

OF FATWAS AND PHONOGRAPHS: REMAPPING TECHNOLOGICAL MODERNITY ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD, C. 1899-1932

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ABSTRACT

Bridging methods of historical ethnomusicology and Indian Ocean history, this article weaves a global history of the phonograph by foregrounding cultural and legal circulations within Muslim Indian Ocean networks at the dawn of the twentieth century. Firstly, the article demonstrates how Muslim consumers and producers of musical entertainments and recitational practices operated within long-standing pilgrimage, trade, and literary networks between the Arabian Peninsula and Southeast Asia and, furthermore, how these networks facilitated the early global spread of the phonograph: a technology that gave rise to popular music industry and global media capitalism. Secondly, and in addition to referencing archival phonograph recordings, the article explores how the circulation of phonograph technologies, vocal recitational practices, and musical “instruments of amusement” were debated by Islamic jurists whose legal traditions occupied the same Indian Ocean cultural geography between Arabia and Southeast Asia. By focusing on *fatwas* published in Java by an Arab Hadhrami jurist named Sayyid ‘Uthman b. Yahya (1822-1914), the article complicates previous scholarly framings of fatwas on the phonograph as a clash between “Islam” and “Modernity” or “the West,” instead framing his fatwas as a response to the early phonograph industry’s success in catering to preexisting vernacular entertainment markets on Muslim networks of the IOW. Additionally, the article suggests that global media capitalism’s spread depended on and became intertwined with what Rajat Kanta Ray (1994) defined as “intermediate spheres” of capital outside the West, in this case long-standing markets for recitation and musical performance within maritime networks. Thus, the article contributes to scholarship that challenges Western exceptionalism in historical narratives of modernity pertaining to media, law, and economy, and to scholarship that understands the modern IOW as a global space shaped by many historical layers of technological globalization and cultural circulation.

INTRODUCTION

In 1915, *The Moslem World* published an English translation of a fatwa issued 1899 in Java by a Hadhrami legal scholar named Sayyid b. Uthman al-'Aqil al-'Alawi (1822-1914).¹ The fatwa (Figure 1), which stipulated that it is forbidden to use the phonograph for Quran recitation, was translated and published the following year as "Islam und phonograph" (1900) by the Dutch orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1822-1914).² Basing their translation on the German version, *The Moslem World's* editors framed the fatwa as follows:

The decision given in Java in regard to the phonograph is typical. In spite of all *Fetwas*, however, the phonograph and the cinematograph are overrunning the Moslem world everywhere, and for good or ill Islam must reckon with them as with Western civilization in general.³

In concluding remarks, the editors (mis)quoted Sayyid Uthman, stating that, regarding technological progress, he "quotes the familiar Moslem tradition: 'The most evil things are those that are newly invented. Every new invention is heresy, every heresy is error, and every error leads to hell-fire!'"⁴

By 1915, however, the fact that new media were "overrunning" the Muslim world was an outdated news flash, particularly for readers abreast with contemporary phonograph trade publications. Furthermore, *The Moslem World's* projection of a clash between Western modernity and Islam was merely just that. Sayyid Uthman had actually stipulated that the phonograph *did not* constitute technological progress and was nothing more than a mechanical toy. He also certainly didn't view the phonograph as an innovation of Western civilization threatening Islamdom. In fact, Sayyid Uthman actively supported the Dutch colonial state in Java as Honorary Advisor of Arab and Native Affairs. To him, the phonograph was an entertainment device that became embedded with existing recitational and musical practices that circulated on networks of Muslim pilgrimage between the Arabian Peninsula and

¹ Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, "Islam and the phonograph," *The Moslem World*, 5, 2 (1915), 159-65. Leiden University Libraries Special Collections (hereafter: LUL) shelfmark for original fatwa is Or. 8206 F 6 (1899).

² Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, "Islam und Phonograph," *Indische Taal-, Land- en Volken-kunde*, XLII (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1900), 393-427.

³ Hurgronje, "Islam and the phonograph," 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

Southeast Asia.

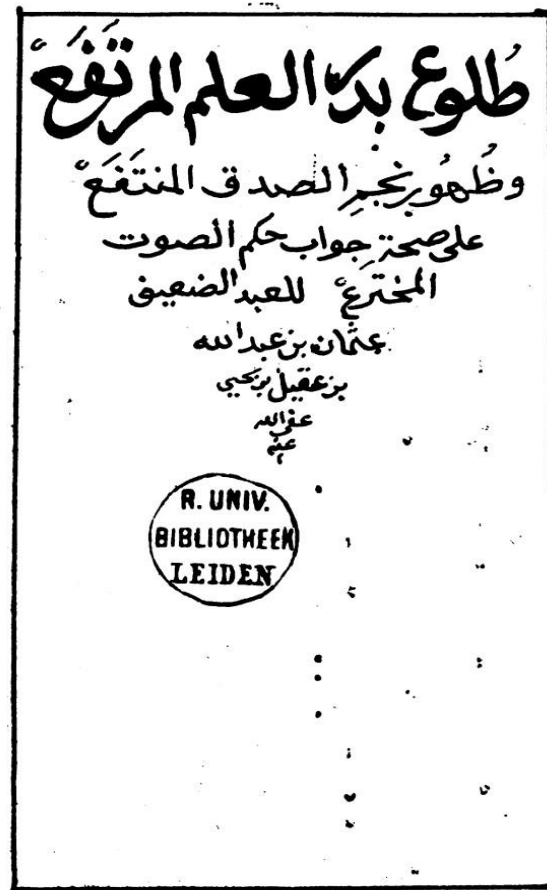


Figure 1. Sayyid Uthman's fatwa Rising of the Moon of Science (1899) about the phonograph, Or. 8206 F 6 (University of Leiden).

Nevertheless, colonial presumptions of Western exceptionalism and Muslim difference underpinning *The Moslem World's* article continue to be taken for granted in scholarship on Islam and media. Drawing on primary sources relating to legal, economic, and global history from roughly 1899 to 1932, this article disrupts this Eurocentric “West-to-East” or “North-to-South” grand narrative of technological modernity by remapping it across the Indian Ocean World (IOW) during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By reexamining Sayyid Uthman's phonograph fatwa (1899) in light of a much wider global circulation of legal practices, musical instruments, and new technologies between places like Mecca, Aden, Zanzibar, Bombay, and Jakarta (Batavia) – no less Cairo, London, and San Francisco, this article demonstrates that it was vernacular entertainment and

congregation that facilitated early consumption of the phonograph across the IOW. Additionally, this article's examination of early phonograph recordings and trade publications (c. 1906-1932) demonstrates that these IOW vernacular spheres comprised "intermediate" markets that the early phonograph industry used to expand global media capitalism. By demonstrating that the global phonograph debate among Islamic scholars was a direct result of early media entertainment firms capitalizing on popular Muslim customs and vernacular religion, the article outlines a multi-polar and contingent history of technological modernity throughout the IOW.

To date, there have been no studies that have used the IOW as a frame to study media history dating back to the late nineteenth century, and particularly early phonograph history. Among phonograph histories written about areas surrounding the Indian Ocean, the scope is almost exclusively nationalistic or regionalistic while operating within the area studies paradigm.⁵ While fatwas on the phonograph are a novel subject of interest in Islamic studies, the recent literature mostly takes the phonograph's synonymy with technological modernity for granted as a historical inevitability.⁶ As such, the literature does not go far enough in placing these fatwas within global historical context by thoroughly engaging literature on phonograph history and the history of technology.

⁵ Philip B. Yampolsky, "Music and media in the Dutch East Indies: Gramophone records and radio in the late colonial era, 1903-1942" (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2013); Suryadi, "The 'talking machine' comes to the Dutch East Indies: The arrival of Western media technology in Southeast Asia," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 162, 2/3 (2006), 269-305; Ali Jihad Racy, "The record industry and Egyptian traditional music," *Ethnomusicology*, 20, 1 (1976), 23-48; Gerry Farrell, "The early days of the gramophone industry in India: Historical, social, and musical perspectives," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 2 (1993), 31-53; Tan Sooi Beng, "Negotiating 'His Master's Voice': Gramophone music and cosmopolitan modernity in British Malaya in the 1930s and early 1940s," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 169, 4 (2013), 457-94; Anne E. Lucas, "The creation of Iranian music during the age of steam and print, circa 1880-1914," in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, eds. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 143-57; Gabriel Lavin, "Music in colonial Aden: Globalization, cultural politics, and the record industry in an Indian Ocean port city, c. 1937-1960," *The British-Yemeni Society Journal*, 29 (2021), 12-20; Ahmad AlSalhi, "The recordings of 'Abdullatif al-Kuwaiti: 1927-1947," in *Music in Arabia: Perspectives on heritage, mobility, and nation*, eds. Issa Boulos, Virginia Danielson, and Anne K. Rasmussen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021); Jean Lambert and Rafik al-Akouri, "Patrimonialisation 'sauvage' et archéologie industrielle de la musique yéménite: Les premiers enregistrements à Aden (1935-1960)," *Annales islamologiques*, 53 (2020).

⁶ Leor Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam's global reformation in the age of Rida, 1865-1935* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Nicola Melis, "The talking machine affair in Ottoman Yemen (1907)," in *Collectanea Islamica*, eds. Nicola Melis and Mauro Nobili (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2012), 107-51; Jan Just Witkam, "Written in wax: Quranic recitational phonography," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 138, 4 (2018), 73-113.

BEYOND TECHNO-TELEOLOGY

Historians have insightfully dispelled the notion that the phonograph was an instant historical watershed in the development of modern media.⁷ After Thomas Edison publicly revealed the technology in 1877, the phonograph trade took over half a century to transform into a successful industry. During the early twentieth century, phonograph firms had to undergo the difficult task of convincing consumers around the globe that they were, in fact, hearing *real* sounds, voices, and musical instruments on phonograph recordings.⁸ To assuage consumer complaints regarding poor fidelity at the turn of the century, phonograph companies established modern advertising and consumer culture, hawking their products in print publications and store fronts while allowing buyers to obtain phonographs through installment purchases.⁹ Thus, that the phonograph represented “modernity” and “technological progress” is a claim substantiated only by hindsight, and was hardly a universally accepted idea at the turn of the century.

If the phonograph was not a universal symbol of modernity, then it certainly wasn't a global trademark of Western civilization. No doubt, everyday technologies like phonographs, bicycles, sewing machines, and typewriters were largely manufactured in Europe and the United States during this time, and they were exported to a world whose global trade routes and economy were controlled primarily by European empires. Yet the commercial success of these commodities, especially phonographs, depended on a firm's ability to cater to the diverse tastes and markets of local populations around the world.¹⁰ This was done by hiring intermediaries who knew popular local singers, musicians, and, in the case of Muslim consumers, Quran and hymnal reciters.¹¹ As historian Andrew F. Jones

⁷ Amanda Weidman, “Guru and the gramophone: Fantasies of fidelity and modern technologies of the real,” *Public Culture*, 15, 3 (2003), 453-76; Emily Thompson, “Machines, music, and the quest for fidelity: Marketing the Edison phonograph in America, 1877-1925,” *Musical Quarterly*, 79, 1 (1995), 131-73; David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The commercial revolution in American music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing technology in the Edison era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁸ Thompson, “Machines, music”; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves*.

⁹ Suisman, *Selling Sounds*.

¹⁰ David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the making of India's modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Everyday machines in colonial Sri Lanka* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).

¹¹ Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio, *An International History of the Recording Industry* (London: Cassell, 1998); Pekka Gronow, “The record industry: The growth of a mass medium,” *Popular Music*, 3 (1983), 53-75.

poignantly noted, the idea that the global spread of media exemplifies the infiltration and or adoption of “Western” cultural objects is to merely reassert the worldview of imperialist historiography, whereby “machines slip unremarked into the domain of an implicitly racialized sense of culture” and technology “is a necessary attribute of Western civilization.”¹²

Despite these insights, the colonial techno-teleology that equivocates modernity with the West (or Global North) continues to inform scholarship on culture and media across fields, sometimes paradoxically dressed in a language of decoloniality and anti-imperialism. Emblematic is the presumption of a delayed moment of West-to-East technological transfer for media like the phonograph, radio, and television: a historical process whereby technologies of Western colonialism and capitalism overrunning the non-West are finally adopted and or decolonized by non-Western consumers.¹³ This transfer narrative feeds the ethnographic fascination underpinning anthropological studies of Muslims and media, which often reinforce the alterity of Islam or “the Muslim world” regardless whether that transfer is idealized as cultural resistance or adaptation.¹⁴ The ethnographic fixation on technological innovation and audio-visual media consumption as essentially matters of cultural difference, while nobly intended to understand unique “sound cultures” and media experiences, further reinforces the presumption that the West retains exceptional cultural qualities that made it the sole bequeatherest of technological modernity.¹⁵ Sustaining this Eurocentrism is the canon of modern social theory which, historically cultivated to explicate Western exceptionalism, typically foregrounds the West as the primary agent of modernity and economic history,

¹² Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media culture and colonial modernity in the Chinese jazz age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 11.

¹³ Yasmin Moll, “The idea of Islamic media: The Qur’an and the decolonization of mass communication,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 52, 4 (2020), 623-42; Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The audio politics of a world musical revolution* (London: Verso, 2015); Goran Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media: Historical and contemporary debates* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Patrick Eisenlohr, *Sounding Islam: Voice, media, and atmospheres in the Indian Ocean world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018). For historical critique of the essentialist notion of “the Muslim World,” see Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A global intellectual history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Jonathan J. Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes, “Introduction: Remapping sound studies in the global south,” in *Remapping Sound Studies*, eds. Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

including the history of media markets.¹⁶

As this article demonstrates, there is no historical evidence that Muslims consumers had comparatively delayed interactions with new media during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consumers outside Europe and North America were eager phonograph consumers from the get go, and they amounted to vast and indispensable markets that fueled and sustained the global genesis of modern media capitalism. Afterall, it would have been impossible for the world's first technological media industry to globally expand without culturally appealing to and financially interceding with markets beyond "the West." If the phonograph had its naysayers like Sayyid Uthman, then it was because, like observers everywhere, they were unimpressed by the new technology. Indeed, this was the principal existential challenge facing early phonograph firms trying to popularize their commodities around the globe during this time.

"INTERMEDIATE SPHERES" AND GLOBAL MEDIA CAPITALISM

Columbia Records (e. 1889) is one of the most significant recording firms in modern American music. Its catalogue retains household artists from Frank Sinatra to Beyonce, loved by billions of consumers worldwide and responsible for Columbia's astronomical profits accrued over the decades.¹⁷ All but forgotten, however, is the Arab nobleman living in Java who helped Columbia expand its business outside the United States at the dawn of the twentieth century: Sheikh Abdullah bin Saleh bin Moetlik, who was hired as an overseas agent by The Columbia Phonograph Company's San Francisco office in early 1911.

Because of Sheikh Abdullah's importance to Columbia, he received a spotlight in the world's first modern trade publication, *The Talking Machine World*, including the rare privilege of a photograph (Figure 2).

Sech [sic.] Abdullah is an Arab of high power and standing in his community, being the recognized chief, or official head of the community, and so recognized by his government. He is a man of large

¹⁶ This is something discussed by historian Robert B. Marks in *The Origins of the Modern World: A global environmental narrative from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century*, 4th ed. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 1-18.

¹⁷ Sean Wilentz, *360 Sound: The Columbia Records story* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2012).

means and many interests, and does a widespread business throughout the islands of the Indian Archipelago, in native lines. He is a “Hadji,” or one who has made the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, and, as such, wields great influence among native men of business in this section of the world, who are largely of this high caste. In addition to being one of the largest native operators in “piece goods” and a number of kindred lines, he is an extensive dealer in precious stones, and is generally recognized as one of the shrewdest and most capable businessmen in his class, which is noted for its men of capacity in that line. He bears a most enviable reputation for fair dealing and big heartedness, and is a most public-spirited patron of all enterprises calculated to contribute to the success and well-being of his people.

The contract with Sech Abdullah involves the manufacture of a large list of Malay, Indian, and Arab records of wide scope, and many thousands of dollars’ worth of machines and other Columbia product, and calls for the fitting out of a special record-making expedition which will cover fields never before penetrated. [. . .] no effort or expense is to be spared in the securing of the very best native talent and the finest list of selections yet made [. . .]¹⁸

Although indicating little else about his life, the report makes clear that Sheikh Abdullah was an experienced businessman in the textile trade and other regional product lines, and was therefore ideally positioned to help Columbia exploit the potential of “native” markets by overseeing music recorded for Arab, Indian, and Malay audiences. An archival sample of Columbia recordings produced by Sheikh Abdullah is housed in the private archive of ethnomusicologist Dr. Ahmad Al Salhi. They feature song and music specific to the Hejaz region of Western Arabia in addition to one example of a “Koweiti” (Kuwaiti) song from the Gulf. These were recorded by an anonymous singer who is playing an Arabian plucked-lute instrument called the *gambus* or *qanbus*, which was historically prominent in Arab-derived musical traditions throughout the IOW.¹⁹ Recorded in Surabaya and then later pressed in New York City for export back to Southeast Asia, these Columbia discs are

¹⁸ “Columbia goods in the Far East,” *The Talking Machine World*, 15 Jun. 1911, 30.

¹⁹ Larry Francis Hilarian, “The structure and development of the gambus (Malay-lutes),” *Galpin Society Journal*, 58 (2005), 66-82. I conducted research in Dr. AlSalhi’s private archive during winter 2020.

some of the earliest examples of recorded music from the Hejaz and wider Arabian Peninsula (Figure 3). Tellingly, *The Talking Machine World*'s spotlight emphasized the importance of Sheikh Abdullah's Muslim identity to his regional economic success, and that his capacity as a leading Arab businessman, no less an overseas agent for The Columbia Phonograph Company, was strengthened by his links to Mecca via the Hajj.

While scholars of the early-twentieth century phonograph business have long acknowledged the central role of local intermediaries in expanding the industry's global market, "Hadji" Sheikh Abdullah's affiliation with Columbia opens a window to explore this process as it unfolded with movements of people, musical instruments, and song spanning Muslim networks of trade and pilgrimage across the IOW. It also provides an opportunity, yet to be taken in phonograph scholarship, to resolutely move beyond techno-teleology and understand this interface between early media capitalism and IOW networks according to the insights of global economic history.

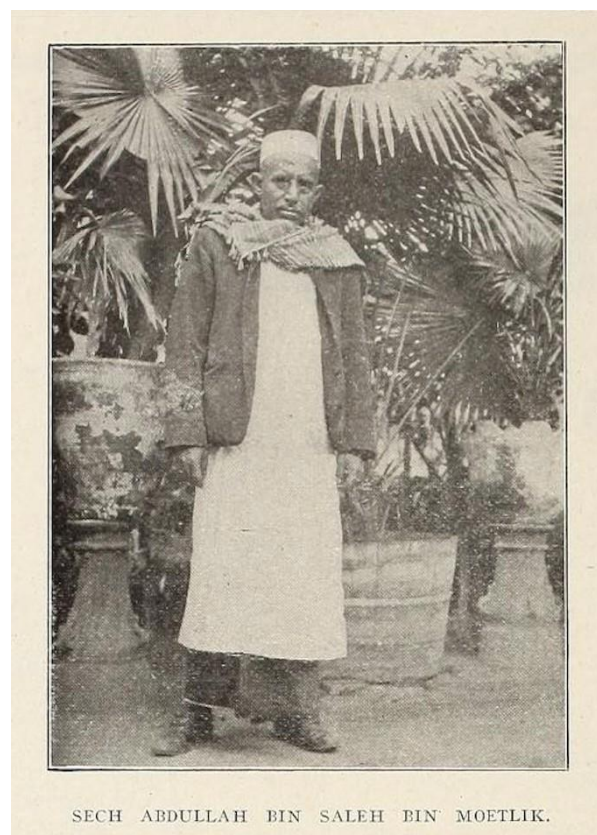


Figure 2. Sheikh Abdullah in *The Talking Machine World* (1911).



Figure 3. Columbia “Arabian Soerabaja” releases (c. 1911). Courtesy of Dr. Ahmad AlSalhi.

Although capitalism has long been pronounced as a totem of Western exceptionalism, the renowned economic historian Rajat Kanta Ray (1994) demonstrated that the so-called “bazaar economy” of colonial India was actually an indigenous money market driven by non-European capitalists.²⁰ Furthermore, he demonstrated how this “intermediate” economic sphere enabled the expansion of global Euro-American finance during this time. Ray’s insights have inspired over three decades of historical research that continues to provincialize Europe and the West in global economic history. Commercial historians researching trade in products like tobacco, cotton, oil, and other commodities in Japan and China have demonstrated the essential role of indigenous intermediaries and capitalists who expanded markets for European and American firms.²¹ Scholarship on Hadhrami, Gujarati, Gulf Arab, and other historic Muslim socio-economic networks of the IOW throughout the early-modern and modern periods has further highlighted these historic economic intersections and their essential importance to the development of the global economy during late colonialism.²² Even more, historians have

²⁰ Rajat Kanta Ray, “Asian capital in the age of European domination: The rise of the bazaar, 1800-1914,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 29, 3 (1995), 449-554.

²¹ Sherman Gilbert Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks: Western, Japanese, and Chinese corporations in China, 1880-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²² Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Michael O’Sullivan, *No Birds of Passage: A history of Gujarati Muslim business communities, 1800-1975* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023); Fahad Ahmad Bishara, *Monsoon Voyagers: An Indian Ocean history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2025).

demonstrated that many of the cultural traits often thought unique to the West for fostering capitalism developed independently elsewhere, or were compatible and adopted in tandem with preexisting economies and customs.²³

For the early phonograph trade, this economic intermediacy hinged on the technology's ability to have cultural relevance to consumers outside Europe and the United States. Expanding phonograph markets to Africa and Asia demanded a catalogue of recorded content that reflected the diverse tastes of consumers throughout those continents.²⁴ As such, the role of intermediaries like Sheikh Abdullah was both economic and cultural. He knew there would be a market for Arabian music in Java because there was an existing market fueled by the cultural import of these musical practices, which were connected to other forms of popular consumption involving sung poetry, Quran recitation, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. While the founder of modern sound studies, Jonathan Sterne (2003), proposed that the phonograph's early appeal marked a uniquely capitalist, colonial, and culturally Western turn to individual consumption, historical evidence suggests that early phonograph markets around the globe were driven more so by collective consumption: reflected by the technology's use in arcades, coffee shops, tea houses, taverns, classrooms, urban streets, public transportation (ships, trains, etc), and religious congregation. This socio-economic flexibility was intertwined with the phonograph's physical transportability as a mechanical hand-crank device that did not require electricity. For the "intermediate" spheres of consumption examined in this article, a delicate line between collective entertainment and sacred ritual often characterized social gatherings and money exchanges surrounding gambus music and Quran recitations, which later became consumed and monetized as phonograph recordings. The public-facing and communal character of this "intermediate sphere" of cultural and economic inertia was the reason Sayyid Uthman was suspicious of the phonograph: a technology he associated, not with Western individualism and modernity, but with spendthrifts and impious Muslim congregations.

In 1906, *The Talking Machine World* revealed that Muslims were an important consumer base to the global expansion of the early phonograph trade. As the American president of the International Talking Machine Company, F. M. Prescott, stated in an interview published that year:

²³ Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*.

²⁴ Gronow, "The record industry."

In Egypt I paid an Arab 40,000 francs (\$8,000) to sing 40 songs—\$200 a piece. We sell quantities of records in Egypt, Arabia, Turkey, and Asiatic territory, and the Moslems are zealous worshippers, so that records and extracts of the Koran and of their hymns and holy pieces sell freely. Sheet music is unknown in these countries, hence the talking machine is therefore regarded with much fervor.²⁵

That same year in Singapore, the Odeon label of Prescott's Company produced a number of Arabic-and Malay-language gambus recordings, labeled as "Hejazi" in Arabic and Jawi script on the record labels. In addition to Odeon and Columbia, other international firms operating in Southeast Asia during the early 1900s recorded gambus and other Hejazi and Yemeni musical genres, including England's Gramophone Company and His Master's Voice as well as the German Lyrophone Company and the Dutch Anker Company (Figure 4). As phonograph scholar and historian Philip Yampolsky (2013) has noted, such recordings were associated with those firms' Southeast Asian Muslim markets that demanded recordings of Quran recitations, the call to prayer, and *mawlid* hymns and incantations recited on the Prophet's birthday. Many of these Islamic recordings were also intended for educational purposes, so that Muslims could learn to recite the call to prayer as it was in Mecca or Medina, or learn to recite the Quran or Sufi hymnal with proper Arabic pronunciation. As F. M. Prescott indicated in the above statement, long-standing orally transmitted Islamic recitational traditions were a boon to the early phonograph business.

²⁵ "Prescott's interesting views," *The Talking Machine World*, 15 Dec. 1906, 21.



Figure 4. Hejazi *gambus* record (left) and Hadhrami “gatni” dance recording (right) produced by Odeon and Anker. Courtesy of Dr. Ahmad AlSalhi.

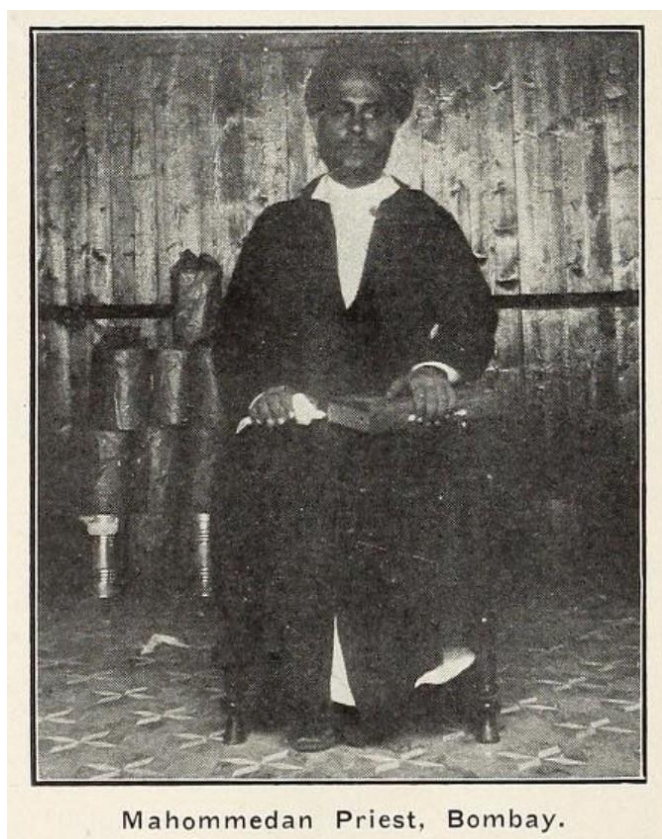


Figure 5. Imam in Bombay pictured in *The Talking Machine World* (May 1913), which reported that he recorded several passages from the Quran for the French *Pathe* company.

Later in 1913, *The Talking Machine World* relayed a report by the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, “on the foreign musical instrument trade of the United States, relating directly to talking machines and records.” It singled out Muslim phonograph consumers in the historic Indian Ocean port of Zanzibar as a potential market that could be more efficiently exploited by American firms to compete with European firms. In Zanzibar,

There is a growing demand among the Indians, Arabs, and Swahilis who made up the bulk of the population in this consular district, for talking machines of various kinds, and the two classes first named have also the ability to buy. Songs and readings from the Koran are eagerly listened to by the Arabs. The coffee houses frequented by the mixed native population use the cheaper grades of phonographs with outside horns, while those with concealed horns are to be found in the private dwellings. At present the cheap machines for which there is the principal demand are being imported from Germany and a much better grade from Great Britain.²⁶

Four years later in 1917, *The Talking Machine World* relayed a more detailed report issued by the American consulate at Aden, which stated that the Indian Ocean port would be an ideal place to expand American phonograph sales. The report claimed that the native Arab population of Aden were the most reliable phonograph customers, and that phonograph technologies there—ranging from cheaper and smaller portable machines to more expensive “cabinets” or “boxes”—cost anywhere from \$8 to \$37. Revealing Aden’s connections to a wider geography of media circulation between South Asia and the Middle East, the report noted that phonographs for sale in Aden were supplied by the local agent of a Calcutta firm while Arabic-language records were imported by local retailers from Egypt.²⁷ The report suggested that, if American firms expanded the Arabic-language sector of Aden’s market, the port city could serve as an access point to a regional market of over 15,000,000 potential customers throughout Arabia and North Africa.²⁸

A fatwa about the talking machine published in Jeddah (1911) by the head

²⁶ “Foreign trade in talking machines and records,” *The Talking Machine World*, 15 Jan. 1913, 51.

²⁷ Also see Lavin, “Music in colonial Aden,” 12-20.

²⁸ “Talking machines in Arabia,” *The Talking Machine World*, 15 Mar. 1917, 114.

Maliki jurisconsultant (*mufti*) at Mecca, Muhammad Ali al-Maliki, provides valuable insight into the Arabian Peninsula's early phonograph market beyond official trade reports, including price information, different models of phonographs, and how phonographs were consumed in the Hejaz at the dawn of the twentieth century. He observed that phonograph consumers (both men and women) would host gatherings and stay up late listening to recordings of Egyptian and Yemeni songs in addition to Quran recitations, often in conjunction with live performances by singers playing musical instruments. Some phonograph owners would pay musicians to record songs or, conversely, rent their phonograph to singers to make their own recordings. Al-Maliki also noted that people could spend as much as two-hundred guineas buying a new phonograph, and that there were phonographs of varying design and quality that elicited different levels of enjoyment from listeners, including one notable machine he observed on public display in the streets of Mecca:

In Mecca, I've seen a phonograph [*sunduq*] whose sound was so loud you could hear it from eighty paces away. Its cylinders [*qawalib*] were large and could keep singing for nearly six minutes, and its belt was such that six cylinders could be placed on it to capture sound, and there are devices even more advanced than that.²⁹

Writing this observation in 1911 about a phonograph with a belt holding six cylinders, al-Maliki appears to have observed the Regina Hexaphone: an early coin-in-slot phonograph and predecessor to the modern jukebox, giving users the ability to select, play, and record any of the six cylinders loaded onto its belt.³⁰

It was not a coincidence that these reports coincided with the pre-War and wartime economic downturn in the United States, which caused a damaging lull in America's domestic phonograph trade. As such, and ostensibly in reference to the same Department of Commerce and Labor report, in 1912 one American newspaper reported that international record sales for Chinese popular music and recordings of the Quran bought by Muslim consumers were keeping the American phonograph business afloat during the domestic downturn.³¹ As this report and others here

²⁹ Muhammad Ali al-Maliki, *Kitab anwar al-shuruq fi ahkam al-sunduq* [Book of the illuminating sunrise on verdicts regarding the box (the phonograph)] (Jeddah: Matba'at al-islah al-ahliyya, 1911), 37.

³⁰ See "The Multiphone," Intertique: <https://www.intertique.com/MultiphoneID.html> [Accessed: 15 July 2026].

³¹ "American phonographs spread knowledge of the Koran," *The Ogden Standard* (Ogden, UT), 24 Dec., 10.

demonstrate, an “intermediate” economic and cultural nexus of IOW circulation helped boost global media capitalism, connecting Arab, Indian, Malay, Swahili and other consumers, agents, and businesses between places like Mecca, Aden, Zanzibar, Calcutta, and Surabaya. Because of the marketability of Quran recordings, Muslim consumers emerged as a major force in this global nexus: a fact wrangled into the service of phonograph advertising back in the United States where phonograph firms were having a difficult time due to the economic downturn and cultural biases against new media.

As such, it is important to acknowledge that widespread spiritual disillusionment and frustration with modern life and new technology was, like today, global at the dawn of the twentieth century. This sentiment is famously attested to in the American composer John Phillip Sousa’s article “The Menace of Mechanical Music” (1906), which lamented the financial and ethical risks of phonograph automation. Frustrations surrounding urban noise pollution, public morality, and poor fidelity also played into negative views of the phonograph, an “instrument of Satan” as one Canadian observer characterized it in 1902:

Truly one man’s meat is another man’s poison, but heaven forgive the sinner who wakes such evil thoughts in the minds of his neighbors as the owner of that Gram-o-phone produces on these nights when the temperature alone is quite sufficient to remind us that there is a hell, without having to listen to the voices of the damned, tortured by the Devil in Hell!”³²

A poignant illustration of how such sentiment could intersect Western Islamophobia is an observation penned by a British intelligence officer who covertly entered Mecca disguised as a pilgrim in 1908, Arthur John Byng Wavell. In his travelogue (1913), he conveyed dismay at the popularity of the phonograph (gramophone) throughout the Islamic holy land while narrating his entry into the Hejaz on the Hejaz railway:

Next to us on the other side of the carriage were two Turks, father and

³² “An instrument of Satan: ‘Its master’s voice?’” *The Phonogram* (1901), 25. Also see Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural acoustics and the culture of listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) and Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The phonograph and the shaping of modern African American religion* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

son, whose only luggage appeared to consist of a gramophone. This ubiquitous instrument is very popular in the Hedjaz [sic.], and many Arabic records for it are now to be obtained—among them even passages of the Koran! I have never lost an opportunity to point out the impropriety of this, having always entertained a strong objection to this invention of the Evil One.³³

While his comment about the phonograph as an “invention of the Evil One” (the Devil) is emblematic of global anxieties about new media, it is also an acute historical reminder that the phonograph had become popularized among Muslim consumers throughout the Hejaz before moral and ethical concerns surrounding it had been resolved in the United States and Europe.

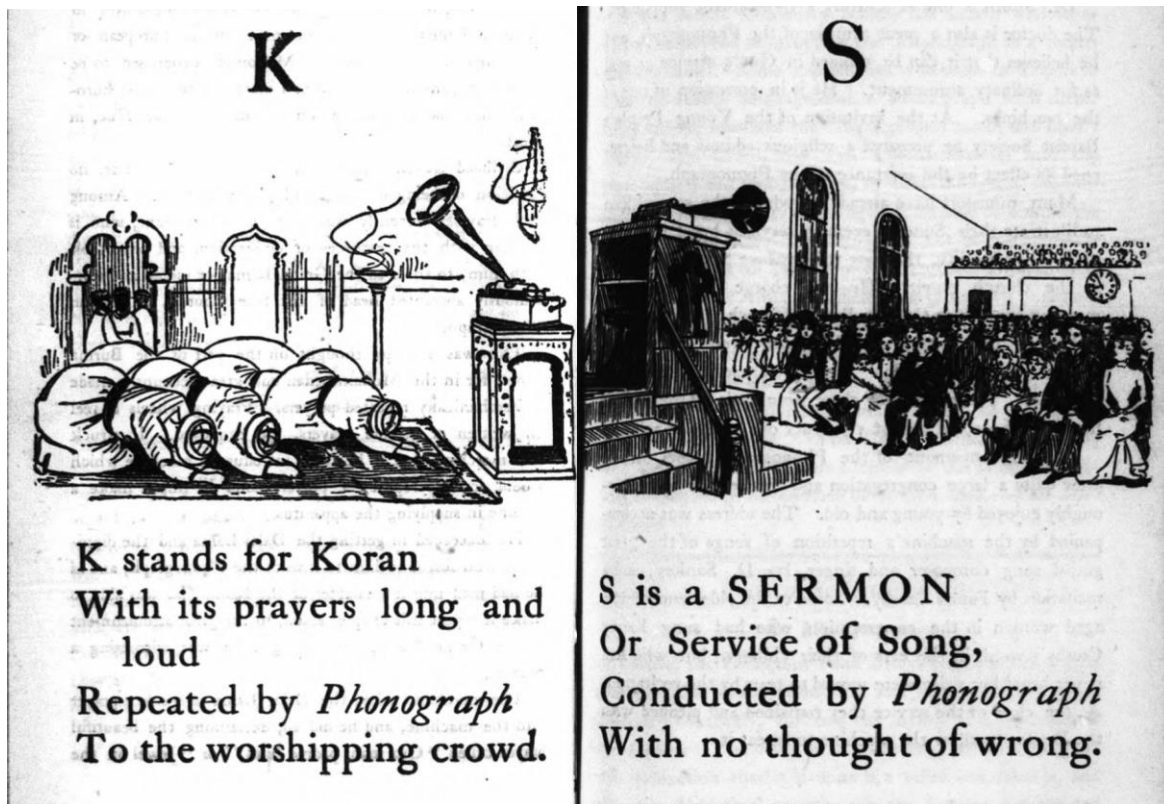


Figure 6. Doggerals and caricatures presenting the phonograph in contexts of Muslim (October 1900) and Christian (May 1901) worship, *The Phonogram* (New York: the National Phonograph Company).

³³ A. J. B. Wavell, *A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca and a Siege in Sanaa* (London: Constable & Co., 1913), 55.

If people like Wavell were raising moral suspicion about the phonograph, then *The Talking Machine World* was delighted to report in 1906 that a leading Muslim authority issued a fatwa that approved the phonograph's use for Quran recitation:

Sheikh Mohamed Bakhit el Mutei [sic.], one of the ulema of the University of Al Azhar, has just published two pamphlets on the subject of the phonograph and life insurance and their relation with the Sacred Law of Islam, according to a Cairo correspondent, says *The Times*. The learned Sheikh declares that there is nothing in Islamic doctrine to forbid Moslems to listen to the phonograph, and that, if the verses of the Koran are suitably intoned from the phonograph the listener may be justly considered to be performing an act of worship.³⁴

In a time when the American phonograph business was globally expanding while simultaneously facing a downturn in sales domestically, reports about potential foreign markets and stamps of approval by authorities like Sheikh Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti'i (1854-1935) provided a boost to industry morale in addition to useful trade information. If Muslims, including members of the ulema, were welcoming the phonograph abroad, then there was no reason investors shouldn't snub the naysayers and pitch their dollars to grow the industry back home.

ISLAMIC LAW AND “ENTERTAINMENT AND AMUSEMENT” ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD

This relatively short historical period (c. 1903-1914), whereby the production, dissemination, and audition of the holy Quran was partially displaced from the traditional professional networks of recitors, scribes, and printers to global media *entertainment* firms, was an unprecedented moment in Islamic history. As historian David Suisman (2009) has demonstrated, this was also a period when Euro-American music publishers, instrument manufacturers, and phonograph firms successfully propagated a universalized notion of “music” as a business strategy. The global reverberations of this were felt in Islamic law, wherein the totalizing term “music” became adopted into substantive law (*furu' al-fiqh*) as the legal category

³⁴ “Mahomedanism and the phonograph,” *The Talking Machine World*, 15 Jun. 1906, 27.

al-musiqā starting around the 1920s. Indeed, the concept *al-musiqā* is never mentioned in the historical sources of Islamic jurisprudence, *ḥadīth* and Quran, nor was it a category of dispute in substantive law until this time. In modern legal debate, this leaves little room but for highly interpretive and analogical arguments based on *ḥadīth*, Quran, and historic canonical precedent (hardly unified among differing sects and schools of law) regarding “idle talk” (*lahu al-ḥadīth*), “singing” (*ghinaʾ*), and “instruments of amusement” (*alat al-lahu*). The latter two categories were a.) never intended to implicate the modern totalizing definition of music and b.) are culturally and historically relative concepts that, in fatwas examined for this research, were considered under al-Ghazali’s rubric of “amusement and entertainment” (*al-laʾib wa al-lahu*), not music.³⁵

Still, it can be argued that the seed of modern legal contention over music was planted during this time, when early media entertainment companies converged with Muslim consumers and the transmission of sacred text and congregational practices. As in other parts of the world, moral concern about the phonograph expressed by Muslim jurists were an amplification of existing anxieties about public morality, congregation, and “entertainment and amusement.” Examining Islamic legal debate about the phonograph in light of these wider anxieties thus highlights the new media’s contingent relationship to the formation of technological modernity across the IOW.

In this regard, it should be noted that jurists like Muhammad Bakhit al-Mutiʿi (cited by *The Talking Machine World*) and Rashid Rida viewed the phonograph as a potentially uplifting technology that could be used for transmitting the Quran or recording testimony in a court of law. Elucidating a theology of sound, voice, sense, and subjectivity based on the ideas of al-Ashari, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Aristotle, and Plato, Muhammad Bakhit al-Mutiʿi (1906) also cited an Arabic translation of *Scientific American*’s seminal 1877 article about the phonograph and Thomas Edison to argue that the machine transmitted *real* voices and sounds. In fact, al-Mutiʿi anticipated the conceptual ground of legal dispute over the phonograph surrounding the United States Copyright Act (1909). He demonstrated that a Quran reciter’s disembodied voice on a phonograph recording is inextricably attached to their legal personhood (i.e. that their recorded voice is actually *their* voice and not

³⁵ Gabriel W. Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph: Law, technology, and entertainment during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2023).

an inauthentic mechanical reproduction) and, therefore, the reciter should be able to accumulate heavenly reward (*thawwab*) from subsequent replays of their recorded recitation. In copyright law, this was the same proof needed to demonstrate that musicians and singers should be able to accumulate financial royalties for subsequent replays and sales of their recordings.³⁶

Yet ulema like Sayyid Uthman and Muhammad Ali al-Maliki were not buying into the hype of technological progress. For better or worse, they saw the phonograph for what it had actually become by the early 1900s at the behest of early media firms: a technology whose primary use was for entertainment and amusement. To them, this made it an unfit medium for the transmission of the sacred Quran and, even more, unfit for a modern Muslim lifestyle. For Sayyid Uthman (1899), the talking machine's essence as a trifling toy was evidenced by the fact that it was a technology that, unlike other modern inventions such as the X-ray, steam engine, microscope, and electricity, didn't work well for its intended purpose. Therefore, it certainly wasn't appropriate for the transmission of the Quran which demands superior spoken eloquence:

[. . .] whoever exhibits his speech or produces a tapping close to it [the phonograph], the sound will enter inside it and engrave its trace on rounded wax through an apparatus composed of parts that capture and trace the sound. Then if this apparatus is moved, the sound is reproduced in its entirety by the talking device tracing the engraved sound, but it is not as clear as its original form. One does not hear anything except a voice as if it is far away, like a telephone, and not a single letter pronounced properly according to the rules of Quran recitation.³⁷

While Sayyid Uthman cited the phonograph's poor fidelity as grounds to forbid its use for Quran recitation, it should be emphasized that he never forbade the technology's use for other purposes. Sayyid Uthman (1899) actually stated that it was permitted (*mubah*) to listen to recordings of musical instruments and even female singers as long as they did not insight sinful thoughts. A decade later however, Muhammad Ali al-Maliki (1911) outright forbade the phonograph, analogizing it with the "instruments of amusement" (musical instruments) and "emblems of

³⁶ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph"; Halevi, *Modern Things*.

³⁷ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 168; translated by author from LUL, Or. 8206 F 6.

drinking, homosexuality, and debauchery” outlined in al-Ghazali’s legal theory (see below).

A closer look at Sayyid Uthman’s 1899 fatwa along with his other legal writings dating back to the 1860s demonstrates how the early phonograph consumption during the late-nineteenth-century was grafted onto preexisting spheres of “amusement and entertainment” (*al-la’ib wa al-lahu*) galvanized by networks of trade and pilgrimage across the IOW, and particularly the circulation of recitational practices and musical instruments that predated the phonograph. The integration of early phonograph consumption with the IOW marketplaces that would later become an “intermediate” sphere to early media capitalism is reflected in this legal literature, wherein phonograph controversy dovetailed preexisting contention over singing lewd Arabic poetry, the playing of the gambus, and the mixing of Islamic recitational practices with popular entertainment.

Globalization in The Age of Steam and Print

Sayyid Uthman was born into a family belonging to the noble Ba Alawi lineage that traces ancestry back to Sayyid Ahmad al-Muhajir (873-956 CE) and the coastal region of Hadhramout in modern-day Yemen. Due to the historic importance of maritime trade to Hadhramout, the Ba Alawi Sufi order comprised a vast network of familial and scholarly lineages stretching from East Africa to Southeast Asia, and was crucial to the spread of Islam throughout the IOW since the middle ages. Sayyid Uthman’s father was a native of the city of Mecca while his mother was of mixed Javanese and Egyptian ancestry. Reflecting the mobile transregional lives of Ba Alawi scholars, traders, and statesmen, Sayyid Uthman was raised by his maternal grandfather in Batavia (Jakarta) after his father returned to live in Mecca when he was a young boy. After his mother’s death in 1841, Sayyid Uthman went to live in his ancestral homes of Hadhramout and the Hejaz to continue his education in theology and Shafi’i jurisprudence. Returning to Java in 1862, Sayyid Uthman was eager to reform Javanese Muslim society. He got to work as an activist preacher and in 1869 obtained a lithographic printing press, with which he published maps, treatises, and decrees in Arabic and Malay.³⁸

The emergence of Sayyid Uthman’s reformist orthodoxy has sometimes been

³⁸ Nico J. G. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A biography of Sayyid Uthman (1822-1914)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

attributed to his educational hiatus in the Arabian Peninsula, where he studied with renowned Shafi'i scholars and jurists like Ahmad Zayni Dahlan at Mecca and Abdullah b. Umar b. Yahya in Hadhramout.³⁹ While it is certainly true that Sayyid Uthman returned to Java armed with newly acquired texts and rhetorical skills, the trope of Arabian "conservatism" is an insufficient explanation for this development. As such, historians have dubbed the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as "the age of steam and print": a time when new printing technologies and steam travel facilitated a more rapid circulation of people and ideas than ever before among speakers of Arabic, Persian, Swahili, Urdu, and Malay.⁴⁰ This era of globalization also heralded an unprecedented expansion of literacy and Muslim pilgrimage to regions like the Hejaz, Hadhramout, and the Najaf. Centers of pilgrimage thus became economic and intellectual hubs which, in turn, re-exported people, commodities, ideas, texts, and technologies.

In Java, Mecca became an extraterritorial center of Islamic authority that dictated social and economic affairs throughout the island, and from where Sufi orders such as the Qadiriyya and Naqshabandiyya made headway into Southeast Asia.⁴¹ In the other direction, Javanese pilgrims—who were comparatively wealthy—comprised an important demographic of pilgrims going to Mecca and were thus vital to a greatly expanded pilgrimage market there. A large Javanese community was also established at Mecca, being associated with the Sufi organizations, pilgrimage economy, and networks of scholarly and legal authority reaching back to Southeast Asia.⁴² As already seen, *The Talking Machine World* (1911) noted the importance of the pilgrimage to Mecca for obtaining economic and cultural eminence in Java, and this fact was included in the Columbia company's calculations when hiring Sheikh Abdullah as an agent. As such, and far from parochial traditionalism, it was this accelerated economic and social tumult wrought by the age of steam and print that shaped the emergence of Sayyid Uthman's reformist orthodoxy.

While the Ba Alawi were the traditional Islamic authorities throughout Southeast Asia, being recognized so by the Dutch colonial government, the

³⁹ Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism*.

⁴⁰ James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, eds., *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the narration of a Sufi past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁴² Ibid.

expansion of other Sufi orders into the region from Mecca disrupted this hierarchy.⁴³ Subsequent feuding often played out in the sphere of Islamic law, revolving around debate over the congregational practices and popular assemblies associated with Sufi organization.⁴⁴ Sayyid Uthman often accused other Sufi leaders of being illegitimate quacks and charlatans, who used gimmicks and tricks for financial gain and to dupe “commoners” (*al-’awam*) into following them.⁴⁵ Many Dutch administrators, especially Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje who had lived in Mecca for two years before beginning work with the colonial government in Java, retained similar attitudes towards these new Sufi organizations and sheikhs from Mecca who settled in Java to turn a profit off the pilgrimage economy:

On their side the Mekkans lose no opportunity to increase the advantages to be sucked from the Jawah lands. The “sheikhs” send out their agents in all directions to recruit pilgrims for the next pilgrimage [. . .] As guest princes and regents, they live for some time a pleasant life and return home [to Mecca] with rich booty or as representatives of learning and mystics they get plentiful gifts from lower class people [. . .] In any case the credulity of the masses in Jawah lands enables foreign Muslims to easily seduce them into religious-politics movements and if the agitators are Arabs, they can always be sure of a certain amount of success.⁴⁶

For Sayyid Uthman, it was often his fellow Ba Alawi leaders whom he accused of irreverently mixing religious congregation and entertainment in order to gain popularity and financial assets. His crusade caught the attention of Dutch administrators who sympathized with his attitude toward potentially subversive activity, especially after the Cilegon massacre of Dutch officials in 1888 which reportedly began with drumming and chanting associated with the Naqshabandi

⁴³ Nurfadzilah Yahya, *Fluid jurisdictions: colonial law and Arabs in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

⁴⁴ Michael Laffan, “A Sufi century? The modern spread of the Sufi orders in Southeast Asia,” in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, eds. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 25-39.

⁴⁵ Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism*.

⁴⁶ Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily life, customs, and learning. The Moslems of the East-Indian Archipelago* (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1931 [1888-89]), 219.

order.⁴⁷ Yet ultimately it was Sayyid Uthman who initiated contact with the Dutch seeking collaboration, leading to his appointment in 1891 as Honorary Advisor of Arab and Native Affairs.⁴⁸

During the 1890s, it was reportedly another (unnamed) Arab sayyid who brought a phonograph to Java to turn a profit by giving concerts to audiences that featured recordings of Quran recitation in addition to Arabic and Malay songs. Sayyid Uthman saw the display of a Quran recitation in such contexts of popular amusement as yet another irreverent mixing of worldly entertainment and sacred religion, encouraged by someone who should have otherwise been an example of piety:

It [the phonograph] is a subject of entertainment, astonishment, comedy, and mockery. The value of it to the owner is making a profit from the onlookers who are a mix of men, women, Muslims, Christians, and Chinese who are, most of the time, gathered in places of entertainment and amusement. The value of it for the onlookers is to watch and listen to what is produced by the engraved sounds that include the voice of a singer, instruments of amusement, and the sound of a Quran recitation expressed musically (*bil-'angham*). They applaud at that which they enjoy in these sounds and laugh at what they do not.⁴⁹

Sayyid Uthman's fatwa was initially published as a formal rebuttal to a decree issued by an Arab mufti in Singapore who stipulated that the phonograph's use for Quran recitation was permitted and to be encouraged. Uthman's fatwa also contained a supplemental ruling issued by his fellow mufti in Tripoli (modern-day Lebanon), Hussein al-Jisr, who issued it after being contacted by Sayyid Uthman.⁵⁰ The result of new technologies circulating on IOW networks and correspondence between ulema in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, Sayyid Uthman's fatwa on the phonograph was characteristically a byproduct of the age of steam and print, as it was a continuation of long-standing legal debates about entertainment and amusement reverberating across the IOW.

⁴⁷ Laffan, *The Makings*, 109-17.

⁴⁸ Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism*, 111-40.

⁴⁹ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 169; translated by author from LUL, Or. 8206 F 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 146-75.

Recitation and “The Phonograph Effect”

One arena of contention predating the phonograph was the behavioral conventions and vocal aesthetics surrounding Quran recitation and Sufi hymnal. The writings of Sayyid Uthman’s mentors in the Hejaz and Hadhramout demonstrate how this legal contention circulated maritime networks since the early nineteenth century. Ahmad b. Zayni Dahlan (d. 1886) was an Ottoman-appointed Shafi‘i mufti in Mecca and helped oversee the legal affairs of Mecca’s large Javanese community.⁵¹ He published decrees reprimanding Javanese pilgrims for unruly behavior during the recitation of mawlid hymnals on the Prophet’s birthday—such as the *Sharaf al-Anam* or the *Mawlid al-Barzanji*—and issued fatwas forbidding the use of vocal tricks that resembled singing in recitation (Figure 7).⁵² Abdullah b. Umar b. Yahya (d. 1849), who had served as a mufti in both Hadhramout and Java, issued decrees condemning popular congregations surrounding Ashura festivities as well as the *dabus* ritual associated with the Rifa‘i Sufi order, which involved practices of self mutilation accompanied by drumming and chanting with large crowds of onlookers. Abdullah b. Umar also issued decrees forbidding the use of vocal prolongation (*tamtit*) and elaboration in the recitation of mawlid hymnals, particularly in regard to the employment of musical scales (*angham*) by Quran and hymnal recitors (Figure 8).⁵³

Continuing the tradition of his teachers, one of Sayyid Uthman’s first undertakings upon returning to Java in the 1860s was attempting to expose the quackery of a fellow sayyid whom he accused of pretending to enter a state of ecstasy during a mawlid recitation to impress onlookers.⁵⁴ Sayyid Uthman would also condemn the singing and recitation of risqué poetry by the twelfth-century Sufi mystic Ibn al-Farid, while accusing some recitors of carelessly adlibbing (*talfif*) poetry about divine union (*wisal*) that was inappropriately clad in lewd sexual metaphor.⁵⁵ He also charged that Javanese audiences were barely able to understand Arabic but nonetheless were inspired to inappropriately shout in approval when hearing these erotic motifs. Even more problematic was when this atmosphere of

⁵¹ Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism*, 40.

⁵² Nico J. G. Kaptein, *The Muhimmat al-Nafa’is: A bilingual fatwa collection for Indonesian Muslims from the end of the nineteenth century* (Jakarta: INIS, 1997).

⁵³ Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 143-4; LUL, Or. 7212, 470-7.

⁵⁴ Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism*, 74.

⁵⁵ Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 147-8; Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism*, 118-19; LUL, Or. 895 E 11.

amusement was carried over into the context of a Quran recitation (often during the course of the same gathering), with the infringement of popular entertainment on religious congregation being invigorated by the reciter's blurring of the vocal boundaries between "singing" (*ghina'*) and "reciting" (*qira'a*). Later in 1899, Sayyid Uthman analogized the Quran's reproduction on the phonograph, which also produced singing for the onlooker's enjoyment, with the standing problem of Quran reciters using vocal gimmicks that resembled singing to draw audiences and larger profits. In this regard, he quoted Ahmad Makki Nasir al-Jarisi's treatise (1889) on Quran recitation published in Egypt the previous decade:

Know that today's reciters devise a number of new and unpermitted innovations, overstepping and undermining the limits of what has been established, and this is the use of musical scales (*angham*) to divert the attention of listeners, who intently hearken to them as if they are the airs of song. It is forbidden for one to perform a recitation outside the established frame, likening the word of our Dear Lord to song.⁵⁶

Yet it was not only the entertaining and performative character of phonograph consumption that made the new technology problematic for transmitting a Quran recitation. More importantly, it was the phonograph's limitations as a so-called "talking machine" that garbled the speaking human voice and therefore the important distinction between the vocal registers of singing and recitation.

Due to the technology's poor fidelity, Sayyid Uthman suggested that onlookers listening to a phonograph would not be able to tell whether the machine was playing a recitation, a singing voice, or a musical instrument. He certainly had a point here, considering the confusion that the phonograph's bad fidelity could potentially cause. As a ruling on the phonograph issued by Rashid Rida in 1911 responding to a questioner from Kazan reveals, non-native-Arabic speaking consumers could indeed mistake the singing of popular Egyptian singers like Sheikh Salama Hejazi with the sound of a Quran recitation. After stating they wanted to learn to recite the Quran just like Salama Hejazi on his phonograph records, Rida was compelled to remind the Kazani questioner that, while it was certainly OK to use the

⁵⁶ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 171; Muhammad Makki Nasir al-Jarisi, *Nihayat al-qawl al-mufid fi 'ilm al-tajwid* [The final word on the science of recitation] (Cairo: Maktabat al-adab, 2011 [1889]), 34 (cited in LUL, Or. 8206 F 6).

phonograph to listen to Quran recitation, the early Egyptian recording star was not a reciter, but a singer.⁵⁷

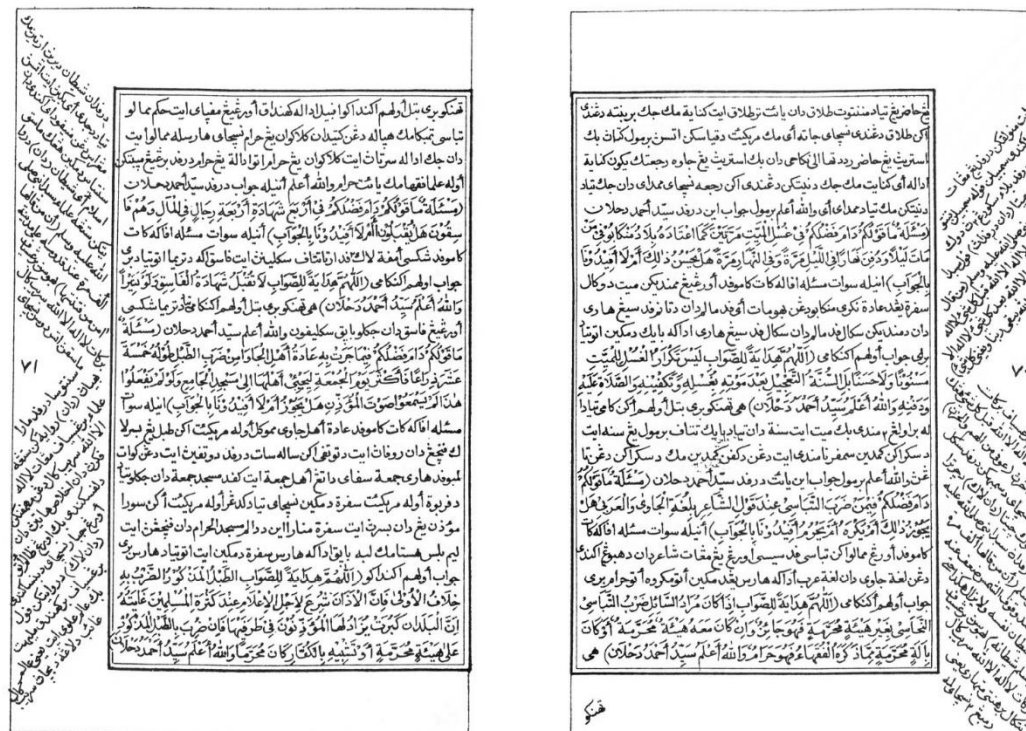


Figure 7. Dahlan's *Muhimat al-nafa'is* (1892/1913), from Kaptein (1997).

⁵⁷ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 173-4; Rashid Rida, "Al-Qur'an wa al-funughray [The Quran and the phonograph]," *al-Manar*, 13, 12 (1911), 906-8. Also see Halevi, *Modern Things*.

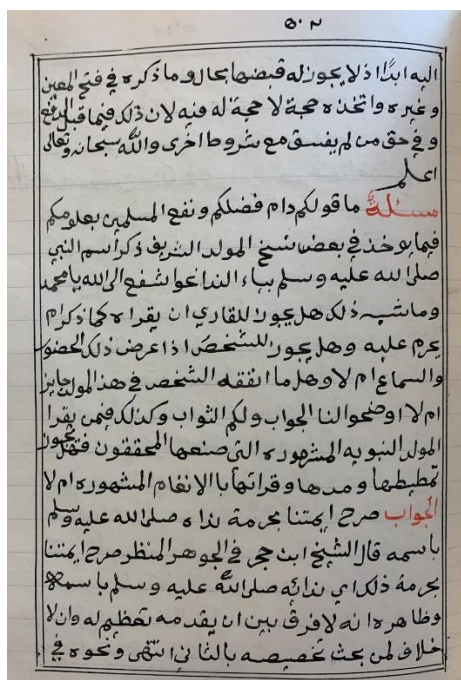


Figure 8. Page from Umar b. Yahya's legal manual outlining the rules of recitation. Or. 7212 (University of Leiden)

In addition to distorting the already contentious boundary between singing and recitation, the phonograph's limitations could potentially taint the bodily comport required of a Quran reciter.

According to Sayyid Uthman's associate Hussein al-Jisr:

He who recites the Quran into the horn could very well prepare himself by adhering to the required manners of recitation, mastering contemplation and the careful study of its meanings. But his body would be nothing but a wanton corpus. Nothing could concern him other than to make pronouncements and engrave the cylinder with the needle. Assuming that one reciter produces a recitation for the horn and adheres to the total respect, contemplation, good manners, and everything else required of him, then every other reciter who wants to engrave his recitation would need to adhere to the same level of respect shown by the former. Yet I assume it will be most difficult for them, as the entire affair is one of amusement. [. . .] Assuming that one could recite the

Quran for this instrument and was careful to properly exhibit the letters to overcome the deficiencies and contraventions of the instrument's performance, I do not think that every reciter will be able to do so.⁵⁸

For al-Jisr and Sayyid Uthman, the phonograph's technological limitations would inevitably cause unlawful "innovations" (*bida'*) in the way Quran recitation was performed. Coupled with singing's infringement on the act of recitation, their concern was that technological limitation would further transform the transmission of God's word into frivolous amusement.

In phonograph history, the aesthetic innovations in vocal performance necessitated by the phonograph's limitations, which included bad fidelity and a shortened play time of four to six minutes, have been dubbed "the phonograph effect." In the context of the development of modern pop music, the phonograph effect changed and defined the way twentieth-century singers would project their voice, the way musical instruments were designed, and the length of musical compositions to accommodate the play-time limit (hence the 3-4 minute "pop" song).⁵⁹ As Hussein al-Jisr makes clear in the above statement, concern about the phonographic Quran was less about the technology itself, and more about the phonograph effect: in this case the innovations (*bida'*) the technology's limitations would necessitate in the long-established conventions of Quran recitation. It was in this context that al-Jisr invoked the *hadith* about innovation, heresy, and hell fire quoted in this article's introduction. Sixteen years later, *The Moslem World* (1915) would both wrongly attribute this quote to Sayyid Uthman and misleadingly interpret it as being directed at Western civilization.

The gambus and "instruments of amusement"

While the vocal aesthetics of recitation were an onerously sonic and ethereal object of debate, musical instruments like the gambus (also *qanbus*, *qambus*, *qabus*, or *gambusi*) were a more tangible substance upon which anxieties about popular entertainment could be cast. While sources cited above point to money exchanges occurring in the context of a Quran recitation, financial gain received by singers for

⁵⁸ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 167; LUL, Or. 8206 F 6.

⁵⁹ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How technology changed music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

playing the gambus was perhaps more explicit, as was the instrument's association with popular entertainment. This created a marketplace for gambus performance in Southeast Asia that, as already noted above, predated the phonograph and thus provided early phonograph firms an existing market to capitalize on. Although Sayyid Uthman (1899) never analogized the phonograph with "instruments of amusement" (*alat al-lahu*), Muhammad Ali al-Maliki (1911) would explicitly make this analogy to forbid the phonograph back in the Hejaz, where he observed the new technology's intimate association with money exchanges and social gatherings surrounding musical instruments.

Legal debate over musical instruments could itself result in their transport across the IOW, as was the case noted by Hurgronje (1901) when a Javanese Muslim scholar transported a gong to the Hejaz to solicit a legal opinion about it from a mufti in Mecca. This was connected to a long-standing debate, taken up by both Hejazi and Javanese scholars, whether certain Indonesian gongs and drums could be used to signal a call to prayer.⁶⁰ As for the gambus, an important source that reveals the instrument's circulation within Arab and Muslim markets throughout the IOW is an interview with a Hadhrami singer named Said Awad, published by the Swedish orientalist Carlo de Landberg in his *Critica Arabia* (1895).⁶¹

Awad befriended Landberg in Aden during the early 1890s and moved with him to Cairo where the orientalist ostensibly conducted the interview and took Awad's photograph (Figure 9). Published in Arabic script with a French translation, the interview was placed under the heading "professions in Hadhramout." Awad expressed to Landberg that he did not make an easy living and was compelled to "travel from town to town, at random and at the mercy of God, seeking fickle fortunes." He learned to play the gambus from a locally renowned singer while growing up in Shibham in Hadhramout's interior. He eventually purchased his own gambus for three *qirsh* (about fifteen francs) and moved to the port of Mukalla before making his way to Aden. Awad noted that, in the course of their work, it was important for gambus singers to cultivate a personal songbook or *karash* of poems. He further explained that there was a noble Hadhrami family, the Ba Atwa, who were renowned for their sung poetry and from whom singers like himself could pay to write poems to expand their personal repertoire. He explained that the Ba Atwa themselves were something like freelancers who travelled to perform and sing praise

⁶⁰ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 141-2.

⁶¹ Carlo de Landberg, *Critica Arabica*, N. III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1895), 21-4.

poetry (*madih*) for illustrious sayyid families such as the Al Kathir or “some wealthy proprietor” in India, Java, and the Swahili coast.⁶² Songs composed by the Ba Atwa abroad could also circulate back to Hadhramout with the movement of traveling musicians: something observed later during the 1930s by British agent Freya Stark, who witnessed musicians in Hadhramout singing Ba Atwa songs from Hyderabad.⁶³



Figure 9. Said Awad with his gambus (Landberg 1895).

However, Awad (1895) noted that singing and the gambus were not accepted by all sayyids, whether at home or abroad. Some viewed the gambus as a “distraction from prayer” while others “enjoyed the gambus because it is pleasing to the heart.”⁶⁴ Back in Java, Sayyid Uthman was a polemical figure in debate about the gambus since the 1870s after his return from Mecca, condemning his fellow sayyids for encouraging gambus performances. In a treatise published in 1880, Sayyid Uthman elaborated on precedent forbidding the playing of stringed instruments laid down in the legal theory of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and, later, by Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 1566).⁶⁵ Noting the gambus’ similarity to other plucked-lute instruments

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Freya Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010 [1940]), 42-4.

⁶⁴ Landberg, *Critica Arabica*, 21-4.

⁶⁵ Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 145-6; LUL, Or. 895 E 3.

such as the *oud* forbidden in al-Ghazalian legal theory, he stipulated that the gambus was an “instrument of drinking” that inevitably led to alcohol consumption and other immoral activities that distracted from prayer. Later in 1888, he would personally take his fellow sayyid Muhammad b. Tahir al-Haddad to task for hosting and encouraging gambus performances, resulting in a slew of publications outlining both sides of the debate. Al-Haddad responded with his own admonitions, critiquing Sayyid Uthman’s haphazard scholarly and rhetorical style. He also rebutted that, throughout history, Hadhrami sayyids had always attended gambus performances to lighten their spirits, and considered them important to their social status. Al-Haddad continued that, among the historical luminaries who were fans of the gambus was his ancestor, al-Habib Abdullah al-Haddad (d. 1720), who composed the Ba Alawi litanies known as the *Ratib al-Haddad* recited by Ba Alawi Sufis until today throughout the IOW.⁶⁶



Figure 10. Sayyid Uthman’s treatise *The Pink Apple* (1880) that condemned the gambus as an “instrument of amusement.” Or 895 E 3 (University of Leiden).

Congregations surrounding hymnal recitation and sung poetry performed with the gambus have been historically associated with the Ba Alawi order and Islam’s

⁶⁶ Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 147-9; LUL, Or. 895 E 11. On the *Ratib al-Haddad*, see Anne K. Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (c. 1880-1940): Ripples of reform* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

spread throughout the IOW. Until today throughout Southeast Asia and coastal East Africa, gambus performance retains a distinctly Islamic identity and has historically occurred in physical spaces connected to mosques and other areas of Muslim congregation.⁶⁷ Yet this mixing of entertainment and religion was a problem for Sayyid Uthman, who in a later treatise (1907) chastised his fellow sayyids for enabling spatial and performative proximity between gambus performances and Islamic recreational practices:

[...] the most heinous occurrence is the base rhythms of gambus playing in the *majlis* where the mawlid of the Prophet is recited, and the greatest transgressions and most evil of innovations being the outcries when verses of the Quran are recited during gambus playing, as if it is divine inspiration (*waridat al-alihyya*).⁶⁸

In his earlier debate with Muhammad b. Tahir al-Haddad, who claimed that Hadhrami sayyids had always respected gambus performance, Sayyid Uthman printed a commentary on the renown text *The Irrigating Fount* documenting the historic genealogies of Hadhrami sayyids throughout the IOW. In the commentary, he tried to distance the Ba Alawi from the spread of gambus gatherings, and claimed that they had a long history of condemning “instruments of amusement.”⁶⁹

Although “Sufism” today is often typecast as being friendly to musical performance in contrast to orthodox “Salafism,” Sayyid Uthman’s antipathy towards the gambus was firmly entrenched in al-Ghazalian mysticism and a literalist reading of Sufi doctrine. Al-Ghazali, and later Ibn Hajar who further developed the former’s arguments, explicitly forbid the playing of stringed musical instruments due to their ostensible association with degenerate behaviors such as homosexuality, prostitution, adultery, and alcohol consumption. The Hejazi scholar Muhammad Ali al-Maliki (1911) would later cast this al-Ghazalian perspective onto the phonograph, making a full analogy with “instruments of amusement,” and specifically the *santur*

⁶⁷ Hilarian, “The structure and development”; Anne K. Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Noritah Omar, “Musical modernity, Islamic identity, and Arab aesthetics in Arab-Indonesian orkes gambus,” in *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*, ed. Andrew N. Weintraub (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁸ Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 148-9; LUL, Or. 878 E 43, 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 149-50; LUL, Or. 897 F 75, 42-9; on the *Irrigating Fount*, see Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

(zither) and *sanj* (cymbal) due of the phonograph's appearance as a wooden box with metal elements like mechanical gears and a horn.⁷⁰

Yet by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Muslims in Java grew weary of Sayyid Uthman's Sufi orthodoxy and his shameless association with the Dutch. As a result, the modernist, legalist, "salafi" movement represented by the Cairo-based anti-colonial mufti Rashid Rida and his periodical *al-Manar* began to attract a significant readership in Southeast Asia by the early twentieth century.⁷¹ Rida was an open critic of Sayyid Uthman for his association with the Dutch and adherence to what Rida considered an irrelevant and elitist Sufi doctrine. *Al-Manar's* readers in places like Singapore and Java would thus ask Rida for alternative rulings regarding not only the phonograph, but also about whether it was permitted to sing and play the gambus (1906). In this case, it was Rida's anti-Sufi salafism, which advocated a return and strict adherence to the original sources of Islamic law, that led him to rule that playing the gambus and singing were perfectly OK as long as they did not associate with activity already established as sinful. In doing so, Rida outlined the most hardcore legalist tradition of Islamic law established by the Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazem (d. 1064), which holds that there is nothing in *hadith* or Quran that explicitly indicates (without recourse to interpretive innovations) that musical instruments and singing are forbidden regardless of context.⁷²

The Hejazi Connection

While the gambus is most commonly thought to originate in modern-day Yemen, early phonograph recordings reveal the forgotten importance of places like Jeddah, Mecca, and Medina to the proliferation of the gambus and sung Arabic poetry throughout the IOW before and after the phonograph's introduction.⁷³ The importance of the Hejaz via networks of pilgrimage in this regard is exemplified in the career of the nineteenth-century Kenyan *gambusi* or *kinanda* player Mohamed Kijuma (1855-1945), who reportedly brought the instrument back to Lamu after sojourns to Zanzibar and Mecca where he picked it up while accompanying his

⁷⁰ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 234.

⁷¹ Laffan, *Islam, Colonialism*.

⁷² Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 175-84; Rashid Rida, "As'ila Jawiyyah fi sama' alat al-lahu [Questions from Java about listening to instruments of amusement]," *al-Manar*, 9, 1 (1906), 35-51.

⁷³ Jean Lambert and Samir Mokrani, *Qanbus, Tarab: Le luth monoxyle et la musique du Yémen* (Paris: Cefas Geuthner, 2013).

mother on the pilgrimage during the 1870s (Figure 11).⁷⁴ As noted above, the Columbia agent Sheikh Abdullah produced a number of early gambus recordings in Java that almost exclusively featured Hejazi musical styles.



Figure 11. “Kijuma in Zanzibar in 1900s, playing the *kinanda* [gambus].” From Egl (1983), Ex. K, pg. 501.

The ethnographic phonograph recordings commissioned by Snouck Hurgronje and made by the Hejazi merchant brothers, Muhammad and Jamal Taj al-Din, between Java and the Hejaz (c. 1906-1909) further reveal how the early circulation of phonograph technologies would follow patterns cultural movement already established by Hejazi musicians.⁷⁵ One gambus player from Jeddah, Sayyid Muhammad Jabir al-Dakhil, was recorded by the Taj al-Din brothers in Batavia (Jakarta) in late 1906 and later in Jeddah during early 1907 (Figures 12 and 13).⁷⁶ One of the songs Sayyid Muhammad initially recorded in Java was written by the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid b. Mu‘awiyya (d. 683), and included the following amorous verse (*ghazal*) later transcribed from the recording by Hurgronje:

⁷⁴ Mohammed Ibrahim Mohammed Abou Egl, “The life and works of Muhamadi Kijuma” (PhD thesis, SOAS University of London, 1983).

⁷⁵ Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 196-221; also see Anne van Oostrum, “Arab music in Western ears: An account of the music of the Hejaz at the turn of the twentieth century,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 7 (2012), 127-44.

⁷⁶ These details about the project are revealed in the Arabic correspondences between Hurgronje and the Taj al-Din brothers, LUL, Or. 18.097 S65 1. See Lavin, “Fatwas on the phonograph,” 196-221 for full analysis.

If not for the fear of God and my life
 I would have embraced her between Hatim and Zamzam
 Her arm would be my pillow as I kissed her lips
 Halal for me even if forbidden
 God has forbid adultery in His book
 But not kissing and necking at the mouth
 If someday the religion of Ahmad forbids a kiss
 Then take it by the creed of Jesus son of Mary⁷⁷

One can perhaps sympathize with Sayyid Uthman's view that some Arabic poems recited and sung in gambus salons contained irreverent sexual metaphors, especially when invoking religion as the above verses do. However, this clearly wasn't a problem for other people of noble lineage like Sayyid Muhammad himself (Figure 12), who, as these phonograph recordings demonstrate, performed on both sides of the Indian Ocean during the early 1900s.

Yet after the Saudi invasion of the Hejaz in 1924, the legal precedents on the phonograph and instruments of amusement stipulated by Hejazi muftis like Muhammad Ali al-Maliki (1911) were adopted into state law by the early Saudi-Wahabi state. Subsequently, a campaign of smashing phonograph records and confiscating phonograph needles and musical instruments was initiated throughout the region, driving musical entertainment underground for the remainder of the twentieth and early twentyfirst centuries.⁷⁸ It wasn't until the 1960s when a Dammam-based record company, Duniaphone, would quietly appear in the Kingdom's Gulf coast, and even much later until 2016 when the Saudi government would formally roll back anti-music policies.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 210-11; LUL, Or. 18.097 S65 2.

⁷⁸ Lisa Urkevich, *Music and Traditions of the Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 6-8.

⁷⁹ See Salim bin Bashir, *Istuwana: Tarikh fan wa dhikriyyat* [Records: Art history and memory] (Kuwait: Mujmua'h al-'ialamiyyah al-'alamiyyah, 2009) and Amr Abdelrahim, "Out of thin air but more than a mirage: The politics of Saudi Arabia's nascent music industry," *IFRI Studies* (Dec. 2024): <https://www.ifri.org/en/studies/out-thin-air-more-mirage-politics-saudi-arabias-nascent-music-industry> [Accessed: 15 July 2026].

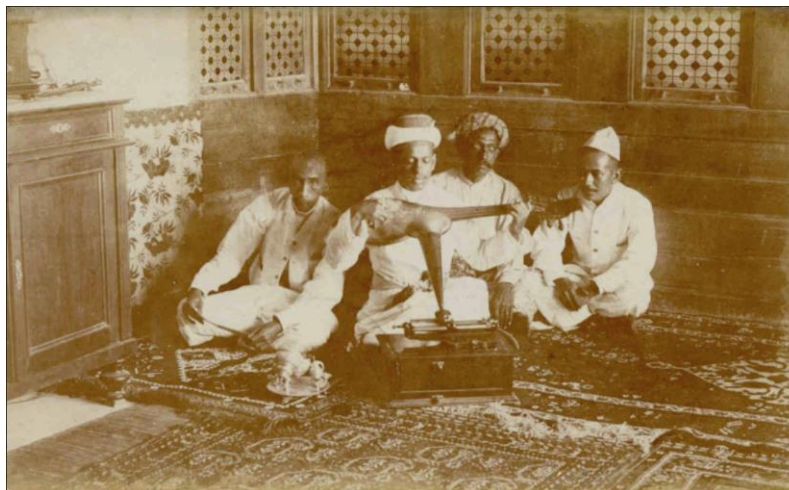


Figure 12. Sayyid Muhammad recording gambus with a phonograph in Jeddah, 1907. (University of Leiden)

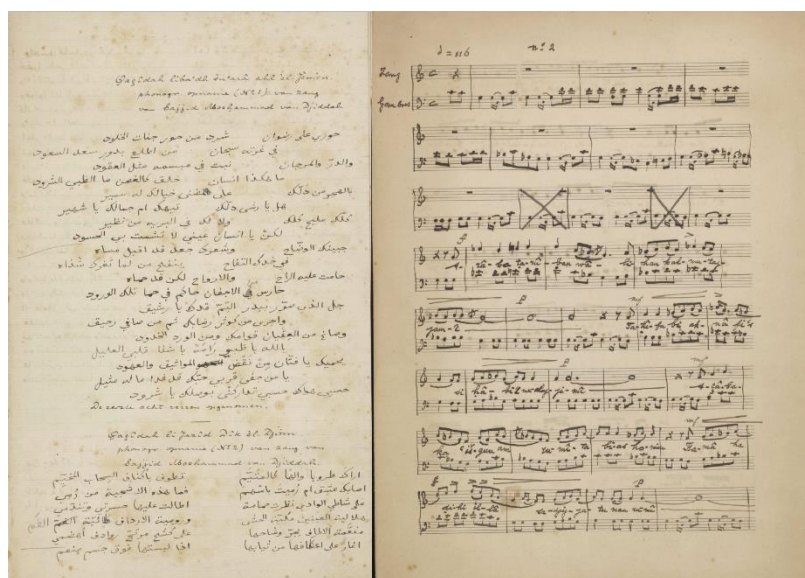


Figure 13. Musical and textual transcriptions by Hurgronje (left) and Dutch musicologist A. J. Wiemans (right) of Sayyid Muhammad's phonograph recordings made in Java, 1906. Or. 18.097 S65.1-3 (University of Leiden)

Yet thanks to the ongoing interest in Muslim markets in Southeast Asia on the part of international phonograph firms, there was a continued amplification of Hejazi gambus music in Java during the 1920s and 1930s. This is exemplified by the musician, singer, and reciter from Mecca, “Machmoed Saad Mekka,” who around 1926-1932 recorded a significant number of records in Java with the German Beka company, the British His Master's Voice company, and the Javanese Yokimtjan

Record label. Machmoed Saad's releases included vocal recitations of the Quran and the *mawlid al-Barzanji* in addition to Hejazi and Egyptian songs accompanied by his gambus.⁸⁰ "For Muslims, Machmud Saad Mekka is no longer a stranger. Many people have learned the Quran from him and also his records," read a His Master's Voice record sleeve from the early 1930s displaying his photo. Interestingly, side A of Machmud Saad's record (NS 112) listed on the sleeve features a verse from the Quran ("Soerat Loekman"), while side B featured a song in the Hejazi musical mode called *hirab* ("Lagoe Herab").⁸¹ As a performer, reciter, and educator who made a living in Java reciting and playing the gambus, Machmud Saad Mekka's phonograph recordings reflect the contentious yet widely normalized interface between popular entertainment and religion on Muslim networks of the Indian Ocean. They reveal how the production and consumption of recitational genres and gambus music on these networks historically converged with early phonograph consumption and the spread of new media technologies: a wider economic convergence between "intermediate" IOW Muslim markets and early media capitalism. These recordings also further demonstrate the importance of the Hejaz to the historic IOW proliferation of the Arabian gambus, and the Hejaz's subsequent importance to the spread of modern media throughout the IOW before 1924.

⁸⁰ Lavin, "Fatwas on the phonograph," 132-3.

⁸¹ Ibid., 318; "His Master's Voice," Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/His_Master%27s_Voice [Accessed: 15 July 2026].



Figure 14.) Beka records by Machmoed Saad (pictured top left) c. 1924-1932, featuring Quran recitation (top left), Meccan *majrur* singing with gambus (top right), and a Hejazi *Mawlid al-Barzanji* recitation (bottom). Courtesy of Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

CONCLUSION

This article has sketched a global, multi-polar history of the phonograph throughout the IOW during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (c. 1899-1932). Drawing primarily on American trade reports and fatwas issued in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, it has demonstrated that, rather than belatedly adopting new media, Muslim performers, businesspeople, and consumers between Arabia and Southeast Asia helped sustain the global genesis of modern media capitalism. Money

exchanges surrounding vocal recitation and gambus performances provided an intermediate sphere of consumer transactions upon which early phonograph firms could expand global business. This was reflected by these firms' mass production of records featuring Quran recitation, Sufi hymnal, and gambus songs as well as the hiring of agents like Sheikh Abdullah whose standing business was explicitly linked to IOW networks of trade and pilgrimage. Fatwas on the phonograph, far from embodying a clash of Islamic and Western civilizations, were a contingent set of reactions and opinions regarding this pivotal historical convergence between Muslim consumers and early media capitalism. As such, this legal history reveals how the phonograph's association with modernity and its place in modern Muslim life was *itself* the subject of debate during this time. Fatwas on the phonograph similarly reveal how legal perceptions of the new media, positive or negative, were contingent on its perceived affiliation with preexisting customs and patterns of consumption. In this case, these were controversial recitational practices and musical instruments like the gambus propelled by IOW globalization during the age of steam and print. Furthermore, negative perceptions of the phonograph also reflected, not an aversion to modernity or Western culture, but what were universally legitimate concerns about the technology's limitations. The phonograph's bad fidelity thus led scholars like Sayyid Uthman to denigrate it as something that merely amplified an existing cacophony of entertainment and religion reverberating across the modern IOW.

Future research exploring phonograph fatwas written in other languages besides Arabic would be of great service to this global history, and would make a great contribution to both global phonograph history and Islamic legal studies. Similarly, further research on primary sources in languages other than Arabic and English relating to the early phonograph trade, Muslim consumers, and other early phonograph markets outside Europe and the United States would make fruitful contributions to the various literatures cited here. However, this article advocates a research agenda that makes an earnest shift to the perspective of global and IOW history in order to disrupt the tenacious lure of techno-teleology in the interdisciplinary study of culture and media.