

# MUSIC AND CLASS

Perspectives from Egypt, Past and Present

Workshop Programme

3–4 DEC  
2024

UNI LEHRSTUHL FÜR  
WÜ ETHNOMUSIKOLOGIE

BAYERISCHE  
AKADEMIE  
DER  
WISSENSCHAFTEN

BADW

Schelling-Forum der BADW  
an der Universität Würzburg  
Klinikstraße 3  
97070 Würzburg

# WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

## MUSIC AND CLASS – PERSPECTIVES FROM EGYPT, PAST AND PRESENT WÜRZBURG, 3-4 DECEMBER 2024

### TUESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2024

- 09:00–10:00 Welcome Round and Introduction (Clara Wenz)
- 10:00–12:30 (with coffee break):  
**SESSION I – TECHNOLOGY AND CLASS**  
**Diana Abbani:** Urban Beats - Music Records and Middle-Class Rise in Beirut and Egypt in the Early Twentieth Century  
**Hanan Hammad:** Technology, Gender Respectability, and Music in Twentieth Century Egypt
- 12:30–14:00 Lunch (on-site catering)
- 14:00–16.00 **SESSION II – MUSIC AND CULTURAL CAPITAL**  
**Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco:** Music and Class in Twentieth Century Cairo – A Perspective  
**Clara Wenz:** The Horse Carriage – A Shifting Class Motif in Egyptian Popular Music
- 16:00–16:30 Coffee break
- 16:30–18:30 **SESSION III – MULTI-MEDIA AND PERFORMANCE LECTURES**  
**Kawkab Tawfiq:** t.b.a.  
**Loab Hammoud:** Youm Sa'id (Happy day) – The Instrumental Music of Muhammad Abdel Wahhab (1902-1991) (performance lecture)
- 19:30 Social Dinner at the Bürgerspital (Theaterstraße 19)

### WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2024

- 09:00–12:30 (with coffee break):  
**SESSION IV – MUSIC OF “THE MASSES”**  
**Andrew Simon:** Egypt's “Vulgar Soundscape” – Class, Culture, and the Economic Opening  
**Gisela Kitzler:** Mahraganāt – Music of the Egyptian Streets?  
**Ahmed Abdelazim:** Chants of Domination – Masculinity and Class in Egyptian Football Culture
- 12:30–14:00 Lunch (on-site catering)
- 14:00–15.30 **SESSION V – FINAL DISCUSSION**

The workshop takes place at the **SCHELLING-FORUM** of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Würzburg, Klinikstraße 3, 97070 Würzburg.

All participants are accommodated at Würzburg's **MOTEL ONE HOTEL** (Paradeplatz 4, a 10-minute walk from the workshop location). For any queries, please contact **CLARA WENZ, MOBILE: +49 178 1129 057, EMAIL: CLARA.WENZ@UNI-WUERZBURG.DE**

# ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

**DIANA ABBANI, MECAM, FORUM TRANSREGIONALE STUDIEN, BERLIN**

Title: *Urban Beats: Music Records and Middle-Class Rise in Beirut and Egypt in the Early Twentieth Century*

Abstract:

In 1936, journalist Karam Al-Bustani (1894–1966) published an article titled “The Song We Desire Today: We’ve Had Enough Mourning and Crying. Bring Us Joy” in the Beirut daily newspaper *Lisan al-Hal* [The Voice of the Moment]. In this piece, he critiqued the Egyptian music industry’s influence on Beirut’s musical landscape, calling for songs that reflect the urban transformations and social changes taking place in the city. Al-Bustani thus reclaimed “songs that depict our situation, express our hearts, suit our tastes, and resonate with our emotions.”

Such criticism was common in Beirut’s newspapers during this period and resonates with the discussions about the city’s cultural identity and modernization at the time, particularly in light of Beirut’s growing prominence in the region and the tensions surrounding its rapid development. Many Beirut intellectuals envisioned their city as a cultural capital distinguished by its “modernity”, engaging in debates about what constitutes a ‘capital.’ They questioned whether Beirut’s appeal is related to its vibrant cabarets and nightclubs or its publishing houses, universities, and “refined” concerts enjoyed by the intellectual and affluent elites. Despite their attempts to shape a new local identity associated with a ‘sophisticated’ modern city, Beirut’s image was, in reality, a complex interplay of contrasting elements: its lively nightlife and intellectual circles against marginalized sectors often overlooked by mainstream discourse.

This contribution explores the historical implications of the music recording industry on the formation of urban middle classes in Beirut during the early 20th century, while also considering Egypt’s significant influence in this development. It examines how new technologies and forms of entertainment shaped, and were shaped by, socio-economic class structures and modernity debates. By analyzing the role of music consumption and production in the processes of urbanization and modernization, this paper highlights the intersections of class, technology, and entertainment across the broader cultural and musical landscape of the region.

Bio:

Diana Abbani is a cultural historian of the Modern Middle East, currently working as the science communication coordinator of the Merian Center for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM), at the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin. She holds a PhD in Arabic studies from Sorbonne University and has received postdoctoral fellowships from the Forum Transregionale Studien and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation as a EUME fellow. She has published works on Beirut’s popular culture, the effects of social and political changes, and the rise of music industries. She is currently preparing a book focusing on alternative narratives within Beirut’s musical scene and the marginalized experiences of those affected by sound transitions.

**AHMED ABDELAZIM, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

Title: *Chants of Domination: Masculinity and Class in Egyptian Football Culture*

Abstract:

Football in Egypt is an overwhelmingly male-dominant sport, both in terms of practice and fandom. Women constitute 3% of registered professional players in the country, even less if one would count amateur players. The Stadiums are more so male spaces where the presence of women exposes them to harassment and abuse. In such a context, it comes as no surprise that football fans’ chants have been characterized by sexism and sexual violence. Focusing on chants in football stadiums, this study examines the relation between masculinity and domination in sports. The chants of the country’s two most prominent teams, Ahly and Zamalek, describe each other using strong sexual language where the losing team is portrayed as a sexually dominated female. The Zamalek team is described as *il-bint Bida*, a “white girl,” denoting their white jersey, while the al-Ahly team, who wears red, is described as wearing a red nightgown. The sexual language continues to haunt the sport beyond stadium chants to print media. Phrases like “wedding night,” “hot night,” and “adults only” are used to celebrate one side’s victory over the other. While sexual chants are not exclusive to Egyptian stadiums, this paper aims to explore the strong sexual nature of chants in football culture by examining the socio-economic and class changes among football fans following the 1967 war. The study uses various materials, including visual aids, interviews, and participant observation, to understand the link between sexuality, class, and domination in sports.

Bio:

Ahmed Abdelazim is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He completed his first MA in Arab and Islamic Civilizations (2014) and his second MA in Anthropology (2018) at the American University of Cairo (AUC). His research explores the intersections of the built environment, gender, class, and

religion. Abdelazim's work examines the discourses that developed around "Islam" in relation to contemporary architectural practice in Egypt. His other ongoing research project examines football culture in Egypt and the intersections with performances of piety and sexuality.

## HANAN HAMMAD, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Title: *Technology, Gender Respectability, and Music in Twentieth Century Egypt*

Abstract:

This paper discusses the role of technology in shaping the social status of the biggest neo-classical divas in Egypt: Umm Kulthum (1904-1975), Bahiga Hafiz (1908-1983), and Layla Murad (1918-1995). The careers of the three iconic women coincided with the development of new media, which, I argue, reconfigured their position from the socially marginalized status of female performers to respected national figures. The paper starts by discussing the applicability of the term class in examining the socioeconomic hierarchies and stratification in Egypt. I'd suggest using the broader Arabic term *satr*. Literally means cover, and as a term means socioeconomic respect, *satr* is a cross and interclass status that excludes those outside the boundaries of social respectability regardless of any wealth or economic means they might or might not have. Arguably elusive, the organically Egyptian concept of *satr* is more precise in capturing the struggles for gender respectability faced by women performers coming from drastically different socioeconomic, geographical, and religious origins. Then the paper moves to discuss how technology related to audio and visual mass communications provided the rural and conservative Umm Kulthum, the Jewish Cairene Layla Murad, and elite European-educated Bahiga Hafiz with moral and material *satr* or the crucial social capital for gender respectability. I argue that those talented women transformed the positions of female performers from morally questioned to respected national icons by utilizing technical innovations.

Bio:

Hanan Hammad is a social and cultural historian of the modern Middle East who holds the Arab-American Educational Foundation chair in Modern Arab History at the University of Houston, Texas. Her work focuses on gender, sexuality, working classes, and popular culture. She is the author of numerous academic publications, most notably *Industrial Sexuality: Gender, Urbanization, and Social Transformation in Egypt* (2016) and *Unknown Past: Layla Murad, the Jewish-Muslim Star of Egypt* (2022). Her research has won prizes from the National Women's Studies Association, the Association for Middle East Women's Studies, MESA, the Arab American Book Awards, and the Journal of Social History.

## LOAB HAMMOUD (UNIVERSITY OF WÜRZBURG)

Title: *Youm Sa'id (Happy Day): The Instrumental Music of Muhammad Abdel Wahhab (1902-1991)*

Abstract:

This performance-lecture will present a series of instrumental pieces by Muhammad Abdel Wahhab (1902-1991), one of Egypt's most prominent composers, actors and musicians who is known as "Mutrib al-Muluk wa al-Umara' [the singer of kings and princes]". Listeners will get insights into his musical work, and they will learn about his connection to Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932), the poet whom Abdel Wahhab met in the early stages of his career and who introduced him not only to Egypt's high society, but also wrote the most important and famous Qasa'id that Abdel Wahhab composed in his career.

Bio:

Loab Hammoud is an ethnomusicologist and a Humboldt postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute of Music Research at the University of Würzburg, where he researches identity formation in musical performances and the role of music in the lives of Syrian musicians, as they adapt and reconstruct their homes in Germany. Previously, he was a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Haifa. He plays and teaches the oud, as well as Arab music theory. His previous research focused on the culture of the Egyptian dawr (as composed by Zakaria Ahmed), the history of Palestinian Arab art music, as well as Arab music education and performance among Israeli Jews.

## GISELA KITZLER (UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA)

Title: *Mahraganāt – Music of the Egyptian Streets?*

Abstract:

*Mahraganāt* is a widespread genre of computer-based popular music primarily associated with male youth hailing from working-class neighbourhoods in Egypt's major cities. It started emerging in 2005 as a genre reaching mostly people from the same social class as its producers, however, it can be considered a mainstream phenomenon listened to across all social classes since the mid-2010s. Being immensely popular especially with a young audience in Egypt and even in other Arab countries, *mahraganāt* has received harsh criticism from cultural elites and government institutions alike. The criticism aimed at *mahraganāt* in public discourse, which culminated in an official ban of the genre, is usually presented as a concern for public morals, the Egyptian youth, and the Egyptian culture as a whole. However, an analysis of the Egyptian public discourse as it appears in newspaper articles and TV-programmes shows that the rejection of *mahraganāt* is mainly based on the conspicuous audibility and visibility of an underprivileged social class and its cultural products. This paper aims to show how *mahraganāt* songs express a certain class identity by using slang expressions and touching upon taboo topics in its lyrics, thereby creating a sense of authenticity and credibility lacking in other popular music genres in Egypt. At the same time, this contribution will point out the main arguments in the anti-*mahraganāt*-discourse in Egyptian public discourse, which also shows parallels to previous discourses on musical phenomena rooted in the urban lower classes, such as Aḥmad Adawiyya and urban *shaʿbi* music in general. It will become clear that social class is the major factor for the disapproval of *mahraganāt* voiced by Egyptian state institutions on the one hand, but on the other hand, the class aspect plays an important role for the popularity of the genre.

Bio:

Gisela Kitzler is Senior Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Vienna, Department of Near Eastern Studies. She holds a PhD in Arabic Philology and lived in Cairo from 2012 to 2015. Her research area is Arabic Dialectology (primarily Egyptian Arabic) and Arabic Popular Culture, focussing on Egyptian *shaʿbi*- and *mahraganāt*-music.

## SALWA EL-SHAWAN CASTELO-BRANCO (NOVA UNIVERSITY LISBON)

Title: Music and Class in Twentieth Century Cairo: A Perspective

Abstract:

In this paper, I explore the intersection of music and social class dynamics in Cairo as it plays out in the lives and careers of selected twentieth century musicians, comparing those who were active in the domains of Western and Arab music. I argue that through their musical careers, some musicians developed their musical creativity, but also acquired cultural capital and social mobility. I also discuss the intersection of socio-economic class and the values, musical options and tastes of practitioners and audiences. I draw on field and archival research that I carried out in Cairo intermittently since the late 1970s, as well as my experience as a music student in the Cairo National Conservatory.

Bio:

Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco earned her PhD in Ethnomusicology at Columbia University and is past President of the International Council for Traditional Music (2013 – 2021) and Professor Emerita of Ethnomusicology at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (UNL) in Portugal. She is founder, past president (1995- 2020) and President Emerita of the Institute for Ethnomusicology – Center for Studies in Music and Dance at the same university. She was Vice-President of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the International Council for Traditional Music; and Vice Chancellor of the UNL. Before joining the UNL, she was assistant professor at New York University (1979–1982). She was also visiting professor at Columbia University, Princeton University; Tinker Professor at the University of Chicago; Overseas Visiting Scholar at St. John's College, Cambridge University; and Gulbenkian Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Among the honors and awards she received is the Glarean Award for music research of the Swiss Musicological Society (2013) and membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2024). Her publications include: *Music and the Making of Portugal and Spain since the Nineteenth Century* (ed.) with Matthew Machin Autenrieth and Samuel Llano (2023). *Transforming Ethnomusicology*, 2 vols (ed.) with Beverly Diamond (2021); *Portugal and Spain: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, with Susana Moreno Fernández (2019); *Enciclopédia da Música em Portugal no Século XX*, 4 volumes (ed.) (2010); *Traditional Arts in Southern Arabia: Music and Society in Sohar, Sultanate of Oman*, with Dieter Christensen (2009).

## ANDREW SIMONS (DARTMOUTH COLLEGE)

Title: *Egypt's "Vulgar Soundscape": Class, Culture, and the Economic Opening*

Abstract:

What insights might the crossroads of class and music offer into the making of modern Egypt? How might popular culture assist us in radically reimagining the past, as opposed to merely complementing what we already know about it? And in what ways might the stories told by everyday technologies invite us to revisit key historical developments? In this talk, we will explore how cassette technology decentralized state-controlled Egyptian media long before the advent of the internet, empowering an unprecedented number of people to participate in the creation and circulation of culture during a time of tremendous change. In tracing the transformation of cultural consumers into cultural producers, we will pay particular attention to Egypt's "Vulgar Soundscape." Beginning with attacks on „imposter artists“ and “unqualified producers” in the popular Egyptian press, we will examine the cultural politics of Egypt's economic opening. Next, we will turn to Ahmad Adawiya, a pioneer of sha'bi music, who was at the very center of debates on the downfall of music and the “death of taste” decades before Mahraganat artists surfaced at the center of similar criticisms. Lastly, we will scrutinize the efforts of local authorities to dictate the shape Egyptian culture assumed. As we will see, discussions of “vulgar” cassettes were not merely about aesthetic sensibilities, but who had the right to create Egyptian culture.

Bio:

Andrew Simon is a historian of media, popular culture, and the Middle East at Dartmouth College. He was a fellow at the Center for Arabic Study Abroad in downtown Cairo during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and is the modern history book review editor for the International Journal of Middle East Studies. Currently, he is writing a biography of Shaykh Imam and is making his private collection of cassettes public in a digital archive for anyone to access. Andrew can be found on Twitter @simongandrew.

## KAWKAB TAWFIQ (TUSCIA UNIVERSITY)

t.b.a.

## CLARA WENZ (UNIVERSITY OF WÜRZBURG)

Title: *The Horse Carriage - A Shifting Class Motif in Egyptian Popular Music*

Abstract:

Following recent research on the implication of different means of transportation such as the taxi (Hirschkind 2006; Grippo 2010), the micro-bus (Puig 2021) and the bicycle (Stokes 2023) in Egyptian popular music, my paper explores a repertoire of songs that revolve around the horse carriage (*el-hantur*). These songs, many of which were composed for theatrical plays or films, not only tend to borrow their rhythms from specific horse gates, thus rendering the horse as a musical agent; they also narrate a history of different class belongings. From Sayyed Darwish's "el-'Arbagi" ("The Coachman", 1919) to the hit "Irkab el-Hantur" ("I ride a buggy", 2006), by sha'bi singer and actress Amina, my paper aims to highlight how the horse carriage changes from being a site of working-class labour, a symbol of social mobility and modern, cross-class love, to a (satirized) item of sha'bi authenticity. The less important the carriage becomes as a means of transport, I argue, the more cultural capital it gains.

Bio:

Clara Wenz holds a BA in Philosophy (Munich), a MA in Middle Eastern Studies (SOAS, London) and a PhD in Ethnomusicology (SOAS). Her research is centred on musical cultures from the Arabic speaking world and their entanglement with ongoing histories of national conflict and migration. Prior to joining the Ethnomusicology Department of the Institute of Music Research at the University of Würzburg, she held a post-doc position at the Martin Buber Society of Fellows in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 2023, she became a member of the Young Academy of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. She is currently working on an ethnography of the *raqs al-kheil* ("dance of the horse"), a musical-equestrian tradition that is performed in Egypt.