods of arts outreach in this particular nation?

How are these methods implemented in the School of Worship and the Creative Center?

What possible forms or strategies of arts outreach could be potentially employed?

How should these undeveloped forms or strategies be implemented?

Delimitations of the Study

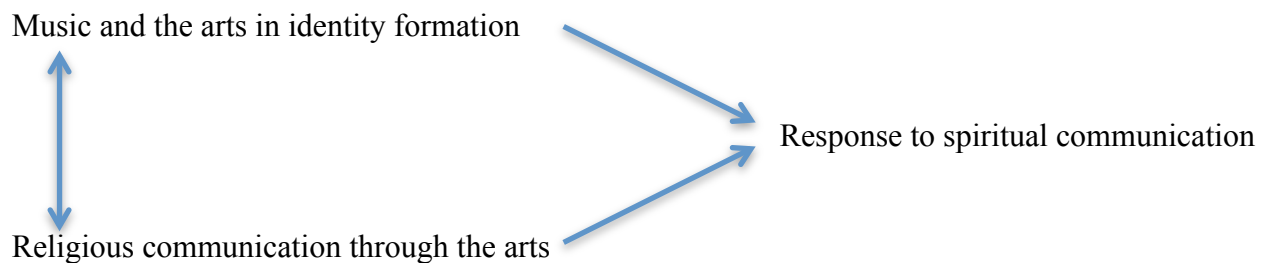
Due to the large number of possible cooperating organizations this case study was primarily limited to the work of the School of Worship and Music and the Creative Center in the

Middle East. Furthermore, only Christian organizations were used for the study. This undertaking to research the presence and effectiveness of methods of arts outreach in this Middle Eastern nation has proved to be highly difficult considering the circumstances. As an outsider, there have been both advantages and disadvantages of attempting cross-cultural research in an unstable Islamic culture. Positively speaking, there was an expectation for me to share knowledge and teaching with the local Christians. Negatively, it appeared that the locals overprotected me from any dangers that could possibly come. This protection hindered my interreligious research greatly and limited me primarily to gathering secondhand information and demonstrations. This research was also greatly hindered by the language barrier. I learned small amounts of conversational language in the national language as well as the most common language, but there were nearly ten linguistic groups observed. Even the locals who commonly spoke English often spoke to one another around me without translating any information until I asked. I was typically placed on the outside of many intimate conversations even though I continually attempted to ask about the topics of conversations.

Thirdly, I was also limited by geographical boundaries and the dangers involved with travel. My hosts attempted to keep me safe at all times, and with rising persecution against Christians in many areas, I was not able to travel nearly as much as I had hoped. Finally, the scarcity of audio, visual, and written materials available forced me to glean more information from conversations and personal accounts. Even upon completion of this thesis, I have been unable to find any other documented research about this topic aside from informal blogs and websites. These informal sources such as websites, newsletters, and emails will not be cited due to their disclosure of highly sensitive information.

Assumptions

This study's major assumption is that a relationship exists between how the arts are used in spiritual formation and how religious ideals are communicated through the arts. The relationship of these two elements is expected to lead to particular responses to spiritually-oriented communication. This theory will be applied to the conclusions of this study. The assumption can be seen in the following illustration.



Audiences

Many different audiences may benefit from this study. Religious ethnomusicologists, whether by profession or practice, will find this interesting because of its uniqueness and weighty implications in regards to the relationship of culture, music, and spirituality in this nation. On a broad scale, people may find the results of this study enlightening and even inspiring as religious people attempt to craft new methods of sharing their ideals amidst ever-changing global cultures. Any person that may be interested in the relationship of the arts and spirituality will benefit from this study as new light is shed upon the way that the people connect with God, through the arts. Some resulting social benefit may be seen through this study as Christians, Muslims, and other religious groups all find the value of sharing culture rather than attempting to destroy one another's cultural and religious history.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Sources pertaining to the topic of arts outreach in the Middle East are rare in the scholarly realm of literature. A small handful of websites offer limited information about outreach and various religious communities in the region. However, the sensitive nature of information pertaining to this topic greatly inhibits public communication of details. A few websites deal with outreach but are vague and largely unhelpful. Furthermore, with the exception of a few blogs and websites no documents could be found about arts outreach specifically in the Middle East. Identifying and analyzing scholarly sources pertaining to the topic of outreach in the Middle East is extremely difficult. Some are sparsely spread across missiological journals, but most sources are simply informal documents on websites or blogs. For this particular project, the researcher and the advisors have decided that the relevant sources and authors should not be disclosed in order to protect the participants of the study.

This literature review will focus on a few key topics that will shed light on music and outreach in the Middle East. First, I will discuss regional music as a whole and outline the most prevalent genres and culture therein. I will then consider religious music and the particular connections between regional music and music styles used for religious reasons. Finally, other uses of the arts in social reform and education will be examined in order to survey current practices of organizations attempting to use the arts for positive change.

Regional Music

A wealth of information is available on Middle Eastern regional music because of the diversity of cultures that comprise the area. In this section of literature, consideration must be given to both cultural aspects that influence the music and the music itself.

Volume six of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* contains numerous segments that deal with Middle Eastern music. This resource includes music culture profiles from northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, to southern and central European countries, to the western edges of South Asia. One of the most helpful general sections of Volume six is “Hearing the Music of the Middle East”, which gives an overview of many of the music cultures in the area.⁵

Volume five of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* has three helpful sections that still apply to the Middle East due to the proximity of the cultures in view and the interreligious nature of this project’s scope. “Music, the State, and Islam” gives an overview of the music and religious cultures of South Asia and draws a line through the facts to reveal the formation of a regional identity.⁶ A primary issue is the role of Islamization in cultural shifts, including those in music. In “Popular Artists and Their Audiences” the author discusses the popular artists of South Asia and reveals the diverse niches in that market, which are held by many native religious groups.⁷

Literally hundreds of sources are written about the culture of the Middle East. Some of the most prominent and comprehensive are referenced here. Daniel G. Bates and Amal Rassam

⁵Stephen Blum, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, s.v. “Hearing the Music of the Middle East,” New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

⁶Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 5: South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent*, s.v. “Music, the State, and Islam,” New York, NY: Routledge, 1999.

⁷Gregory D. Booth, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 5: South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent*, s.v. “Popular Artists and Their Audiences,” New York, NY: Routledge, 1999.

demonstrate the complexities of the relationship between Islam as identity and Islam as culture in their work entitled *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East*.⁸ The fourth edition of *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*, written by Dale F. Eickelman gives insight into the socio-political history and shifts in the region.⁹ In *Music in the World of Islam: A Sociocultural Study*, Amnon Shiloah begins with the pre-Islamic era of the Middle East and journeys into current times to examine the chronological expansion, unity, and finally, the uniqueness that has developed among various music cultures in the region.¹⁰

There are also numerous sources that detail the national cultures of the region as well as particular music genres or musical traditions. *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* by Virginia Danielson provides readers with both the origins and history of Egyptian music as well as a general sense of the transitions of Middle Eastern music into modernity.¹¹ Bruno Nettl discusses the cultural practices of the Iranian melodic tradition in his book, *The Radīf of Persian Music*.¹² In her article, "Classical 'Ūd Music in Egypt with Special Reference to Maqamat," Johanna Spector writes about the commonalities across the Middle East in regards to microtones, rich ornamentation, maqamat, homophony, hetero-phony, improvisation, complex rhythms, meters and instrument usage.¹³ She also deals

⁸Daniel G. Bates and Amal Rassam, *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983.

⁹Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*, 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 2001.

¹⁰Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam: A Sociocultural Study*, Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar, 1995.

¹¹Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

¹²Bruno Nettl, *The Radīf of Persian Music*, Champaign, III: Elephant and Cat, 1987.

¹³Johanna Spector, "Classical 'Ūd Music in Egypt with Special Reference to Maqamat," *Ethnomusicology* 14 (1970): 243-257 (accessed October 31, 2013).

with the tradition of *maqamat* with particular attention given to the area of North Africa involved with the more specific practices of the style. Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi's *Pakistani Culture: A Profile* is a valuable resource.¹⁴ The specific emphasis of this book is the creative impulses of the national people. Music, literature, painting, and architecture are key pieces that can both be observed to reveal indigenous culture and understood to help shape the regional culture of the Middle East in the twentieth century.

Religious Music

In the Middle East, religious music is highly promoted in the media as a legitimate part of pop culture and the mainstream market; however, some of the more strict countries oppose music more heavily. Eleanor Abdella Doumato writes about Saudi Arabia's stance on music in her article, "Manning the Barricades: Islam According to Saudi Arabia's School Texts".¹⁵ The *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* contains numerous valuable sources. "The Muslim Call to Prayer" helps to illuminate the Islamic perspective about chanting and praying as musical expression.¹⁶ "The Qur'an Recited" continues this study into stylistic practices.¹⁷ "Islamic Hymnody in Egypt: Al-Inshād al-Dīnī" delves in Sufi tradition of melodic vocal performance of Arabic poetry.¹⁸ Several other articles are written about similar concepts in other Middle Eastern

¹⁴Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi, *Pakistani Culture: A Profile* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1992).

¹⁵Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Manning the Barricades: Islam According to Saudi Arabia's School Texts," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 230-247 (accessed October 30, 2013).

¹⁶Scott Marcus, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, s.v. "The Muslim Call to Prayer," New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

¹⁷Kristina Nelson Davies, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, s.v. "The Qur'an Recited," New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

¹⁸Michael Frishkopf, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, s.v. "Islamic Hymnody in Egypt: Al-Inshād al-Dīnī," New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

countries, such as “Manifestations of the Word: Poetry and Song in Turkish Sufism”.¹⁹ Another area of valuable articles within this scholarly source pertains to Islamic concepts about music in general. “The Symbolic Universe of Music in Islamic Societies” helps outline these conceptions.²⁰

Jonathan H. Shannon demonstrates how Syrian Sufi religious tradition has become an appreciated style of art even in the broader sphere of secular global music in his article “Saltans of Spin: Syrian Sacred Music on the World Stage”.²¹ In his article, “The Sacred Music of Islam: Samā' in the Persian Sufi Tradition,” Leonard Lewisohn analyzes the integration of the arts into the religious Sufi groups around Iran. Prayer, litanies, singing, music, meditation, poetry, and dance are all part of this tradition.²² Edith Gerson-Kiwi writes about how religious chanting is a common link between the Middle East and Asia in her article, “Religious Chant: A Pan-Asiatic Conception of Music”.²³

The Garland Encyclopedia’s section entitled “Religious and Devotional Music: Northern Area” explains the unique methods of expressing devotion in various religious and spiritual groups in the northern half of South Asia.²⁴ This article is highly relevant in the way it

¹⁹Walter Feldman, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, s.v. “Manifestations of the Word: Poetry and Song in Turkish Sufism,” New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

²⁰Jean During, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, s.v. “The Symbolic Universe of Music in Islamic Societies,” New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

²¹Jonathan H. Shannon, “Saltans of Spin: Syrian Sacred Music on the World Stage,” *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (June 2003): 266-277 (accessed October 31, 2013).

²²Leonard Lewisohn, “The Sacred Music of Islam: Samā' in the Persian Sufi Tradition,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6 (1997): 1-33 (accessed October 30, 2013).

²³Edith Gerson-Kiwi, “Religious Chant: A Pan-Asiatic Conception of Music,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 13 (1961): 64-67 (accessed October 30, 2013).

²⁴Guy Beck, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 5: South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent*, s.v. “Religious and Devotional Music: Northern Area,” New York, NY: Routledge, 1999.

demonstrates two facts. First, Sufi devotional expression has had an enormous effect on Christian worship in the Middle East and South Asia. Second, it shows that much of Christian music in the entire northern area of South Asia is still greatly influenced by the West. This article reveals a grave problem in contextualization of South Asian music that negatively affects the ability of the national church to worship with and compose indigenous Christian music.

This problem of Christian musical contextualization extends to the Middle East and helps to paint a picture of some of the primary challenges in the Middle Eastern Christian communities even though there is very little written on the matter. In his article, “Oktoēchos of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in South India,” Joseph J. Palackal writes about an interesting culture transfer that has taken place between the Middle East and South Asia. Syrian Orthodox churches in South India have preserved and historically practiced numerous worship songs that are more reminiscent of Middle Eastern and Western cultures than of the majority Hindu traditions in the Carnatic region.²⁵

Other Uses of the Arts in Social Reform and Education

A third category of literature that should be noted is the use of the arts in social reform. Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, in her article entitled “Dance as an Expression of Islamic Culture”, writes about how the legitimization of dance has been long held in question by Islamic communities but that the dance that does occur is indeed a culturally formative, cohesive collection of socio-religious expression by the Middle East as a whole.²⁶ Music has also been seen to be a tool in seeking peace with one another. Nasser Al-Taei considers the effects of music in relation to the

²⁵Joseph J. Palackal, “Oktoēchos of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in South India,” *Ethnomusicology* 48, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2004): 229-250 (accessed January 6, 2014).

²⁶Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, “Dance as an Expression of Islamic Culture,” *Dance Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1978), 6-13.

continual journey to define a national and regional identity in his article, “Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East”.²⁷ Uri Sharvit also writes about how music has evolved in Israel to create a unified recognition of national styles in his article, “Diversity within Unity: Stylistic Change and Ethnic Continuity in Israeli Religious Music”.²⁸

There are a few articles that deal with the relationship of music, gender, and social reform of the various perceptions of both genders within the Islamic milieu. Mary Elaine Hegland writes about some of these methods for social reform. In the northern areas of South Asia and the eastern edges of the Middle East, where demoralizing treatment of women is most rampant, women have found hope in rituals of mourning for fallen Muslim leaders. These rituals are known as *Majles*. Through recitation of the Qur’an and leading mixed gender groups through rituals of mourning, women have used the arts to gain value and purpose even among the men.²⁹ Ralph P. Locke explains some of the more pigeonholed perspectives about Middle Eastern women using the arts to gain recognition and worth in his article, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East”.³⁰ Men have also been seen to utilize the arts as part of a process of defining masculinity. “All-Male Sonic

²⁷Nasser Al-Tae, “Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East,” *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (January 2002), 41-61 (accessed October 30, 2013).

²⁸Uri Sharvit, “Diversity within Unity: Stylistic Change and Ethnic Continuity in Israeli Religious Music,” *Asian Music* 17, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1986), 126-46 (accessed October 30, 2013).

²⁹Mary Elaine Hegland, “Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)Forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender Through Pakistani Women’s Rituals of Mourning,” *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (May 1998): 240-66.

³⁰Ralph P. Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East,” *19th-Century Music* 22 (1998): 20-53 (accessed October 30, 2013).

Gatherings, Islamic Reform, and Masculinity in Northern Pakistan”, written by Magnus Marsden, discusses this topic.³¹

Patricia Shehan Campbell and Amy Beegle have contributed to the study of the shifts and advancements in music education in the Middle East. Their article, “Middle Eastern Expansion on Cultural Diversity in Music Education” demonstrates how the school systems have found ways to promote cultural diversity while maintaining a general identity for the region in a non-offensive way.³² Oddbjørn Leirvik’s article entitled “Religion in School, Interreligious Relations and Citizenship: The Case of Pakistan” writes about interreligious relationships and how they are affected by education.³³ The author discusses the relationship between religion, education, and citizenship in schools. The article concludes by proposing several steps toward reform in order to better serve both the majority and minority religious groups in the nation.

As the Middle East continues to become increasingly open to education through music, more resources will most likely be made available. For the sake of comparison to the events of other continents, Gregory Barz offers a helpful book entitled, “Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda.” In this work, he explains why it is so effective to use music as a medium for educational communication. Both he and the locals believe that Ugandan people will retain much more interest in and information from a time of communication when it is framed around a musical performance.³⁴

³¹Magnus Marsden, “All-Male Sonic Gatherings, Islamic Reform, and Masculinity in Northern Pakistan,” *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (August 2007): 473-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4496828> (accessed April 20, 2012).

³²Patricia Shehan Campbell and Amy Beegle, “Middle Eastern Expansions on Cultural Diversity in Music Education,” *Music Educators Journal* 90, no. 1 (September 2003): 21-30 (accessed October 30, 2013).

³³Oddbjørn Leirvik, “Religion in school, Interreligious Relations and Citizenship: The Case of Pakistan,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 30, no. 2 (March 2008): 143-54.

³⁴Gregory Barz, *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.

Conclusion

Though the sources listed above shed light on the focus of this study, very few scholarly sources deal directly with the topic. The three subtopics covered in the preceding pages are helpful in the writing of this thesis, but they alone do not suffice for answering the most basic questions about arts outreach in the Middle East. Regional music is one important element that must be examined in order to gain a broad sense of the use of the arts in this area. Additionally, the category of religious music narrows the scope of the available literature further by gaining understanding of the current religious uses of the arts in the Middle East. Branching out from these general categories, a supporting group of other uses of the arts in social reform demonstrates non-religious uses of the arts for positive change. None of these three areas can fully explain or answer the topic of this thesis. Further research, synthesis, and analysis are necessary to accomplish the goals of this thesis. This thesis will contribute to this problem by studying various uses of the arts for outreach in the Middle East.

III. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Procedures

The tradition of qualitative research has been widely utilized by researchers in anthropological, sociological, educational, and aesthetical fields. Qualitative research is a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”.³⁵ The design emerged out of the inabilities of quantitative research to answer different types of research questions. A benefit of this model lies in its emerging quality of research that undergoes adaptations throughout the study to satisfy the needs of the research questions. In qualitative research, answers arise from the participant’s locale, culture, and worldview instead of being imposed beforehand. This investigative method constantly synthesizes data to form new research questions as the study emerges out of the life of the participants and the interpretation of the researcher. The following list summarizes the fundamental tenets of qualitative research and its most noteworthy differences from other designs. The following points are borrowed and annotated from John W. Creswell’s book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.³⁶

Qualitative research is performed in the same setting where the normal events of the participants’ lives take place. Concentrated observation and study in this type of location allows the information to arise out of natural conduits instead of a researcher-controlled environment. Therefore, information about arts outreach in the Middle East is best gained through learning from natural, indigenous events. Secondly, the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative

³⁵John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008, 4.

³⁶Creswell, 175-176.

study; that is, the researcher is the very means by which information is discovered and analyzed. In this particular study, the researcher gleans information through firsthand observation in the field as well as ongoing international communication.

Participants' thinking is the origin of the researcher's perspective on the research problem. This perspective is intentionally and continually sought after to override the perspective of the researcher during the qualitative research process. This is achieved through traditional observation as well as the phenomenological method as arts events take place in the field. Qualitative researchers typically use a theoretical lens to view the situation under observation. This helps to limit the scope of the research enough to attain the depth necessary to understand a single area of the issue, such as the cultural, historical, or social aspects of the research problem. For this study, the former principle is applied by using a theoretical lens to focus on the issues of spiritual identity development and religious associations of cultural arts. The goal of qualitative research is to provide a holistic account of the internal perspectives of the participants in the study. One perspective could be the primary focus, but all perspectives are usually explained so that a broad understanding of the phenomenon under observation can be gained. In this research, multiple perspectives will be learned from advocates of 2 primary organizations.

Comparative Case Study Research Design

This study will use the comparative case study research design. In "A Handbook for Social Science Field Research", Andrew Schrank uses several criteria to describe a case study.³⁷ He writes, case studies are "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures

³⁷Ellen Perecman and Sara R. Curran, eds., *A Handbook for Social Science Field Research: Essays & Bibliographic Sources on Research Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006, 21.

over a sustained period of time.”³⁸ Case study offers an exciting personal look into a particular phenomenon, separating it from other research designs because of its unique concentration on the single object of study. Schrank also suggests that the foremost difference between case study and other designs is its single object of study rather than multiple items.³⁹

The study’s design will not be limited to a single participant, but will focus on two major organizations as case studies. The comparative approach that will be used here is in contrast to the one-shot approach. The selection of this case study design is largely due to the extremely limited number of participants whose work applies to this thesis. The case study approach will allow the researcher to delve deep into the answers of the research questions while still maintaining validity and balance by including other participants. A great deal of precedent has been set for the reasoning behind this design choice. Case study has long been criticized as an illegitimate method of research, particularly the one-shot approach, but in this thesis it brings a distinctively valuable perspective because it would be nearly impossible to conduct research in any other fashion.⁴⁰

The Researcher’s Role

The role of the research in this study was to observe and document events and conversations regarding musical performance in a few distinct contexts and then to synthesize the methods used in a way that may provide a useful resource to others interested in religious musical performance and outreach in the Middle East.

³⁸Creswell, 13.

³⁹Perecman and Curran, 21.

⁴⁰Ibid., 173.

Bounding the Study

Setting

This study will be conducted in a Middle Eastern country. One participating organization, the School of Worship and Music, is located in a major city of several million. The second organization, the Creative Center, included in this study is located in a different city of around half a million in an interior, less developed part of the country. This setting was chosen because of the unique groups practicing arts outreach and because of the hostility of the surrounding culture towards this process.

Participants

The primary participatory organizations in this study will be those involved with the School of Worship and Music, and the Creative Center. All participants are indigenous with the exception of a few people of Western ethnicity that have lived in the country for the majority of their lives. The Village Outreach Ministry, a division of the Creative Center, will be studied as well. The responding participants in this study will be all those affected by the work of these organizations.

Events

This study focuses on the regular practices of both organizations in relation to those in the surrounding community as well as those impacted worldwide by online media. Events will include music performance, media distribution, arts seminars the Village Outreach Program, religious festivals and services, community gatherings, life cycle events, and random open-ended interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research must take into account ethical considerations. All research processes will be filed with the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University. Research objectives will be clearly articulated in verbal and written form so that all participants are made fully aware of the intent of the study. Written permission via a consent form will be gathered from every participant involved in an interview prior to the use of any information gained through such interaction. All forms of data collection devices will be plainly revealed to the participants. All data collected will be stored in a secure location at the researcher's home. All names, locations, and associations that might put any participant at risk or make them uncomfortable will be changed. The best interest of the participants will be held in the highest regard above all other research objectives during the entire course of study.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected from July 2012 through July 2013. Field experience began during four weeks in July 2012. Then, communication took place over the internet and phone for several months. This data collection included observation of organizational planning, field notes, attendance of music events, and casual conversation about the activities of the School of Worship and Music and the Creative Center. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews with participants of various religious beliefs that experience the music presentations were also conducted. A field notebook was kept for documentation of daily activities in the field. Audio and video recordings were created to document any interviews, music events, organizational meetings, and applicable cultural phenomenon in which all participants gave consent to do so.

Thus, all four of the following primary categories of qualitative data were collected: observations, interviews, documents, and audio/visual materials.

Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data was analyzed in two different phases. First, data was continually analyzed throughout the collection process. The magnitude of information collected was processed on a regular basis because of 1) the sheer enormity of the information, 2) the timeliness of understanding the context of the information, and 3) the emergent design of the study. Several principles guided the data analysis procedures. As stated before, the data was analyzed concurrently with the data collection. In addition, the perspective of the participants was continually sought in order to analyze the information gained through qualitative interviews.

Ensuring Validity

Qualitative validity must be achieved and proved throughout the study. This occurs both before and during the course of the research. The study will be verifiable internally as well as in relation to similar studies. The precise terms used in the study will be defined if necessary. Likewise, the methodology, approaches to data collection, and data analysis procedures will be rooted in examples and models utilized or produced in prior research.

Specific safeguards will be employed to ensure internal validity. Data collection procedures will employ multiple sources for crosschecking of information. In other words, interview and observational data will be crosschecked with additional interviews and observations. Data analysis procedures will consult examples and models from past research for verifying professional and reliable methods. The participant will not be offered any incentives for his/her cooperation to ensure that no researcher-produced motivation will affect the data. All

data collection and analysis will be compared to research that has been done in other cultures to establish precedent and confirm reliable research patterns. All applicable data will be recorded and written about regardless of whether it supports or contradicts the themes. The participating organizations will be directly involved in several sections of research, including checking and approving the analysis and conclusions of the research questions.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

During my fieldwork in the Middle East during the summer of 2012, I was privileged enough to be able to experience a wide variety of cultural events relating music and the arts to outreach. Anytime a foreigner enters into a religious community, in this location, everyone expects for he or she to come with words of wisdom and of teaching to share. I realized that much of my learning would result from phenomenological experiences and from building trust with the locals through providing the teaching that they desired.

One particular church service was especially memorable. This particular area was known as a predominantly Christian area. There was quite a dangerous history of interreligious crime involving Muslims attacking Christians; therefore, there were over ten armed guards that escorted all visitors through the tight alleyways of the neighborhood and peered down the long, dark streets before crossing any of the more notoriously violent corners.⁴¹ There were no incidents that took place during this event in the neighborhood, but there were definitely some valuable occurrences during the worship service.

The basic outline of my time in the area was as follows: journey to the church building, formal Christian greeting, worship through music, offering with continued worship music, presentation of a Western song, preaching, local pastor's invitation for healing, service benediction, dinner with church leaders and elders, tour of immediate surrounding area of the church, visit with a family relative who lived nearby, and journey back home. Worshippers were playing and singing during the entire course of my journey to and from the service and only stopped for preaching, prayer, and after the service ended. The entire sequence of the service was approximately three hours.

⁴¹“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

One individual from the church mentioned that it is normal in the indigenous churches to hear the music being amplified much more loudly than is necessary. This may be due to the Christian pride felt through loud amplification into the streets or simply because Christians there enjoy worshipping with very loud music. Church congregations also hoped people would be drawn into the buildings by loud music. All of these explanations were given at different times during the course of my fieldwork.

The experience in this church was overwhelming. The music was louder than in any other church that was observed and the adrenaline caused by the possibility of imminent danger was both exhilarating and unsettling. My vantage point was from the front stage with the church leaders, as this was the typical custom. The four of us that were visiting, both foreign and from other congregations, were brought forth to the front of the stage to take part in a typical greeting by the local congregation. In this greeting, several church elders would take turns placing a necklace of fresh flowers over the visitors' heads. They then would place a type of national scarf around the visitors' necks. Finally, a locally worn cap was placed on the visitors' heads to honor the guests.

The worship was powerful, both in volume, expression, and spirituality. The atmosphere was intense as worshippers sang, danced, clapped, and shouted to God. There was a clear excitement about worshipping God and enjoying relationship with Him. People cried out to God during the music in fervent prayer. Local Christian musicians used traditional instruments specific to the area (the names of which will remain unlisted to protect the locale). There was also a choir comprising of about 15 people, which is large compared to most churches that I observed. The choir seemed well-rehearsed and proficient in their musical abilities. After the offering was taken during a song and prayer over by the pastor, I was asked to present a Western

worship chorus together with another foreign visitor, who came from Europe. The people enjoyed learning some English and sang along as we helped to teach them some of the lyrics. We also sang half of the song in the national language so that they could more easily join in with the singing.

After the preaching, many accepted the invitation to dedicate their lives to Christ, and the locals estimated that the vast majority of the congregation said they had never heard of being born again prior to that day. Music played an essential role in building excitement and sense of anticipation through the entire event as well as drawing people to the event.

The School of Worship and Music

A Heated Worship Conference Panel Discussion

On a late afternoon in the scorching July temperatures in a major world city of several million in the Middle East, Christian leaders held a discussion about popular and pertinent topics pertaining to worship leading. The church building is strategically placed between a non-Christians communities located on either side of the Christian complex posing potential threats of violence for the Christian community. The four meager fans placed throughout the sanctuary are meant to provide the one hundred and fifty guests with slight relief from the blistering heat that enters in from open windows into the crowded room.

Earlier in the day, armed guards opened the locked gates as the conference attendees entered through, towards the sanctuary, in their vehicles. The Muslim call to prayer was heard blaring from loudspeakers only two blocks away just as the worship conference began. Aaron explained the vision and purpose of the School for Music and Worship and the establishment of the first-ever series of worship conferences in the nation. Dynamically gifted, local worship

leaders took turns leading songs and reading Scripture. Primary speakers offered specific sessions from issues ranging from the Biblical mandate for indigenous worship to practical worship leading skills to critical contextualization of secular music styles for use in Christian worship.

Now, as the conference draws to a close a final discussion ensues between a public panel of leaders in view of all the conference attendees. The lighthearted spirit of the teaching sessions previously observed throughout the day evaporates as the leaders disagree about a highly controversial topic that many churches in the Middle East currently face. Should Christian songwriters, arrangers, and producers utilize popular, professional Muslim artists in Christian worship recordings or limit themselves solely to Christian musicians and vocalists? As leaders across the panel become divisive, it is increasingly apparent that there are many strong emotions attached to each view and that there is no easy solution to the challenging problem.

Seated along the panel are five of the most prominent voices on the matter of worship music local to the hosting church. Aaron, the founder of the SWM, directs the discussion from the middle of the eight-foot-long, curved table, clothed in dress khakis and a short sleeve button-down shirt. David, a local studio operator and owner is seated to the left of Aaron with a frustrated appearance and harsh tone of voice. He is dressed in tight black jeans and a dark polo. On the far left, Andrew peacefully offers knowledge from his occupation as a Bible teacher and professor at a university and is dressed in traditional clothing. To the immediate right of Aaron is Sam, the chairman of a large branch of over forty churches belonging to a well-known international denomination. He is always seen wearing Western suits and ties and sometimes a suit jacket. Placed on the far right, Phil is an American that grew up in the Middle East and now works with the Creative Center using music and other arts to work with rural people. He

typically wears conservative, traditional clothes from the interior of the country and on this day seems to carry an uncomfortable and aggravated demeanor during the entire course of the discussion.

Unbeknownst to the onlookers at the conference, Phil was uninformed about the topic of the panel discussion until it was introduced at the beginning of the debate. On the contrary, the rest of the panel had a chance to process their answers to the prompts prior to the conference. Those in attendance at the conference asked questions through a microphone placed between the rows of church pews. Another uncomfortable discovery I learned through later conversations is that Phil had produced a CD in the national language over the past couple months and had elected to hire one of the most popular Muslim artists for the recording.

As the discussion proceeds, the two prominent views come to light. Aaron and David strongly keep to the perspective of only utilizing Christian musicians except for instrumental positions where no Christian musicians can be found. They agree that Muslim singers should never be hired to sing in Christian recordings or to sing in Christian churches. David nearly reaches a shouting level of volume as he describes how angry he is about destitute churches hiring Muslim singers to sing worship music. He exclaims, “These churches have no money and expect Christian worship leaders and artists to perform for free! These Muslims do not believe a word that they are singing and are basically lying as they speak. Pastors hire them only in hopes to attract people into their church buildings and sometimes even put a bottle of wine backstage for them to drink after their false performance!” Aaron chimes in: “Meanwhile, Christian artists cannot even provide for their families and are forced to give up their God-given talent and calling in order to pursue a secular vocation, and the cycle continues.” Sam quietly nods his head in agreement.

Andrew seems to resonate with Phil's rationale and makes comments that support both sides of the argument. He says that he sees the value in reaching out to Muslim artists even in Christian recordings, but that he also understands that this practice is detrimental both of the development and finances of Christians in the industry. Many of the worship leaders and musicians in attendance seemed to disagree with Andrew's balanced perspective, but none spoke up, probably out of respect him and his weekly teaching. Sam finally spoke up and said, "It truly is a shame for churches to give any money to Muslim singers in order to 'falsely' be encouraged by their singing of a lie. They cannot mean words that they do not believe."

Phil appears dumbfounded and angry as he is clearly outnumbered and seems to feel as though he had been tricked and set up to fail. Aaron and David continue to insist that the Christian singers are "just as good" as the Muslim professionals. Phil disagrees and tells the story of his experiences using Muslims artists in Christian recordings. He explains, "During my time with 'Mark', the vocal lines were recorded quickly and excellently. I used Christians singers and musicians for every other part in the project where they could easily succeed in their responsibility." He recalls a situation in which Mark had truly been moved to obvious emotion and says, "while singing a song about the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ, Mark came out of the vocal booth with tears streaming down his face. He reflected aloud, 'Jesus really did all this for me? I just cannot believe that He would do something like that for a man like me.'" Phil continues, "This is precisely why I choose to use Muslim singers. Not only do I have the best possibility for CD circulation among listeners who follow the artist's work, but I also have an opportunity to share the Gospel with prominent Muslim celebrities."

David and Phil converse back and forth in a rather heated debate for some time, and eventually Phil says that he was disappointed and hurt by his invitation to be a part of the panel

and feels that he was set up for the purpose of embarrassment and defeat. The panel discussion comes to no true conclusion, but there is a clear representation of the two predominant views. Locals remain divided on the issue and its importance is continually felt among the churches of the Middle East. This details of this observed event were verified by multiple sources, including a post-event interview with Phil.⁴²

Situations like this help to illustrate exactly why there is a need for ongoing discussions about Christian worship in predominantly Islamic nations. Though several of the prominent leaders at the conference insisted that Christian artists were equivalent in talent to their Muslim counterparts, other studio producers in later conversations did not reciprocate their feelings. At the same time, the Christians singers at the conference were indeed very good at their task. Most importantly, it is truly a problematic issue for the locals to figure out what the Biblical response to the situation should be. Regardless of the viewpoint held at the conference, all agreed that there should be continued methods of training for worship leaders and recording artists for the betterment of the Christian church in the Middle East.

Overview, History, and Purpose of The School of Worship and Music (SWM)

The School of Worship and Music (SWM), is an organization that began in 2003 in the Middle East. It has gained exponentially increasing influence over the past ten years and continues to grow today. Several elements of the SWM are worth mentioning: the goals and dreams of the organization, the constituency of greatest interest in the program, and the possibilities for continued work.

The School of Worship and Music began with the primary vision to equip worship leaders of local churches in a particular nation in the region. Numerous Christian musicians and

⁴²“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

worship leaders have participated in the program. At a weekly gathering, the organization director teaches principles and practices of worship leading and then the class divides into particular interest groups as several instructors teach group sessions. One of the secondary concerns of the SWM is to assist in the process of uniting local churches as national and regional churches working in partnership. A final ambition of the SWM is “outreach through excellent worship and music ministries with the goal of producing excellent worship leaders and worshipping musicians.”⁴³

The School hopes to continue to impact both Christians and non-Christians in the nation and the region through various kinds of music. One of the instructors for the SWM, Nate, is a young local who is very proficient in the areas of guitar and voice. He attends the “Music and Arts School”, a highly prestigious school in the country that is the only public academy for the arts in the entire nation. Nate is also a locally known songwriter and worship leader for the School of Worship and Music. He volunteered himself for an interview pertaining to several current issues in arts outreach. He gave his impression of the organization:

The School of Worship and Music is doing things that have never been done before. There is only one other school in the whole country! This is the first Christian music school that has ever existed in the nation. We are able to teach music to worship leaders, musicians, and songwriters. This impacts the local churches first, then works to share the truth through music to all the people that walk into the churches. We hope that as all the people become more highly trained in church music, more people will hear the songs. People have to care more about Christian worship music. When Christians care about it and care about doing it well then more people will hear its message.⁴⁴

He said the following about which types of regional music could be used for outreach:

I think all of them could be used. We like using modern styles and a lot of the traditional styles as well. Some of the styles are not used in Christian worship music, but maybe we could. It’s a hard question because some of the styles have never been used for that

⁴³“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁴⁴“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

purpose. I don't think people would notice much if we changed some of the lyrics to the songs in any music styles, so it would probably work.⁴⁵

During the first few years of the organization's existence, the outreach goal was not fervently pursued because of the immediate focus on the health of the early stages of growth; however, this has drastically changed in the past few years. Due to continued growth in the region as well as the acquisition of teachers such as a prominent studio owner and a student of the most prestigious national music school, the SWM has been noticed by many non-Christians. Among the most remarkable relationships that have been built is the relationship with a local Sufi Muslim congregation. The imam of the congregation heard about the School of Worship and Music and actually invited them to perform at his three hundred year-old shrine. The invitation was accepted and the event was reported to have gone well.

Psalm Festivals

In this country, the Psalms have been translated into a local tongue understood by more than a hundred million people. The SWM has begun an endeavor to write new musical arrangements of the Psalms and to modernize many arrangements of the ones that already exist. Both Muslims and Christians regard the Psalms as a divine book.⁴⁶ Remarkably, professional Muslim singers have recorded over two hundred parts of the original psalm arrangements. Semi-professional Christian singers are extremely sparse and difficult to come by because of the lack of education, widespread poverty, and rising persecution. Even if the SWM chose to only utilize Christian musicians, this would be a difficult task. I was informed that there is not a single Christian musician in the entire nation that could play many of the necessary instruments at a professional level. This brings up again the highly controversial issue of whether or not to choose

⁴⁵“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁴⁶“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

to use Muslim musicians and singers in Christian recordings. Christian producers and writers are faced with the dilemma of hiring Muslims or sacrificing quality and some instruments to use solely Christian musicians.

The School of Worship and Music has observed major success in interreligious relationships through the establishment of an annual Psalm festival many years ago. This event has drawn Christian and Muslim artists from all across the country to a friendly talent show involving Psalm singing and times of teaching song arrangements. The festivals have several benefits. They assist Aaron and the SWM in discovering Christian talent for future recordings. In fact, the majority of the current teachers and artist have been discovered through this gathering. The festivals also help to build trust and common ground across religious boundaries.⁴⁷ Nate spoke very positively about the possibilities for music outreach in the Middle East.

I don't know a lot about other forms of art here but music can do amazing things. The Muslims say that they don't listen to music, but what do you do when you first get in your car? They are the same as us. They get into their car, turn on music on the radio, and roll the windows down and enjoy it. So you can see, everyone loves music and everyone is affected by it.⁴⁸

Nate also said that he does not know of anyone else in the nation doing anything quite like the Psalm Festivals. He said that he had much hope for the future work with Sufi Muslims, but he also expressed some frustration. He said,

“A little while back when we went to a Sufi shrine, there were almost three thousand people gathered to hear us perform the Psalms in their local language. The problem is that the reason the people were interested in hearing us perform was not because of the message. They didn't care about that! All three of the girls in our worship team sang with their heads uncovered. The men just stared at them with sexual thoughts because they never get to see anything like that. They would have listened no matter what we had to say because the whole time, they really just wanted to watch the girls. It was disgusting and made me so mad! I know that our music can be used in a good way but it was just

⁴⁷“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁴⁸“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

terrible watching them look at the girls when we went so that they could hear the message.”⁴⁹

He did express that he believed there was a lot of potential for the message to be received well aside from this oversight. He said, “If the music is good, people will listen. That is the way we get their attention. They have listened to it at other times when they had no other reason to listen to us. Music gives joy and brings people together. They listen to it regardless of whether they agree with the words or not.”⁵⁰

Though most Muslims do not sing Psalms or any songs at public gatherings or in private devotional time, many Muslims love music. Muslims particularly enjoy attending concerts with Psalms in native styles that have originated in the Muslim culture. Muslims are invited to the festival both as presenters and performers.⁵¹ Due to persecution in the Muslim context, live singing is not often heard on the streets of this area, but music is almost always playing in the vehicles of people driving down the same streets.

To achieve the widest audience from various regions of the nation, the SWM has also attempted to translate the songs into another widely known language of the people in the more rural sections of the country. The language is a particularly difficult one to understand, especially to those who did not grow up speaking it. The Muslim imam heard of these undertakings and wanted to hear more about the group, so he invited them to his shrine and asked all of his parishioners to attend the gathering. The event appeared incredibly successful because of the sheer numbers of attendees as well as national exposure. Around two thousand five hundred

⁴⁹“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁵⁰“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁵¹“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

Muslims attended the event and a news station broadcasted a post-performance interview with Aaron. The potential television audience was fifty million viewers.

This event is unprecedented in this particular culture, and quite possibly unparalleled in any majority Muslim culture. Hearing about this event was actually the original inspiration that sparked my desire to study the topic of arts in the Middle East. Regardless of the spiritual outcome of the occasion, the fact that two thousand five hundred Muslims willingly sought to hear the Psalms being sung is a step towards a positive direction. There were mixed reports about the results of the event from individuals associated with the SWM, but it should still be considered a great success in interreligious relations due to the fact that it even happened at all.

The importance of the relationship of song and faith should also be noticed. In an oral culture such as this, most people do not read the Bible or any type of written literature. Ideas are often taught by song because of its ease of learning and transmission. It is easy to understand why music is so important in the communication of the Christian message in this country. Nearly eighty percent of the original Psalm translations have been lost to the majority of local Christians.⁵² The implication of this fact is that the people have also forgotten a large part of the Christian faith.

In this region, missionaries in the early 1900s expected Christianity to spread from Christian institutions to the masses, but psalm singing became the catalyst for the conversion of several of the largest tribes. Both evangelical Christians and Catholics still sing the Psalms to this day. In fact, due to extremely high illiteracy rates, the Psalms function as the most widely memorized portion of the Bible for the common people because they are sung.⁵³

⁵²“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁵³“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

Providing resources to local languages has been an important component of this teaching. Prior to the productions distributed by the SWM, there were virtually no materials to assist in teaching children from birth until early adulthood. The SWM has recorded one CD for all age groups that is comprised of several Psalms and utilizes local instruments. Two children's CD's were produced next, and most lately a CD targeted at youth has been produced. A couple volunteer graphic artists have also produced a few videos. The videos use animation and newly published Christian music from the SWM to teach children about things like the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, and New Testament stories of Jesus. Aaron has also written the nation's first two books on Christian worship music in the national language.⁵⁴

When asked about the perceived progress of the School in its undertakings, David responded optimistically. He said, "It is always difficult to do something that has never been done before. It is also tough because people do not have a desire for what we do until they are able to see the value in it, and that takes time. Now, I believe that we are seeing great progress and more people desiring to use arts for outreach and Christian growth every year."⁵⁵ He was also asked about his correspondence with the radio stations and public broadcast groups with which the SWM had come into contact. "We continue to develop positive impressions of our message and our faith through media relationships," David said. "We are already about to get weekly airtime on one radio station through our recorded songs, so that will be a tremendous focus of our organization moving towards the future. I am grateful to have developed friends in the recording and music industries."⁵⁶

⁵⁴"Aaron", interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁵⁵"David", interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁵⁶"David", interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

The School of Worship and Music continues to explore new opportunities to impact the religious communities in the region. Art forms such as drama and video have been used for outreach on occasion.⁵⁷ Nate was one of the individuals asked about future possibilities for arts outreach. He said, “We have so many different kinds of art and music but most Christians do not know how to use them. The ones that do know how to work with the arts do not know many Muslims. Maybe in the future we will see what other kinds of things we are able to do.”⁵⁸

Interreligious Relationships

I discovered an unexpected setback during my research of the interreligious relationships of Christians. I asked nearly thirty Christians from different churches and different areas of the country about their relationships with secular people and those of other faiths. What I discovered is that most Christians cannot even name one Muslim, secularist, or other non-Christian person with whom they are in relationship. Many said that they work with people of other beliefs but that they do not discuss anything with their acquaintances apart from work-related duties, though several Christians related to the School of Worship and Music did have Muslim servants.

There is always a great deal of international news speaking of extremist persecution against various religious groups in the Middle East. This is certainly a reality, but there are interesting nuances of the minorities’ public displays of faith. Christian’s vehicles often have crosses or Christian slogans displayed openly on dashboards and hanging from rearview mirrors. Christians do not make many efforts to hide their faith and several families reported that all of their neighbors were aware of their faith. It might seem that under extreme persecution, Christians would have hidden their faith from the majority culture unless asked about it. Instead,

⁵⁷“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁵⁸“Nate”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

Christian symbols are plainly displayed as iconic differences between urban Christians and those of other religious beliefs.

Additionally, the clothing of Christians seemed tied to some kind of perceived association with the West. Many people, particularly in the village areas, believe that Western influences on the local culture have produced negative results.⁵⁹ This cannot be confirmed without further study, and may not be as important in large port cities as it is in rural areas. Regardless of the reasoning behind the choice of clothing or the effects of this decision, there is a visible difference between walking into a room of Christians and a room of other religious people in the urban cities of this nation.

Sunday School and Children's Camps

Aaron and his wife, "Sarah", have worked diligently to offer their ministry to children through training Sunday school teachers. The SWM has held an annual weekend event to train local teachers in their methods. Music and the arts are a large emphasis in the teaching at this event. The event has grown larger every year, attracting about one hundred and twenty teachers during the summer of 2012. The Sunday school teachers are primarily taught how to better disciple children, but teaching subjects such as math, English, and the national language is also encouraged and moderate instruction is provided to help with this task. The children's CD's and videos have helped both in teaching the teachers as well as supplying aids for teaching the children. As of 2013, the progress of reaching the goal of training one hundred teachers and reaching one thousand children is well over its halfway point.

Sarah is the primary coordinator of the Sunday school teachers' seminars and training centers. She believes that the principal reason for the loss of most of the Psalms is due to a lack

⁵⁹"Phil", interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

of discipleship among children. The songs simply have not been circulated among the children and youth enough in the past one hundred years. The rationale for such a focused approach for Christian discipleship among children is simple. Children are the most impressionable people in the nation and learn quickly. Furthermore, the children have the most life ahead of them to serve as agents of change in the world. Music has proved itself to be an effective method of teaching both Biblical and worldly truth among this demographic through Sunday school. Most of the music is about the parables and miracles of Jesus. Some of the lyrics come from stories such as the parable of the sower in Matthew thirteen and the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men in Matthew fourteen.⁶⁰

Another avenue of implementing change in the lives of Christian children is children's camp. Aaron and Sarah founded an annual camp specifically for children and their parents about five years ago. The School of Worship and Music is officially the hosting organization of the camps. During this camp, children are taught Bible stories through music and visual arts. Songs, videos, plays, and dramatic skits are all part of this multi-sensory experience. Parents are simultaneously taught in a separate room of the conference center about how to better disciple their children. Parents learn the same Bible stories that the children do so that families can discuss the meaning and application of God's Word when they return home to their cities and villages. Due to lack of finances, the greatest obstacle for the children's camps is always the burden of expensive travel and housing arrangements for those who attend. International funds generally carry the weight of a heavy stipend that allows most people that attend to be able to afford the costs. Aaron and Sarah have observed many changed lives as a result of the children's camps and continue to labor in hopes that the truth will reach farther through the attendees than

⁶⁰“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

they ever could personally go without the families that hear God's truth. Many parents have reported teaching the truths learned in their communities of origin upon returning home.

The Creative Center

Introduction

In a city of around half a million in a less developed part of the country, workers from nearby village communities commute by foot or farming animals to look for work in order to support their families in the dire times of economic poverty. Much different from the bustling urbanized centers of the nation, the city feels as if the villages have grown closer together without much modernization and globalization. The busiest streets are made of dirt and occasional, broken pieces of concrete. The smells of donkeys, vehicle emissions, fresh fruit, and stagnant rainwater fill the air. Village farmers are heard hawking the fruits of their labor to those passing by on the crowded streets of the main section of town. Car and bike horns seem to incessantly cry out in a place without any apparent direction of traffic, rules, or regulations. The city is void of any Western clothing and formal outfits. All the locals wear traditional garments and many wear the native style of head covering.

Though within miles of one another, city life is starkly dissimilar to village living. There is little to no monetary currency in the villages. Goods or services are bartered or transported to the city to be sold. Major cities in the country have isolated communities of Christians, Muslims, and other religious groups. To the contrary, the diverse sects of religious groups typically live in harmony for the most part. There is not much mingling between the groups, but most people are not on the radical fringes of their belief systems. A flood that wiped out many village farmers' crops in the past year still drastically affects the economy. A local church facilitates the

distribution of international aid funds coming from international churches that will help the farmers rebuild their livelihood in the coming months.

Education is of little concern to most of the local villagers because of the more pressing immediate needs. The wise elders of the community know that education is the key for the younger generations to gain success in their adulthood and they hope that the weather gods will provide enough relief for the strain of daily life to be able to one day afford to send children to school instead of out into the fields to work. The Creative Center, a ministry of a local church denomination, sees people with these needs daily. It has instituted several ministries to help people dealing with difficult life circumstances.

Overview, History, and Purpose of the Creative Center (CC)

The Creative Center (CC) of the Middle East is one of the most dynamic organizations currently at work in its region. Incredible results have been observed over the past ten years and it has rightfully earned a spot in one of the most influential ministries in the region that uses music and the arts for outreach. Information gained from an interview with Phil, the founder of the Creative Center, helps to outline the core objectives for the existence of the institution. It also reveals several reasons why such an organization can be effective in the area and why it has progressively grown to larger areas of effect. The CC exists to reduce spiritual and material poverty in the region through many different means. The Center develops culturally relevant audio, visual, and written resources for the use of local believers in witness and discipleship. A second goal is to emphasize and encourage the responsibility of the local church in the task of integral Gospel mission. A witnessing team participates in outreach to the marginalized village

people of the region using indigenous music, dance, drama, and video. The final major ministry of the CC is the Village Outreach Ministry (VOM).⁶¹

Inevitably, the question of need arises in relation to the use of music and visual arts in the region. An additional interview with Phil's daughter explains why the need for such a ministry is tremendous in the Middle East. Phil's daughter, whom we will refer to as "Nafisa" henceforward, grew up in the Middle East but has also had the opportunity to obtain a college education in the West. According to Nafisa, many people might consider the arts as a luxury reserved for prosperous and educated peoples, but that even the most "primitive" societies enjoy a thriving culture of arts.⁶² The various arts forms enjoyed by different social classes are often different in style, however. In fact, the poor and the illiterate use the arts out of necessity instead of as a luxury. It is nearly impossible to turn onto any street corner in a major city of the Middle East without hearing music being played from stores and markets. Even in the most remote places, music can be heard from tractors in the fields or from the lips of villagers during their work or community gatherings. Music, dance, and visual arts are central parts of all celebrations.⁶³

In the West, Christians are often expected to learn about God through long sermons, but this does not work as well in the Middle East among the uneducated. People learn much more easily through short times of teaching and through songs. They have never been conditioned to sit still and learn by lecture, so this is a foreign concept in the culture. Music is a simple, nonthreatening way to communicate truth. The village peoples actually have incredible memories because they cannot rely on text to remember things. The people are extremely willing

⁶¹"Phil", interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁶²Nafisa", interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

⁶³"Nafisa", interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

to listen to and participate in music events throughout the entire night. Nafisa told a story about how she had evidenced waiters at restaurants correctly remember the orders of twenty or more people without writing down a single word!⁶⁴

The rationale for music recordings applies to an even wider variety of cultures. Most of the region has lenient pirating laws, making it easy to distribute music to a wide audience. The CC has little regard for benefiting from music production financially, so the popularity of music piracy actually works to its advantage since the message of the music is heard by a growing audience of listeners. Music video is the most recent point of emphasis in the CC as this form of art has grown in popularity in Middle Eastern culture. Instead of displaying scenes of romantic nature or seductive relationships, the music videos of the CC communicate a spiritual message through thoughtfully chosen lyrics, role models, and illustrations to clarify the words.⁶⁵

There are minimal Christian music recordings in this particular Middle Eastern country. Christian music has traditionally been sung in church settings but not in pop culture or daily life. Christians and non-Christians alike listen generally listen to the same music in daily life. Most of these songs revolve around the subjects of love, dance, and relationships, and many are associated with elements of pop culture. This fact is the CC's motive for music production, and its goal is to produce Christian music that can be listened to in any setting by both youth and adults. Music recordings are initiated for various reasons. The motives for these projects could be to communicate the Christian message to other religious groups, reach the youth, teach tribal wedding songs, or encourage the Christian community. The CC has elected to utilize the best

⁶⁴“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

⁶⁵“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

singers from the majority religious culture for the best musical quality and with hopes that the music will be more widely listened to and might gain the largest hearing possible.⁶⁶

Another ministry of the CC is the traveling singing and dancing team. This team is frequently invited to perform at weddings, birth celebrations, funerals, and all-night ceremonies. Traditional styles of song and dance are utilized, but modified and given a Christian message and illustration of that message through dance. At these events, other arts are also occasionally used. Bible stories may be demonstrated through visual paintings, drawings, or videos. Drama and plays are also used to enact these stories or to describe a Christian worldview in relation to many of the current struggles of the people in the region.⁶⁷

A Girls' Conference in a Village Community

In the middle of the scorching summer heat in the city, around one hundred and fifty young village girls are gathered in a large room of the Creative Center's conference center. The girls excitedly await the start of the conference and the singing that will shortly begin. They sit on the carpeted floor with their legs crossed, dressed in diverse colors. Most of the attendees identify with tribal religion, with a moderate Christian and Muslim representation as well. Soon, Phil walks onto the stage to a microphone and addresses the conference guests with a traditional greeting. He tells a few jokes and all the girls giggle together. He then reads a Scripture passage about God's love for all of His children and speaks about the reason for the conference.

Due to a lack of education, young girls are unaware of many feminine matters. Sexual matter such as the origin of pregnancy, an explanation of periods, how to deal with sexual temptation, and the dangers of abortion are rarely discussed even between mothers and

⁶⁶“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

⁶⁷“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

daughters. There is tremendous pride in the birth of sons, but this is not the case with female births. Sadly, abortion runs rampant as a result of this cultural mindset. Furthermore, there is such shame in having children out of wedlock that if young girls discover themselves to be pregnant, they will likely attempt an abortion and never even understand why they became pregnant. Phil explains that during the conference the countless emotional, mental, and spiritual scars resulting from abortion would also be discussed alongside the physical consequences.

Phil invites all of the attendees to join in singing with him so that they could worship God for who He is and all He has done. With the help of a couple other instrumentalists, he then begins to teach a couple new Christian songs in popular local styles. Phil plays the pump organ and sings some introductory material to teach the message of the song. In a local genre of call and response, he sings a line and then the other instrumentalists repeat the line along with the girls. Singing in the style seems to build unity amongst all those participating, especially in those who were hearing the song for the first time. Phil sings one chorus by himself the first time to teach the melody and then the girls join in during future repetitions. The volume in the room grows increasingly louder as more girls learn the song. Everyone seems to enjoy the style of music, understand the purpose of the songs, and join in the singing. The lyrics of the songs speak of God's love and the responsibility to do everything as unto God. Forgiveness is also a topic that is referenced in the second song in an attempt to set the tone for the recent events that have happened.

It turns out that a young girl from one of the nearby villages had died about a month ago from internal wounds. She had sexual relations with a young man in the village and did not understand the relationship of those actions to pregnancy. When the unexpected physical changes alerted her to the coming baby, the two youth decided to attempt an abortion. The

dangerous method of abortion left the young girl with a punctured uterus and she bled to death just outside the village before anyone else was aware of the pregnancy and the shame that the girl was experiencing.

The songs teach the girls more about the importance of gender roles. The culture typically refers to women with negativity and dishonor, but the message of the songs challenges this attitude. During different sections of the songs, Phil stops briefly to explain the Scriptures to the girls and then teaches them how to sing the newly discovered truth. He teaches things like identity in Christ, trust in God's plan, and holiness through the power of God's Holy Spirit. After the second song ends, Phil's wife asks the men around the room to leave so the females could discuss the more sensitive issues alone.

Over the next three mornings together, the girls had a truly new experience as they encountered the message of the Bible and heard of God's plan for their life. An example of Biblical worship was modeled each morning and excitement in the room grew with each new revelation of truth. The arts played a vital role in teaching the girls more about God's Word and their feminine health. Songs helped the girls remember what they had learned and assisted them in teaching the information to their families and friends that were unable to attend. Discussion about this highly sensitive and taboo issue was desperately needed and music helped to accomplish the daunting task in an appropriate manner. Music seemed to loosen up any tension that was brought by the girls to the conference and cultivated a sense of unity and friendship in the gathering. It was used to teach, encourage, and edify in an effective way.

At the end of the conference, all the teaching was supported in a practical way through a ceremonial birthday part that was held for the wife of the head pastor of the Creative Center. The head pastor is a native of the region, so the birthday party for his wife was something that was

unprecedented in the culture. All the men and women praised the pastor's wife and clapped and cheered for her as she entered. With tears streaming down her face and laughter in the air, she took her seat at the front of the room beside her husband as several relatives and friends sang songs in her honor. The party concluded with the passing out of cake and a celebratory song to end the conference.

Village Outreach Ministry

The purpose of the Village Outreach Ministry (VOM) is to employ holistic means to accomplish the mission of the Creative Center. Over thirty workers and their wives have already been trained as the key instruments for the organization's workforce. These families of workers are all Christian converts that have been developed from prior ministry done by the initial personnel from the CC. Each worker and wife pair is responsible for three villages, including their own. The villages in the region are generally made up of poor and underprivileged families of Christian, Muslim, and other religious backgrounds. The job of the working pair is to teach a lesson in each village once per week for three years. After the first three weeks of teaching, the village workers assemble in base camp for three days of the final week of the month to learn and prepare a new lesson for the coming month. Thus, each village would have thirty-six church gatherings in a year with one hundred and eight gatherings over the course of the three-year period.

The lessons include a Bible story with a new worship song that helps the people share and remember the story. They also include a basic health and hygiene lesson and an ongoing adult literacy course since many of the village people have never been educated. Over the course of three years of ministry, each village would have the potential to hear the general outline of the entire Bible, gain much greater understanding about health, and read and write in both their local

and regional languages. Over one hundred and twenty-five villages have already participated in this process.

The VOM has seen incredible results of the past ten years of ministry in the area. Thousands of people have heard the Bible, learned worship songs, become healthier, and embraced a mixed community of diverse backgrounds and interreligious relationships. Churches have been established in nearly every village that has been involved with the program. Over three hundred people have participated in the adult literacy program. Surprisingly, over one-fourth of the literacy students are female, a shocking and exciting result since only around three percent of the females in the region are literate. Though there is little hope for the adults in the villages to ever advance into a higher quality of living, the children are prepared for the potential possibility of becoming assimilated into the modern culture of the country should they ever choose to do so. The VOM's enrollment and area of effect continue to increase exponentially.

The Creative Center has also trained a few of the more educated village people in Bible translation. Five languages are currently in the process of translation, with a complete New Testament published in each tribal language. The head supervisor is responsible for ensuring accuracy, but the tribal people themselves translate the Scriptures into their respective languages.

An important point of emphasis for the CC is sensitivity to culture. Phil claims that too much work has been done in the region without proper regard for culture. Pastors and evangelists commonly insist that new believers must change their language, clothes, culture, and even sometimes their diet. This has discouraged many people from understanding the core principles of Christianity. On the contrary, the CC focuses on the need for a transformation of the heart and a different worldview. External aspects of life change are considered much less important and are only discussed along the journey of the inward change. If particular elements of culture

directly conflict with Christian beliefs, they are dealt with more strongly. If such things are idolatrous or harmful, then they are eliminated and usually exchanged for new, culturally appropriate rituals to replace the old ones. The substituted practices are then given new meaning that specifically pertains to the new Christian faith of the transformed individual.⁶⁸

One example of this type of cultural substitution is the work done during a particular tribal holiday. This tribal holiday is a celebration of light, but the Christians have replaced the tribal holiday with a different term emphasizing the definite article. This transforms the holiday from a celebration of light in general to a celebration of “the Light”, referring to Jesus.⁶⁹ These terms actually sound quite similar in the native language of the region from which the words have developed. The CC workers began to think of all the ways that Christian truth could be inserted into the indigenous culture, and this holiday seemed to present the perfect chance. The Christians thought to themselves, “Don’t we have a concept of light that could be celebrated during the same time of year and in a similar manner to their festivals?”⁷⁰ It was obvious to them that since God is the light of the world, He should be celebrated as such. Instead of celebrating Him in a way that may have been foreign to the culture, they simply took the rituals of the indigenous holiday and modified them until they solely reflected a Christian worldview but managed to retain some of the local forms of art and expression.

The formation of the newly rebranded and re-explained Christian festival not only became an effective way to teach Christian truth to the tribal people but also turned into a widespread celebration that Christians looked forward to all year long. Songs were written specifically for the occasion and videos were made to demonstrate it. Instead of demanding that

⁶⁸“Phil”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁶⁹“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

⁷⁰“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

the tribal converts give up their culture completely like groups have done in the past, the CC has provided these new believers replacements like this one to foster community and show their commitment to God.

A second example of this cultural substitution involves a local movement. Many tribal people are very attracted to this movement, which teaches that people can gain spiritual merit, enlightenment, and even improved living conditions through worship. The religious leaders are singing teachers that teach their faith through worship. Every religious event includes worship songs and the singing often continues throughout the entire night. These worship songs are most common at life-cycle ceremonies, particularly funerals. The people hope that merit can still be gained even for the deceased individual.⁷¹

Neighboring the Middle East, South Asia has a similar movement that has been recognized by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism. They provide a wonderful example of how the Gospel can be contextualized into the culture of the Bhakti movement. Group seventeen wrote the following excerpt at the 2004 gathering:

There are some Christ-followers in various parts of India who have been judiciously taking cultural forms from the Indian religious context and explicitly “pouring” new meaning (biblical truth) into those symbolic elements. The purpose is to gain a more widespread hearing among Hindus and to achieve greater understanding of the gospel message. This is done in the context of the Hindu satsang form (from the Hindi “sang,” meaning fellowship, and “sat,” meaning truth—a fellowship centered on the truth). During the satsang, the acharya (teacher) leads the group that is gathered. The home of a professional Hindu artist (also a seeker), the roof of another Hindu family’s house, and the home of an expat university professor were the settings for three such satsangs that took place in Delhi. The following are some of the common elements of these gatherings: the singing of bhajans (devotional songs involving leading and mimicking as well as unison singing); the giving of a pravachan (message) which often focuses on the words in the bhajans; prayer for specific needs; the presence/explanation of symbolic objects and personal counselling for those who request it. The Christian acharya will sometimes end this time of worship by breaking a coconut, explaining how

⁷¹“Phil”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

it symbolizes the “pouring out” of Christ’s blood and the “breaking” of his body for the forgiveness of our sins.⁷²

The workers at the Creative Center have completely immersed themselves in the tribal culture of a similar movement and have used the associated traditions and rituals to communicate the truth of the Gospel in a similar manner to the description presented above from the Lausanne committee.

Weddings, engagements, and naming ceremonies are also perfect opportunities to share the truth of Christ with indigenous people in the region. Many tribes in the area enjoy singing around a large drum at weddings or at any joyous occasion. The Creative Center workers have learned the dancing tradition for these celebrations and have used this worship expression for outreach and teaching. They have standardized the traditional dance style and rhythms in order to make them easier to teach and learn. Christian women have learned how to sing new songs written by the CC workers that are still based on the same traditional method; however, these songs teach about Jesus, Christian marriage, faith, and many other Christian concepts. These Christian songs are written in a call and response style of singing. It is one of the most effective ways that they have found to teach because of the chance to hear a line, repeat it, and learn the truth through the process.⁷³

Even the smallest details of ritual ceremonies such as those at weddings must be considered. In the tribal wedding rituals in this region, the bride and groom would circle around an idol to seal their marriage. The CC worked closely with local converted believers and decided to maintain the ritual practice, but replaced the idol with a cross. They also added a short portion

⁷²“Redeeming the Arts: Restoration of the Arts to God’s Creational Intention,” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 46. Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, 2004, 31.

⁷³“Phil”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

of the giving of vows to the ceremony, emphasizing commitment to their Christian faith. Scripture provided the primary basis for these vows, but specific cultural issues were also considered. For instance, one segment of the vows consisted of the husband declaring that he would not dominate or beat his wife like most of the husbands from his native culture, but rather that he would love her just as Christ loves His church.⁷⁴

The strategy of cultural substitution has served as an effective tool in the ministry of the Creative Center in the Middle East. Indigenous villagers already expect to receive their religious training through song, so they have a preexisting desire to hear songs that teach truth. The dance teams produced by this group have been invited to perform at wedding ceremonies all over the region, sometimes to villages where the message of Christianity has never been heard prior to that point. These gatherings always draw large crowds who enjoy participating in the sport of dancing. In many ways, the singing groups of the CC are preferred over the traditional groups. Though their dance and vocal styles are nearly identical, the words of the songs that the CC team has written are positive in nature and easier to understand because of the simple language that is used.

Self-assessment with Phil and Nafisa

Though it is a difficult task to discover a particular gauge of effectiveness and success for the CC because of the diversity in its ministries, the leaders believe that it is clear that the amount of Christ-followers is increasing as a result of its presence in the area.⁷⁵ Nafisa reports that the use of the arts in outreach has been especially effective among the tribal population in the region. She says that there has been an increasing interest in the local churches, rising

⁷⁴“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

⁷⁵“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

numbers of baptisms, and softening hearts of the leaders upon hearing the message of the Gospel through music and dance. In relation to the Muslim population, she confesses, it is much more difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the CC's efforts because of the impersonal nature of ministry through broadcasting and music recording distribution.⁷⁶

Phil adds his positive opinion to this assessment. He believes that one of the key points of success for the CC has been its sensitivity to culture. He has seen effective results in the practice of substituting new, Christian forms for old ones that could be idolatrous or harmful. Changed lives are the fundamental gauge of success for both the CC and the VOM. The village outreach workers may face danger, persecution, isolation, and loneliness as a result of their ministry, so it is probable that their persistence and dedication to the ministry of the Gospel reveals true heart change and therefore, ministry success of the VOM and CC. Furthermore, the proper recognition and encouragement of local culture and contextualization of music and the arts demonstrates an additional measure of effectiveness.⁷⁷

The Arts in Identity Formation and Social Reform

Research clearly reveals a desperate need for the development of the arts in this nation. The arts have been stifled for decades by religious fundamentalists and extremists, even though many people from both organizations studied say that they thoroughly enjoyed the arts. During my fieldwork, I was highly privileged to stumble upon the annual convocation of one of the only arts schools in the entire nation. I was previously unaware of just how stifled the arts culture had been in the past. I received an informal invitation to attend the annual convocation and thought it to simply be an exciting opportunity to learn more about the music culture and to take some live

⁷⁶“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

⁷⁷“Phil”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

video of professional performances. When I arrived at the event, I was told that the school was the first and only professional music and arts school in the entire country. There is an extremely small amount of music teaching in public schools in the country, but until the establishment of this school there was no institution specifically dedicated to professionalism and promotion of the arts.

The arts school will be referred to as “Music and Arts School”, or MAS, henceforward. The MAS was established around ten years ago by a moderate Muslim with dreams of changing the cultural landscape of the country. My experience at the 2012 summer convocation was exhilarating. The professors and students produced incredible performances that included superb vocal ensembles and solos, traditional music performances, electric guitar-driven rock music, traditional dances, short drama scenes, poetry reading, Western classical piano music, and many local song styles. I had never before seen live performances done more excellently than at this convocation.

When I returned from my fieldwork I did not give much thought to my journey to the MAS that day, but several months later I rediscovered an article that I had bookmarked about the school. I am unable to cite the article here due to safety reasons. An informal, international newspaper with headquarters in the United States had published a report about the establishment of the school several years ago. Indeed, it reported that the MAS was the first institution dedicated to the arts to ever exist in this Middle Eastern country. Due to the obvious relationship of the article and the geographical location of this study, I will only utilize knowledge gained through interviews and observation and not that gained from the article. The most remarkable part of the article was not the information about the school, but rather the rationale of the founder for his reasons for starting it.

Some people think that the arts school is the nation's remedy for extremism. During a decade of military rule, most artists were forced to go underground or emigrate to other countries to avoid persecution. Under strict Islamic rule, dancing and singing have been historically thought to lead people away from Allah and border on the charge of blasphemy. The stigma and prejudice against artists has been an extremely difficult perspective to begin to overcome for the growing community of those concerned with the task of revitalizing the arts.

The establishment of a national arts school may seem inconsequential in a country with thousands of institutions dedicated to the teaching of primarily anti-music Islamic thought, but many locals believe the existence of the school to be revolutionary. Many believe that artistic expression is a crucial regulator for social frustrations.⁷⁸ The president's of MAS continues to attempt to champion the pursuit of a moderate national culture in order to move away from the historical reputation that the nation has of being bent on authoritarian Islamic control.

Due to the perilous discrimination against artists, the director of the MAS spent most of his life performing in other areas of the world before moving back to his native country to establish the now thriving arts school. He believes the arts to be the absolute best method of ushering in social change. Since its establishment, the MAS has had thousands of applications but only about one hundred spots for students to date. It is expected to continue to grow as long as the government remains peaceable. The cultural change continues despite heavy opposition from some. In the predominantly fundamentalist parts of the country, several politicians have placed bans on all public music performances with heavy penalties enforced on any who do not comply.⁷⁹

⁷⁸“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

⁷⁹“Aaron”, interview by author, Middle East, July 2012.

In this chapter I have presented the current practices, goals, and methodologies of the School of Worship and Music and the Creative Center, with additional mention of the Music and Arts school. In the following section, I hope to summarize the results of all information gleaned from research. Furthermore, I will offer the conclusions gained from this study and recommendations for further research.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study has observed and analyzed 2 unique organizations in an unnamed nation in the Middle East. Both the School of Worship and Music and the Creative Center have proved to be dynamic organizations with unprecedented accomplishments in their region. The School of Worship and Music equips worship leadership through music education and coordinates events designed to impact the other spiritual communities in the region through arts outreach. The Creative Center exists to reduce material and spiritual poverty in the region through arts outreach and other holistic programs for societal benefit among various religious communities. Both organizations produce multiple forms of audio and visual materials to accomplish their respective missions and goals. Though the thesis only offers a snapshot of the current goals and methodologies of outreach through the arts in the Middle East, it might serve as a foundation for others who hope to do research in these areas.

Conclusions

Several common themes appeared throughout the fieldwork and research. First, there is clearly a pressing need for communication of spiritual truth through music and the arts. Due to the extremely low literacy rate, oral transmission is the most effective and practical way to communicate information. Music and the arts are proven to be powerful tools both in communicating truth and remembering it. In this area of the Middle East, there are already a great variety of cultural and social customs that are capable of being “redeemed” and rebranded as Christian practices. Therefore, instead of importing Christian truth from a foreign basis, music and the arts assist in infusing truth into already existing rituals.

Secondly, there are evident commonalities in the arts between interreligious groups. Several types of music are enjoyed in Muslim, Christian, secular, and other religious cultures. A historically Islamic worldview can make musical enjoyment difficult, but the country has drastically changed over the past few decades. With the growing force of globalization, modernization, and media influence, music is everywhere. The tribal village areas have experienced musical cultures that date back several centuries, but the cities have evolved and expanded musical tastes in more recent years. Due to secular, tribal, and Sufi Muslim influence, popular styles have been infused into the majority Muslim culture in a contagious surge of musical saturation. Each one of these indigenous music styles and art forms have the potential to be redeemed and utilized for communication of spiritual messages in a culturally acceptable way.

Thirdly, a clear problem that is seen across the nation is the use of Muslim artists in Christian worship. Whether in Christian recordings or live performances in churches, there is a battle between the common believers who desire to hear popular Muslim artists and the developing Christian community of worship artists who desperately need encouragement, education, and promotion in order to succeed in the vision for more excellent and God-honoring Christian worship. Possibilities include making a decision not to utilize Muslims in Christian worship at all due to Biblical reasons, or adopting a balanced method of using Muslim artists while still edifying the Christian community of worship artists. Furthermore, a differentiation could be made between the use of Muslim musicians in recording Christian tracks and in live worship leadership in Christian churches. Recordings are typically intended for entertainment for Christian listeners and outreach both to the Muslim community and Muslim musicians, while worship leadership is a separate and distinct context. This ethical issue must be dealt with in

every global culture, even in the West. Further study must be done to find an appropriate solution to the problem.

A fourth discovery that spans the entire national culture is the necessity of the use of the arts in identity formation. Referring back to the “Assumptions” section of chapter one, it was assumed that a relationship exists between how the arts are used in spiritual formation and how religious messages are communicated through the arts. The relationship between these two variables was thought to lead to responses to religious communication. Indeed, research has shown that there is a definite relationship between these elements. In a nation that carries a heritage of colonialist influence, intermittent militant turmoil, international stigma, and negative propaganda against the arts from religious fundamentalists, identity formation through the arts is absolutely and urgently necessary. Every religious group in the nation has demonstrated some kind of intimate relationship to music and the arts. Furthermore, this commonality applies to Christians in a specific way. The arts are an important component of Christian growth and reformation of identity in the process of the development of the newfound Christian faith of converts.

Finally, the fifth theme that spans across this Middle Eastern nation is that the arts are desperately needed to bring social change. There are many avenues from which to attempt social change in free nations, but most of these methods are useless in a fundamentalist culture. Political protests, public media propaganda, and public religious presentation are currently both legal and social impossibilities. In this nation, education through the arts is perhaps the more effective method of outreach. Christians, moderate Muslims, and other religious groups alike are interested in the growth of the arts as an acceptable medium of communication, expression, and education. A large portion of the indigenous people seems weary of the strict regulations against

the arts that have been imposed over the past few decades. As these people pursue a moderate, tolerant, and peaceable nation of the future, Christians have the opportunity to use the arts not only for social change but also for spiritual transformation.

Comparative Case Studies Analyses

The School of Worship and Music is a pioneering community of worshippers contributing greatly to the spiritual and practical formation of worship leaders as well as to an appreciation of the arts by the public in the Middle East. The incredible accomplishment of the School of Music and Worship as the second music school in the entire nation is impressive. The school uses effective means of training worship leaders, children, and parents in a quest to spread the Christian faith to both nominal and devoted Christians. The SWM has also been given groundbreaking opportunities to build relationships with Sufi Muslims through common appreciation of the Psalms.

The Creative Center has also proved itself to be an innovative organization that deeply understands and values critical contextualization of the arts in Christian mission. Through the Village Outreach Ministry, Bible translation, songwriting, and audiovisual materials, the CC continues to work with some of the most forgotten village people on the earth. The Creative Center has done an incredible job of discovering and learning traditional art forms and redeeming them with new Christian meaning. As Scripture has been infused into already existing cultural rituals, many villagers have become agents of change within their own communities. Hopefully the Creative Center will be able to extend its principles in order to implement its vision in other unreached areas in the future.

Both case studies have successfully contextualized the arts for use in Christian outreach, but from different angles and to different audiences. The School of Worship and Music has taken

the approach of educating the local Christian community, seeking to disciple the already existing leaders and families. The Creative Center staff has spent their time working with individuals who have no access to the Gospel and working directly with those of other faiths. Both of these tasks are noble and necessary. Hopefully, the future will hold a combination of both types of efforts, where believers are discipled within a missional culture. This nation presents unique problems to work around, making it exceptionally challenging not only to share religious beliefs but also to live it out day by day. The School of Worship and Music and the Creative Center could be used as models for others to take into consideration. Their methods could prove to be successful in all areas of this nation and likely in those Middle Eastern nations surrounding it as well.

Recommendations

In order to accomplish the daunting task of outreach in this creative access country, Christians must pursue several intentional steps. First, artistic believers must take it upon themselves to become determined learners of national art cultures rooted in the secular, Muslim, and other religious traditions. Instead of importing a foreign Christian worship style from the West, local leaders must continue to think of and pray for creative ways to redeem the already existing arts forms. This will require several steps. Well-informed leaders must educate the general Christian population about the need for such a practice. These leaders will also need to train Christian artists in order to prepare them to carry out this important ministry. Mentorship relationships must be built with secular, Muslim, and other religious artists to learn from their work. Gatherings of people who respect the arts must be sought after in order to present the arts in their newly “redeemed” form to share the message of Christianity. Ultimately, Christian artists must pursue excellence both in their craft as well as in their understanding of Scripture so that the two can be combined together in the most appropriate and effective way.

Secondly, the vast numbers of nominal “Christians” in this nation suggest that re-outreach must be a highly prioritized focus of the national church. Several church leaders estimated that only one-fourth of the Christian community actually believes and follows the Christian faith. Efforts of re-outreach dating back to the 1800s, when whole tribes numbering millions of people nominally converted simultaneously, must be continued. This is perhaps the easiest responsibility of the church because of the lesser family and community persecution that may come from decisions to follow Jesus. Furthermore, it is only illegal in this nation to convert from Islam to Christianity, but mostly legal to remain within the declared faith that one holds. The reported numbers of Christians in the country is quite misleading when considering how many nominal Christians there may be, so this task of bringing the light of Jesus to local churches will still be a challenging one.

A third recommendation has appeared out of the lack of work with the largest demographic in the country. Sunni Muslims comprise the vast majority of the nation, but no significant work of outreach through the arts has been attempted with them to date. The Creative Center has recently recorded one Christian album in the primary language of this sect. This group is the most difficult in the country to work with, because extreme fundamentalists who believe that the arts are sinful make up part of this group. With this taken into account, it should also be noted that it was unanimously held to be true in all conducted interviews that the majority of Sunni Muslims in this nation do appreciate the arts, and at the very least do participate in some form of chant involving scripture. Several of the Muslims participating in the catalytic Music and Arts School are Sunni. More research must be done in order to find the best avenue of arts to redeem for the sake of the Sunnis in this nation.

Fourthly, other artistic expressions might be explored for possible use in outreach. One organization in middle segment of the country has very recently launched a quilt project. The goal of this ministry is to provide a musical evangelistic and teaching tool for the women to use as they quilt with their neighbors. Many villages contain beautifully quilted pillowcases containing religious symbols made by tribal villagers of various spiritual traditions. Christians could certainly learn such customs and utilize them in outreach if further research is commenced. Several of the locals gave reports of a man in the northern part of the country with a radio and television outreach, but it would be difficult to gauge its effectiveness.⁸⁰ Christian literature is one of the most lacking tools for outreach and discipleship in the nation today, and in particular, literature that deals with Christians worship and the use of the arts.

Finally, many Christians must engage others in conversations involving more personal, relational outreach that is able to take place over time. Outreach through mass media, live group presentations, and other public options are valuable and have proved to bring some unbelievers to faith; however, the depth involved with personal relationships is always more likely to bring about true conversions and disciples that understand the incarnational nature of Christianity. Just as Jesus came to earth and lived among men and women, we are charged with the responsibility of making disciples of all nations. The implication of this task is that there must be some sort of personal interchange that occurs on a relational level. In a nation like this, counting the cost is not ambiguous nor a light matter. Persecution will certainly continue to lead to rising martyrdom, hate crimes, and uncomfortable living situations just like those observed over past decades and even centuries. Christians must contextualize all outreach efforts through the arts both at the cultural and personal level as an incarnational Christianity is lived out through the church.

⁸⁰“Nafisa”, interview by author, Virginia, United States, March 2013.

As respect for the arts in this Middle Eastern nation progresses, social reform should follow shortly thereafter. Worldwide, the arts are a vital component of identity formation and social reform. The arts allow for expression, whether in the sorrowful songs of displaced rural farmers in urbanized Cuban cities, polyrhythmic rituals of African Pygmies, quiet hymns of underground Chinese churches, or praise songs of Paul and Barnabas in prison in Philippi. All over the world, Christians now have the chance to capitalize on this movement with a mission to redeem indigenous art forms. Doing so will not only encourage and edify Christian communities but will bridge interreligious gaps and share the message of Christianity with the other religious groups in the nation.

APPENDIX A – IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 11, 2012

IRB Approval 1370.071112: Arts Outreach in the Middle East

Dear _____,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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APPENDIX B – PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Arts Outreach in the Middle East

Video Interviews

Matthias Clark

Liberty University

Ethnomusicology

You are invited to be in a research study of arts outreach in the Middle East. You were selected as a possible participant because you are affiliated with such activities or are friends with someone who is. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by: Matthias Clark, Department of Ethnomusicology at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to identify all current methods of arts outreach in this nation and determine how the arts are being used for communication of religious values.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Answer questions as best as possible about the topic while being video interviewed for about ten minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks: First, you may experience psychological distress upon thinking about the risks of being a Christ-follower in a persecuting culture. Second, the risk is only that which already occurs through daily life as an active Christian in this nation.

The benefits to participation are: Aiding the global progress of the Great Commission given by Christ by adding to the body of research about the effectiveness of outreach efforts.

Compensation:

You will not receive any form of financial compensation, but will receive updates about the research progress.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All names will be changed unless otherwise discussed prior to publishing any information. Data will be stored in a locked

safe owned by the principal investigator. Videos may be used for teaching purposes if the participant gives permission.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, the “School of Worship and Music”, or the “Creative Center”. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Matthias Clark. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact his advisor, Dr. John Benham, who can be contacted at jlbenham@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I consent to being videotaped.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Witness: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1370.071112

IRB Expiration Date: July 11, 2013

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