They Retain Their Beauty: Christianity and Local Cultures in the Global Era*

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The article examines a variety of local cultures in their relationship with modern Christianity as a global institution. The review summarizes three case studies conducted by the author in Israel and Canada over the past decade. These studies, reviewed in the article through various lenses and considered as three different sociocultural narratives, tell the reader how music, consciously or unconsciously, determines the contours of the cultural and religious identity of the groups whose members are natives or resettled residents of the Holy Land, Old and New Worlds, China and Australia. An updated analysis of ethnographic data points to local cultures as the true indicators of global change.

Keywords: local cultures, globalization, church music, national identity, religious identity

While globalization as a geo-political and sociocultural process has recently been understood as “the emergence and slow consolidation of European and American hegemony across the planet over half a millennium” (Stokes, 2008, pp. 5-6), the response of local cultures to this process has evolved as a research topic from about 1990s onward (cf. Slobin, 1993; Appadurai, 1996; Stokes, 2004; Zahra, 2016). The current review, which is a summary of the author’s contribution to this subject up to the present, aims to address local cultures of the modern era through the lens of their relationship to public bodies associated with global processes. Christianity and its institutions will be regarded as such a framework within which local music, customs, and practices are addressed using various points of reference.

During the past decade, the author conducted three ethnographic studies on the music of contemporary Anglican and Maronite communities located in the Galilee (Northern Israel) and Greater Vancouver (British Columbia, Canada).1 The study included the collection and processing of a significant amount of ethnographic materials: audio recordings, hymnbooks, and interviews with officials and community members. The scope of each specific project has included different parts of ethnography as the primary database for a particular study, whereas “extraneous” material for comparison has been included as needed. Thus, hymnbooks of the Anglican projects in two different locations provided additional information about the local cultures outside the places in

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1 See Rosenblatt, 2014; 2018; forthcoming.
which the research was conducted. The Maronite project in the Galilee included sound recordings previously made by other ethnographers, as well as online information about this culture, as presented today in the West.

Each of the three studies has identified distinctive features of the local cultures associated with their original or new location (in the case of relocated communities). Each study offers different sociocultural narratives, telling the reader how important music is in the formation of the ethnic/national and religious group identity of people who are natives or resettled residents of the Holy Land, Old and New Worlds, China and Australia. The revised examination of the three studies shows the importance of local musical cultures as indicators of the communal interpretation of such different phenomena and categories as what may be called “subaltern identities”, “sonic tolerance”, and “global change”. Three sections below present these narratives, each of which is connected to a relevant study, with appropriate cross-references.

Indices of Subaltern Identities

Emil is a member of the Arab-Anglican community of Haifa, Israel. He is an engineer who studied in Germany in the 1970s, as well as a devoted Christian who attends Mass every Sunday. According to Emil, people in the West have a rather vague idea of the Christian communities in Israel, and they cannot even imagine that the Arab-speaking community of Haifa includes thousands of Christians who belong to various churches located in the city. While studying in Germany, when asked where he came from, Emil answered, usually repeating the following formula: “I am Israeli”. “Are you Jew?”—“No, I am Arab”. “Are there Arabs in Israel? Are you Muslim?”—“No, I am Christian”. “Are there Christians among Arabs? Are you Orthodox?”—“No, I am Anglican”. The assumption that the Arab-Anglican identity (or, more precisely, the Israeli Arab-Anglican identity) is the “final core” for the self-determination of this group will be a mistake. Seven Arab-Anglican churches located in the Galilee and central Israel belong, like everywhere else, to four major divisions of the modern Anglican Church, where one cleric can say of another, “he is another faith”. So, what actually unites people from different wings of the local Anglican Church? The field study has shown that such a means, or a medium, is nothing but music.

On the one hand, traditional missionary hymnody accompanied by the organ is a common musical experience of Anglicans in Israel. Many respondents stress the importance of this traditional part of the church ministry, including Samuel, an amateur organist who joined the Anglican community of Haifa (and became an organist for Sunday services there) after the revolutionary changes in the musical policy of the Pentecostal church to which he originally belonged. Contemporary Christian songs in Arabic are an additional “musical bridge” for uniting local Anglicans of different doctrinal affiliations within the Church. On the other hand, the tunes borrowed from various local churches and adopted by the local Anglicans over the past decades define the doctrinal distinctions through music. Several such tunes have become a kind of liturgical codes, thus using a local motive to indicate the originally Western divide. Local tunes may possess additional functions in a dialogue between the Churches. Thus, Orthodox-like reciting during Anglican sermon is aimed at highlighting

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2 The Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem dates back to the early 1840s when the joint Anglo-Lutheran Bishopric was established and the first regional Anglican church—Christ church near the Jaffa gate in the old city of Jerusalem—was built. St. John’s Anglican church in Haifa was built in the late 1890s (Perry, 2003).

3 Interview with Emil Daher, April 22, 2007.

4 This was literally the answer of a priest, whom the author asked about the doctrinal stance of another cleric.

5 Interview with Samuel Sabbah, April 22, 2007.
differences in approach to the same subject between the two denominations. The music of the modern Arab-Anglican churches in Israel is a symbolic example of the intersection between West and East in religious music. It should be borne in mind that the practices of the local Anglican churches are conducted within a post-missionary framework. Such practices must demonstrate a delicate balance between the preservation of the musical and textual legacy of the Mother Church (following its development over time) and the local culture. It is also worth mentioning that these practices are formed in a rather unique geopolitical situation: the Holy Land and the Jewish nation-state. Navigating between global and local church practices creates certain difficulties for the local Anglican clergy. Some clerics believe that the religious experience should be formed only in accordance with local culture, i.e., Arabic music and language.

The ongoing shift of subaltern identities (that is, the growing doctrinal divide and affiliation with a particular sub-division of the Church) intersects with an opposite trend—the ecumenical tendency—that is manifested in shared summer camps for teens, as well as family events for the wider community of Arabic-speaking Christians. Music still plays a vital role in such events, for it is played and performed by participants as a common emotional experience.

Sensitivity to indigenous customs and practices is also typical of the Anglican churches in British Columbia. Thus during the mass in Christ Church cathedral, Vancouver, the priest invites the audience to stand up and turn to the east (and then in other directions), explaining the meaning of such gestures in the historical beliefs of the indigenous parishioners. The tunes originating in Chinese and First Nations’ musical traditions are part of the Mass for Many Nations composed by Rupert Lang, an organist and choirmaster of the cathedral.

The traditional “healing circle” is maintained on a weekly base in a small parish of New Westminster (BC). The Anglican community of Greater Vancouver is, however, extremely diverse, for the traditional doctrinal divide has been multiplied here by the recent breakup caused by the clergy’s disagreement on a number of issues, primarily same-sex marriages and forms of worship and music. Yet the churches that recognize same-sex marriages have remained very conservative in matters of traditional service, and vice versa: in the breakaway parishes, where same-sex couples have not received the church’s blessing, both the clothing of the clergy and the music are in tune with the expectations of the younger members. The churches that have broken away do not use any of the hymnbooks issued by the official Anglican Church of Canada. Instead, they use different ones, most of which are published in Kenya or Rwanda whose Anglican communities support the rebels’ struggle for traditional values.

### Indices of Sonic Tolerance

This section will discuss four national hymnbooks (aka hymnals, that is, national collections of church hymns) released in the 1990s. The author collected these books in the course of two projects in Israel and Canada, since they are used by various Anglican communities in the Galilee, Jerusalem, and Greater Vancouver.

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6 Rev. Bilal Habibi explained this in an interview with the author, June 26, 2007.
7 Interview with Rev. Samuel Fanous, April 14, 2010.
8 Ibid.
9 The Chinese community is one of the largest Anglican congregations in Greater Vancouver—A.R.
10 All information regarding the Anglican churches in Vancouver was collected by the author in situ (in 2013) and later checked with clergy and parishioners of both wings of the breakup. For ethical reasons, the author will not give the names of people who shared opinions on contentious and painful issues with him.
In line with missionary work and the post-missionary reconfiguration of churches and local parishes, the non-dogmatic nature of the hymns has allowed the joint committees to abstain from doctrinal or theological differences between churches and create hymnbooks shared by several denominations and therefore perceived rather as national collections of church music\textsuperscript{11}.

The comparison of hymnbooks will be carried out with an emphasis on the representation of various musical cultures in each particular book. Since many of the national hymnbooks of the 1990s include musical material, some of which seemingly unrelated to the musical traditions of the target audience, the most likely reasons for going beyond the national/confessional borders in musical choices for these books will be discussed. This will serve as a kind of lens for examining the cultural content of group identity, namely the “religious” part of national identity and the “national” part of religious identity. The boundaries and indices of sonic tolerance, characteristic of a particular society, complement the range of issues discussed in the section. The following hymnbooks will be compared:

- Book of Spiritual Hymns (in Arabic). Nicosia: Zavallis Litho, 1990. (hereafter: The Arabic book)
- Common Praise. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998. (hereafter: The Canadian book)
- Hymns of Universal Praise. Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1996. (hereafter: The Chinese book)
- The New English Hymnal. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1994. (hereafter: The English book)\textsuperscript{12}

Attribution of the melodies appears in each of the above hymnals but follows slightly different terminology and methods of distinction. While the earliest melodies, whose origin is not completely clear, appear everywhere under the name “plainsong” or “Gregorian chant”, national melodies, in addition to the heading denoting nationality, usually receive an extension with further information, such as traditional, folk, hymn, or church melody. Although information about authors and sources is usually presented in different lists for texts and music, the Canadian book offers a unified index of authors and sources for both texts and music. Whatever the nuances in terminology and methods of indexation, the very tendency for accuracy in attribution points to the intention of the compilers to highlight the historical scale of a particular collection and its cultural diversity (or, conversely, cultural unity if one culture is represented in many varieties). Figure 1 is a comparative chart showing the total number of early tunes and folk melodies in each of the four hymnals discussed.

\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the Preface to The Hymnal Book (1971), a joint publication of the two Protestant churches, clearly states that “nothing in this Hymn Book is of any authority on matters relating to faith or doctrine in the Anglican Church of Canada or the United Church of Canada” (p. iv).

\textsuperscript{12} Complete bibliographic data for these four books, as well as other hymnbooks, quoted or mentioned in the article, may be found in the section “Hymnbooks”, after “References”.

As for the number of national cultures represented, the Chinese book occupies a leading position—32 geographical locations, for both traditional and sacred national melodies. The English book, with 64 plainsongs, contains only three traditional melodies representing cultures outside the UK. In the Canadian book, special attention is paid to the languages of the indigenous peoples of the country—12 of the 19 languages presented in the book.

What actually determines the musical choice for the hymnals? What are the reasons for this or that expansion of either historical scale or geographic scope, or both? In addition to the original value as the sole source for congregational singing, hymnbooks of the 1990s perform additional functions, such as the unification of an ethnic group or even a nation, especially when the self-identification of a group or person is based on the native language and cultural traditions rather than on the place of birth. Musical choice can also seem a kind of political gesture. For example, the inclusion of two folk melodies from Taiwan in the Chinese collection of hymns might sound like a musical reminder of the tragic pages in the relationship between the Republic of China and Taiwan. Another example of this kind is the aforementioned hymns representing the languages of the native inhabitants of Canada in the Canadian book. The openness of the editors of these two books to Hebrew and Byzantine (Orthodox) melodies testifies to the ecumenical tendency typical of post-missionary churches in the global era.

Yet openness to other cultures sometimes depends on sonic tolerance and its actual limits in a particular society. Sonic acceptance should not be taken for granted in societies whose audience has been formed in different musical systems, as in the West and the Middle East. While a Western-trained ear easily accommodates to the pentatonic scale characteristic of Southeast Asia, melodies based on a microtonic scale, such as the Arabic maqamat, can be perceived as uncomfortable for those who have not been familiar with them since childhood. The issue of sonic acceptance was perhaps on the agenda of Western missionaries in the Middle East. It should be explained that singing a church tune in a minor scale by the congregation of converted believers might have caused some discomfort to the missionary’s ear, since it would have been sung
in one of the traditional local scales with which the audience grew up. This was probably the main (if not the only) reason for choosing, almost exclusively, the major-scaled hymns for the early editions of the Arabic book: The major scale is quite close to one of the Middle-Eastern scales (namely, *ajam*), so there is no sonic conflict. Being a means of intercultural communication, national hymnbooks can thus serve as indicators of the cultural lability of the societies in which they were issued.

**Indices of Global Change**

The sounds of the closing melody melt into silence, and suddenly a conversation of a man and woman (in a car) is heard from the speakers: The extraneous recording wasn’t erased from the tape at the time of transferring the recording to the Sound Archive. The audio recordings of liturgical events in the Maronite churches in Israel, made in the 1960s and 1970s and kept in the Sound Archive of the National Library in Jerusalem, were considered the main source documenting the music of the Maronite service of that time. The author decided to make audio recordings of the “second round” on the same day of the church calendar (in a corresponding church) when an earlier recording was made. All the recordings of the “second round” were carried out in 2016-2017. The *Book of Offering, According to the Rite of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church—Music Book* (hereafter: The Maronite Book), released in 2012 by the Maronite Inter-Eparchial Music Commission, headed by four bishops living in the USA, Canada, and Australia, is another part of ethnography. This release, published online (www.maronitemusic.org), crowns many years of work in the translation of the Maronite heritage into English. It presents both traditional and modern music material in Western musical scales with suggested harmony. This event, comparable to the compilation of a collection of Gregorian chants in the early Middle Ages, indicated to the author that there was room for a fresh view of the Maronite tradition from both local and global perspectives.

The Maronite Church is one of the oldest Eastern churches and, at the same time, one of the largest communities of the Roman Catholic Church, which preserve the Eastern ritual. Historically, it is a unit of the Syro-Antiochene Church—the group of churches that originate in the early Christian school of Antioch (nowadays ruins near the city of Antakya, Turkey) where the second Christian church (after Jerusalem) was established and recognized. The name of the Maronite Church is associated with Saint Maron, a Syrian monk of the late fourth century, known for his desire to unveil the presence of God in everything. Since the seventh century, the Maronites have been identified with the mountains of Lebanon and later with the Lebanese state, whose president was always Maronite. The Maronites consider themselves descended from the Phoenicians who lived in what is now Syria and Lebanon. Although they were always considered Orthodox Christians in alliance with the Catholics, the final union with the Catholic Church (still with a significant degree of independence) occurred only in the 16th century. Maronites spoke Aramaic (aka Syriac) until the end of the 19th century. They find themselves quite close to Assyrians, who are believed to be descendants of the Mesopotamian peoples and whose religious affiliation refers to other units of the Syro-Antiochene Church, primarily Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean. Yet during the 20th century, the Maronites gradually moved into Arabic, including the language of worship. Today, most domestic Maronite congregations, both in Lebanon and

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13 Antioch was the city where Christians, according to the Bible, were so-called for the first time (Acts 11:26).
14 Saint Maron (Bulletin of the Maronite Catholic Church of California), 5 February 2017.
15 The letter of the Coalition of American Assyrians and Maronites (CAAM) to the Arab American Institute, http://www.aina.org/releases/caamletter.htm.
16 Ibid.
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in the Galilee, conduct the church service in Arabic, with the exception of the key words of the liturgy. Various sources indicate that the Maronite community in the Galilee dates back to the 18th century, while the emigration of the Maronites from the Middle East to the United States, and later to Canada and Australia, began as early as in the 1880s. Consistently preserving their own group identity at different levels of social consciousness and cultural context, Maronites have found themselves in demand in all aspects of American life, including political and professional, and in the world of entertainment (Beggiani, 2003).

The Maronite project of the author was aimed at examining the changes which occurred over half a century to local Maronite communities in the Galilee and to compare the local model of this culture with the global model of the same culture that in the meantime had moved to the West. As the project progressed, additional tasks appeared. One such task was editorial work: Early audio recordings stored in the National Sound Archive were of questionable quality in terms of integrity and content. It took time to study all the related recordings in order to compile the correct sequence of fragments, thereby restoring the timeline of a particular event. Another such task was the ethical duty to “return” edited historical recordings to representatives of the communities of origin. Indeed, five recordings made in the Maronite churches in the 1960s and 1970s, compiled and verified for integrity and authenticity, were handed over to the local Maronite congregations.

The study has shown that the music of the Maronite Church is directly connected to the legacy of Syriac church music, namely to the Syriac chant. In analogy with the Byzantine and the Gregorian modal system, Syriac (Orthodox) church music is also based on the eight modes. These modes, however, are microtone ones and, as such, serve as a bridge between the Arabic maqamat and Western tonality. The transformation of the Maronite heritage into the semitone scales, thereby rendering this legacy fully compatible with Western tonality, is a summary of the work carried out by the Inter-Eparchial Commission, responsible for issuing the Maronite Book. “[T]he chants retain their beauty using a tempered scale as well”, notes Fr. Geoffrey Abdallah (The Maronite Book, ii). Jeffery (1992) maintains that in the early Western Christian communities, there were different oral musical traditions that did not survive the unification of melodies and writing them down (i.e., melodies that became “Gregorian chants”—A.R.). In the case of the Maronite tradition, which is now represented in Western tonality, we know (and can compare and assess) the original sound of this ancient musical culture, which could not only adapt to a new time and place but also be of interest to people outside this culture.

Conclusion

The focus of the three case studies summarized in this essay was ritual, tradition, and music, all addressed as “text” representing local Christian cultures of the modern era. Reading this text against various backgrounds enabled the author to reveal the dynamics of ethno-religious identity and sociocultural changes experienced by various local Christian communities in recent decades. The place of “religious” in national identity and the place of “national” in religious identity were among the lenses through which the artifacts and events were examined. National hymnals were considered a documentary, reliable enough to outline the limits of national cultural tolerance. The ecumenical tendency and the continuing shift of subaltern identities were recognized as the hallmarks of local Christian communities in our day. Comparison of local and global models of the same tradition was a lens for studying patterns of global change.

17 Interview with Amir Khalloul-Risha, 30 April 2017.
Local cultures and their relations with global institutions do not stand still, but move in the stream of time, consonant with its signs: being able to reach any location in the planet within hours, communication with everybody via mobile phones or Internet social groups, etc. The language barrier is no longer an obstacle, since the Google translation services are universally available and useful. It seems that globalization takes a different dimension when the world community accepts useful innovations, but in the name of this, one should not abandon the culture of his or her ancestors.

Plato mentions the statement of his contemporary: “[W]hen modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them” (Plato, 2008, p. 93). Can we, however, assume that in the 21st century, a global order will give every local culture, including its music and religion, the opportunity of being installed in the treasury of world culture? Let’s hope.

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