Abstracts

The Performance of the Social Imaginary in Bābak Boubān’s Setarvan
Ignacio Agrimbau

Growing up in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution (1978-9) and approaching artistic maturity in the turbulent years that followed the downfall of the Reformist movement, the Iranian santoorist, composer and linguist Bābak Boubān (1971) expressed his views regarding the aesthetic discourses and social attitudes of the time. In his setting of Mehdi Akhavān Sāles’s poem Setarvan (‘barren’), Boubān sought to integrate a range of discursive positions that were, at times, at odds with each other. At the heart of the ideas and feelings that informed the making of Setarvan were ambitious conceptual links: a reaction against the dominant canons of Iranian classical music, his mixed feelings about the santoor’s identity, the state of unknowing confusion which he attributed to Tehranian classical music audiences, his disappointment with adulthood, and a concern for the emotional well-being of adolescents in Tehran.

Drawing on different strands of narrative theory, I introduce the concept of aesthetic emplotment to illustrate the intentional creation of an instance of discursive and experiential consistency through aesthetic practice and reflection. Presenting it as a case study of the performance of the authorial self, I argue that aesthetic emplotments also constitute a way for individuals to reassert their standing and project their agency within social realities over which they have limited control. Locating the construction of individual artistry within the exchanges between practice, reflexivity and self-representation, I build on hermeneutic and experiential approaches to the ethnomusicology of the individual. I also hope to contribute to the tradition of Iranian classical music scholarship both within and outside Iran.

Ignacio Agrimbau (Buenos Aires, 1977) is an ethnomusicologist, composer, multi-instrumentalist and community musician currently completing a PhD in ethnomusicology at SOAS, University of London. He has conducted research in Tehran, Iran, and the Upper West Region of Ghana. His research interests include the Ghanaian-Dagara gyil, the Iranian santoor, music and individuality, ethn-theories of learning, they ways people talk about music and how they relate to the way they play it. He works as a freelance performer and composer in the UK and internationally. As a community musician, he has delivered professional training for different organizations and is currently developing a research project about the practice and uses of music in special education.
Mumbling the Qur’an: Pious incorporation and vocal reluctance
Lisa-Maria Brusius

Converted Muslim women who learn to recite the Qur’an in Arabic face a number of vocal challenges. If they aspire to conform to an ideal way of reading the Qur’an, they not only have to get a grasp of the rules that govern the transformation from text into vocal sound, they also have to reform and retrain their bodies to produce such sounds. Converted women’s struggles are not merely limited to mastering the correct articulation of letters, they include realising vocal nasality, semi-regular rhythmic patterns, ways of being affected, and ways of experiencing and appreciating the sonic results. The women also have to recite in front of others, outside their private space. Although they do so wilfully and as a pious endeavour, it is an act of discipline that requires not only control of the self but also overcoming a culturally shaped body. Particularly in mixed Arab-German recitation classes, where native Arabic speakers appear better-equipped in terms of their linguistic abilities, this can produce social dynamics of separation and a sense of exclusion.

Drawing on my ethnographic study of converted women in Berlin, I attempt to capture the significance of ‘somatic repertoires’ or ‘body memory’ in vocal practices of recitation. Building on Marcel Mauss’s (1935) conceptualisation of body techniques, Deborah Kapchan (2007) understands these repertoires as ‘corporeal attitude[s], gesture[s], or habit[s] learned in a cultural environment that [are] often unconscious but that [are] a site of subjective and intersubjective meaning’. My paper interprets the challenges that converted women encounter as struggles against such somatic repertoires and further addresses how these struggles create and impact social dynamics in recitation classes.

Lisa-Maria Brusius is a PhD student at King’s College London. She studied musicology, history, and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Oxford (MPhil), Humboldt University of Berlin (BA), and Free University of Berlin. Her current research focuses on vocal practices in Muslim communities in Europe. Her research interests also include the history of the so-called ‘Berlin school’ of systematic and comparative musicology and hip-hop in Germany. Since 2014, she has been co-organiser of the Berlin Ethnomusicology and Anthropology of Music Research Group (BEAM).

The Musical Nahda: Reckonings with Musical Modernity across the Mediterranean
Hazem Jamjoum

Over the course of the long nineteenth century, the specter of Europe came to haunt the intellectual activity of the learned classes of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, an
era that has come to be known as the *Nahda*. This haunting was clearly evident in Nahdawi writings on music, where the confrontation between musical practice in the Arab world and the idea of Europe, laden with notions of superiority, created a conception of cultural crisis, that was to be overcome through musical reform. Music is an aspect of the *Nahda* that has received little to no attention in intellectual histories of the Arab world, and Arabic musical thought has remained largely absent in many an attempt at histories of “world music.”

In this paper, I explore the ways in which rather than being a confrontation between ‘European’ and ‘non-European’ positions, as both diffusionist and nativist historiographies would suggest, the arguments underpinning the musical *Nahda* were not determined by writers’ identities as European or other. Between 1800 and 1938, groupings including both Arab and European writers forwarded similar agendas in debates against other similarly diverse groupings, where the idea of musical modernity—and by extension ideas about the standardization, codification and tempering of the Arabic modal system (*maqam*)—took on differing valences. The paper is an attempt at an intellectual history of pronouncements on musical reform—from Mikhail Mishaqa and Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq to the participants of the Cairo Congress of Arab Music—that is attentive to the contending political agendas of the varying ways in which these thinkers diagnosed the crisis of Arabic music and outlined their suggestions for its treatment.

**Hazem Jamjoum** is a doctoral candidate in modern Middle East history at New York University (NYU), and currently a Graduate Research Fellow at NYU London. This paper is part of his broader research on the interrelations between cultural production and cultural power in early twentieth century Egypt and the “Arab world.”

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**Sonifying National Independence Ideology: the politics of popular music in Karimov’s Uzbekistan**

**Kerstin Klenke**

Uzbekistan is an exception from the seemingly universal rule that new nation states choose particularly old traditions as musical emblems. By selecting *estrada* as sound of the nation, it made one of the youngest additions to the repertoire of genres the country’s musical ambassador after independence. Under president Islom Karimov, various state institutions were entrusted with *estrada*’s development and control, and the creation of so-called *milliy estrada* (*national estrada*) as sonic incarnation of national independence ideology was high on the agenda of musical and educational policies.

The choice of estrada as musical signet is not only unusual, it seems paradoxical—because Uzbekistan is no exception from the widespread tendency among postsocialist
successor states to negate their Soviet history. So why did a country that once even banned the word ‘Soviet’ from public discourse chose to be represented musically by a genre that undisputably is a heritage of the Soviet era? How exactly did the Karimov government deal with *estrada*? In how far were music policies successful in imbuing estrada with the nimbus of something new? And what is the legacy of 15 years of concerted *estrada* politics in post-Karimov Uzbekistan?

These questions I will explore in my paper. Based on extensive fieldwork in Tashkent, the presentation will be framed by a critical reflexion of the subversion bias, which has so far dominated research on socialist and postsocialist popular music in Western music studies. My aim is to come to an understanding of the relation between authoritarian policies and popular music that transcends the common binary tropes of repression – resistance and affirmation – opposition.

*Kerstin Klenke* is an ethnomusicologist with a regional focus on the postsocialist world, particularly on Central Asia and the Caucasus. After completing her PhD project on popular music and politics in Uzbekistan, she has recently started to study the nexus between war, music and memory in Abkhazia. Further interests include ethnomusicology’s history and politics of ideas as well as socialist approaches to music research. She is currently based at the Goethe University Frankfurt.

The Ashiq Bard in Iran and Azerbaijan: A Comparative Look at Transmission and Change

Anna Oldfield

The *ashiq* minstrel tradition is a genre of musical storytelling that has circulated through Northern Iran and the Southern Caucasus for over 500 years. This genre is the Azeri people’s venue for oral literature, including epics, romances, lyric songs, and verbal dueling. An art born of the crossroads, this genre was forged at the intersection of Turkic bardic traditions and Iranian philosophical mysticism in early Safavid Iran. Later, as ashiqs dispersed into the Caucasus, local schools developed with their own repertoires, instrumentation, and performance traditions. Ashiqs frequently travelled between regions to perform together, and thus practitioners remained in contact for most of the genre’s history.

This contact was disrupted in the 20th century when northern Azerbaijan was incorporated into the USSR. Not only did the genre become isolated from the Azerbaijani regions of Iran, but it was also set on a different path by the Soviet State. Contact between ashiqs of the two regions was limited and only opened up in the 1990s. Today, ashiqs of Azerbaijan and Iran mix freely, but the traditions have developed significant differences in repertoire, performance practices, and social functions. Co-researched by Anna Oldfield (based on fieldwork in Azerbaijan) and Behrang Nikaeen (based on fieldwork in Iran), this presentation will discuss how this genre has evolved differently in two different regions, focusing on transmission, performance venues, and gender.
Anna Oldfield holds a PhD in Languages and Cultures of Asia with a minor in Ethnomusicology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her dissertation, based on two years of fieldwork in Azerbaijan, resulted in the book *Women Poet Minstrels of Azerbaijan: 18th century to Present* (2008), and she continues to write on Turkic literatures, epics, and singers in Soviet and post-Soviet societies. Oldfield is active in cultural exchange projects. She teaches World Literature and is currently working on a Teaching Archive of Musical Storytelling, to be housed at Coastal Carolina University.

A Brief History and Examination of 20th Century Arab Women Composers

Zaina Shihabi

Women in music have played an important role in the history of Arabic culture from as early as Al Jahalliya (the period of ignorance – prior to 630 AD), when ‘poetry was the material of singing’ (Kamel, 2012), with poets such as Al Khansâ, and later after the introduction of Islam Sufi poet Rabia Al Adawiyya, and several others throughout history. Within Arabic traditional music, particularly in the ‘Al Nahda’ (Renaissance) period of the late 19th and early 20th century, women thrived in performance, but after the 1932 *First Congress of Arab Music* met in Cairo, female composers flourished in the Arab world. This historic meeting was ‘the first international scientific forum on non-European music to bring together distinguished composers, scholars, performers and educators from European and Arab countries’ (Stanevičiūtė, 2016), and marked a turning point in the history of Arabic music. After this meeting, Western instruments and notation were introduced to traditional Arabic music, and this had a significant impact on Arab women in composition. This presentation explores the position of women in Arab music society after the introduction of Western instruments and notation, and the debates on music and particularly women in music in Islam. The talk will focus on the current perception and development of music education in Jordan and Palestine today, and influences from the West in terms of music education.

History on Rewind: Traveling with an Arab-Jewish Baidaphon Record
Clara Wenz

This paper builds on my ongoing research project “Arab-Jewish Musical Memories of Aleppo” and investigates my ethnographic journey with a record of the Jewish hymn “Yom Yom Odeh”, sung by the Hazzan Raphael Tabbakh and recorded by the record company Baidaphon in Beirut in the early 1920s. Since discovering it in a music collection in Lebanon, I have travelled to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Istanbul and Berlin and presented this record to Syrians who have recently been displaced as a result of their country’s ongoing war as well as to members of Aleppo’s former Jewish community.

By exploring and disentangling the particular histories, musical association and often contradictory reactions that have emerged during these various listening occasions, I suggest to understand this record not only as evidence of a historically dismantled Arab-Jewish musical landscape but, more importantly, with regards to the ideological and geographical borders and border-crossings that inform listening practices today: Whether the record’s association with the “enemy” state of Israel, a mysterious muting incident on my mobile phone, or the memory of a secret encounter between two musicians - reflecting an ongoing history of conflict, these narratives often contribute to the feeling of music not being mobile but being “locked” into place, while simultaneously exposing the limits of divisive thinking about Jews and Arabs.

Clara Wenz is a third year PhD student at the Music Department of the School of Arts at SOAS, University of London. She holds a BA in Philosophy (Munich) and a MA in Middle Eastern Studies (SOAS). Her research project investigates ”Arab-Jewish Musical Memories of Aleppo” and involves fieldwork among Jewish and Muslim diasporic and refugee communities in Berlin, Beirut, Jerusalem and New York.

“The Algerian woman is very strong”: Music and Gender in Algerian London
Stephen Wilford

The network of Algerian musicians and listeners in contemporary London is relatively small but includes a significant number of women who are actively involved as performers, composers, event organisers and audience members. In recent years, these women have been at the forefront of an expanding, vibrant local diasporic music scene. Music-making provides a means for social interaction, offering Algerian women from across the city an opportunity to meet and perform together. However, while many of these women are successful professionals and accomplished musicians, they often feel constrained by the expectations placed upon women within contemporary Algerian society. These boundaries and limitations evidence the role of music in maintaining individual and collective ties.
between the UK and Algeria, and the social and familial pressures played out through these socio-cultural boundaries.

This paper draws upon my extensive ethnographic fieldwork within London’s Algerian community. Through interviews and conversations with Algerian women, I attempt to unpack the complex, and sometimes contradictory, relationship between music, gender and Algerian-ness within contemporary London. I explore how music encourages social interaction and community building while simultaneously producing specifically gendered spaces for Algerian men and women in the city. By interrogating some of the tensions between agency and constraint that play out for Algerian women in the city, I seek to understand how issues of class, age, religion and language also contribute to the lived experiences and musical practices of these women.

Stephen Wilford is an ethnomusicologist whose work focuses upon the musics of Algeria (and North Africa more broadly), with particular emphasis upon the role of digital technologies in the production and circulation of music among diaspora communities. He teaches at City, University of London and the University of Southampton, and his current research project is ‘Music and Digital Cultures in the Middle East and North Africa’. He is an elected committee member of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, and a member of the Ethnomusicology Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute.