When *Maqam* is Reduced to a Place
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In March 1932, a large-scale impressive festival took place at the National Academy of Music in Cairo: the first international Congress of Arab Music, convened by King Fuad I. The reason for holding it was the King's love of music, and its aim was to present and record various musical traditions from North Africa and the Middle East, to study and research them. Musical delegations from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia and Turkey entered the splendid building on Malika Nazli Street (today Ramses Street) in central Cairo and in between the many performances experts discussed various subjects, such as musical scales, the history of Arab music and its position in relation to Western music and, of course: the *maqam* (pl. *maqamat*), the Arab melodic mode.

The congress would eventually be remembered, for good reason, as one of the constitutive events in the history of modern Arab music. The Arab world had been experiencing a cultural revival since the 19th century, brought about by reforms introduced under the Ottoman rule and through encounters with Western ideas and technologies. This renaissance, termed *Al-Nahda* or awakening, was expressed primarily in the renewal of the Arabic language and the incorporation of modern terminology. Newspapers were established—*Al-Waq'i'a al-Masriya* (Egyptian Affairs), founded under orders of Viceroy and Pasha Mohammad Ali in 1828, followed by *Al-Ahram* (The Pyramids), first published in 1875 and still in circulation today; theaters were founded and plays written in Arabic; neo-classical and new Arab poetry was written, which deviated from the strict rules of classical poetry; and new literary genres emerged, such as novels and short stories, uncommon in Arab literature until that time.

Traditional Arab music also underwent a revival and a renewal as part of the *Nahda*, throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Composers and musicians such as Abdu al-Hamuli (1836–1901), Salama Hegazi (1852–1917), Sayed Darwish (1892–1923) and Mohammed Abdel Wahab (1902–1991) brought about a flourishing of Arab music, drew influence from other styles, invented new *maqamat* and adjusted Western instruments to Arab melodies. Abdel Wahab, for example, was influenced by Western and Latin musical styles such as the tango and the rumba, and used Western instruments as well as Western Solfège notation.

The first international Congress of Arab Music was thus a pinnacle of this revival, and was attended by renowned Western musicians and musicologists, among them Hungarian composer and pianist Béla Bartók (1881–1945), German composer and conductor Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), French musicologist and painter Rodolphe d'Erlanger (1872–1932), British musicologist Henry George Farmer (1882–1965), German-Jewish musicologist Curt Sachs (1881–1951) and German-Jewish ethnomusicologist Robert Lachmann (1892–1939).

The presence of Arab Jews was especially conspicuous. In the Iraqi delegation, for example, all players apart from Muslim vocalist Mohammed Al-Qubanchi (1900–1989) were Jewish. In Iraq more than in any other Arab country, Jews were well-assimilated in Arab and Islamic culture and played an essential part in the development of Iraqi culture—the ancient community was long-established, and its children were given a literary Arab education even if they attended foreign schools. During the first half of the 20th century, many Jewish writers and poets, such as Mourad Michael (1895–1973), Ya'qub Bilbul (1920–2003), Meir Basri (1911–2006) and, especially, Anwar Shaul (1904–1984), left their impression on Arab and especially Iraqi literature and poetry. Others, such as Samir Naqqash (1938–2004) and Sami Michael (b. 1926) continued to write and publish in Arabic even after immigrating to Israel in the mid-1950s.

In Music, Iraqi Jews produced a long line of renowned artists who became famous among their community as well as throughout Iraqi society. In fact, many of the songs that are still regarded as "Iraqi folk songs" were composed by the Jewish *oud* and violin players brothers Saleh al-Kuwaiti (1908–1986) and Dawud al-Kuwaiti (1910–1976; grandfather of Israeli singer Dudu Tassa), performed by Jewish singer Salima Pasha Mourad (1912–1974) and originally played by Jewish instrumentalists. It might be that, since playing many musical instruments, especially string instruments, is forbidden by Islamic law, it was mostly Jews who learnt to play them and it was Jews who comprised most of the first Iraqi Broadcast Station ensemble, established in 1936 by the al-Kuwaiti brothers. It is said today, that when the Jews left Iraq in the early 1950s, Iraqi music stalled for a decade.

It is no wonder, then, that the delegation representing Iraq at the Cairo Conference was composed mostly of Jewish players: Ezra Aharon played the *oud*, Yusuf Zaarur the *qanun*, Yusuf Patao the *santoor*, Abraham Saleh Simcha the *riq* (tambourine), Salih Shemayil the *jawze* (string instrument) and Yehuda Musa Shamash played the goblet drum. Ezra Aharon, appointed head of the delegation and appearing as "Azuri Efendi," was nominated the Conference's best musician.

It is to this moment that artists Dor Zlekha Levy and Aviad Zinemanas seek to return and to take us, in the chapter *Maqamat*. A mythical, constitutive moment, a moment of cultural glory and social wealth. It is a moment of a plethora of identities, where Judaism does not contrast Arabism and the East nonetheless contains the West.

By welding the Arab *maqamat* circle to the Hebrew one and to the staff, Zleka Levy and Zinemanas re-weld that identity—the possibility of an identity that contains being Jewish, Arab and Western. In their electronic arrangements for ethnic instruments from the Cairo Conference recordnings—Abraham Saleh Simcha on the *riq* and Yusuf Zaarur on the *qanun*—they provide them with a contemporary, relevant sound that draws a direct

line between the past and the here and now, especially when the sounds of David Zaarur's *qanun* overlap the sounds of Yusuf Zaarur, his great-grandfather. Playing the *qanun*—perhaps even the *qanun* itself—has seemingly passed in the family from generation to generation. A direct line is seemingly drawn from the great-grandfather's sounds to the sounds played by his great-grandson. It is as if Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas have taken the strip of history, cut it somewhere in 1932, and have taped it directly onto the film playing on from 2017. As if there was no severance in the middle. As if 85 years have not elapsed: years of immigration and erasing, and alienation, and loss, and ignoring, and denial, years of identity and sounds and audience and melody and community. Another community.

Only seemingly, though. For by distorting the sound, "escaping" from the rhythms, the disharmony between the Hebrew and the Arab *maqam*, the inaccuracies between the chosen *maqam* on the circle and the heard sound, the electronic amplification of the *riq* beats or the sampling of Yusuf Zaarur's *qanun* and creating an atmosphere of tension and strain, Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas disrupt the harmonic image that could have been created. They capture this moment in history, that moment of joint Arab-Jewish creation, turn their gaze onto it and examine their own contemporary point of view of that historical moment, their confusion and perplexity as they face it.

The viewers observe the *maqam,* which itself looks like the zodiac; they admire its beauty, its symmetry and esthetics, the handwritings (which might be Ezra Aharon's) and the accuracy. Yet they also face it rather helplessly. Most of us have no idea what this circle is, not even what the meaning of the word is, nor how to recognize one *maqam* or another; we might even not know how to read and write in Arabic.

Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas freeze this moment and treasure it like an ultimate moment of joint musical creation, of a joint life, of another possibility. But they take us there not as a purely nostalgic act, a fond remembrance of an (at least partially) imagined past—but rather as a kind of obsessive act of trauma sufferers who repeatedly return to that moment before everything changed. They seize this moment in their works, no more than it is already seized, for many decades, in the hearts of thousands of people.

For there was that moment. Even if people lived it throughout their lives, historically speaking it was indeed a moment. And after that pinnacle, as clichés would have it, the slope was waiting. If the 1920s were the Golden Age of Iraqi Jews, from the mid-1930s onwards the atmosphere began to change.

For Jews and Arabs alike (as well as for other minorities in Arab countries), in the 1920s the concept of nationality—whether Arab or Zionist—was in its infancy, inasmuch as the movements had not yet reached a head-on clash. Local national identity—Iraqi, Egyptian

or other—could still contain Jews and other minorities, and one could still imagine a society with multitude origins, ethnicities and religions, all united in one common denominator—belonging to one country where they were all born and where they had lived for generations. This is the moment, almost the last moment, when a different future could still be imagined.

Most Iraqi Jews would continue living there until the mid-20th century: they would acquire an education, deal in commerce and flourish economically, hold a few important positions or gain public recognition for their art. However, from the mid-1930s the atmosphere would deteriorate. In 1933 King Faisal would be succeeded by his son Ghazi, whose approach would be far stricter than his father's, and the concept of Iraqi nationalism would now be replaced by pan-Arab nationalism, led by intellectual Iraqis, to which Jews were denied access. The ongoing conflict surrounding Eretz Israel/Palestine, as well as the growing influence of the Zionist movement in Iraq, both played a great part in the deterioration of relationships between Jews and their neighbors.

However, at that moment in the musical conference, in 1932, the year when Iraq gained independence from Britain, nobody in the Iraqi delegation could imagine that Nazi propaganda would shortly be influencing Iraqi public opinion and that, within less than a decade, during the Jewish feast of Shavuot, in June 1941, this would escalate into a series of events known as *Farhud*, or dispossession, in which at least 179 Jews were murdered, mostly in Bagdad and Basra. Nobody in the Iraqi delegation could have dreamed that within a few years most of them would be forced to leave for ever the motherland they were representing. Ezra Aharon, the head of the delegation, who settled in Jerusalem in 1934, probably never imagined that he would never be able to return to his birthplace, Iraq. Nor could anyone have imagined that upon rising to power in 1979, Saddam Hussain would order that the names of all Jewish musicians and composers be erased from their works in the Iraqi Radio archive.

Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas capture this moment in history when it was still possible to imagine a different future. And as they gaze at it—a seemingly innocent, puzzled and perplexed gaze—they undermine the national idea as it has developed, or at least the narrative it produces. With the landscape image they create, the artists raise a series of defiant queries, "mischievous" in national terms: Whose landscape is this? Who does it belong to? Which of these two motherlands is mine? Who or what determines where an individual's motherland is? Furthermore: Who is my enemy? And who says my enemy is necessarily my enemy?

This is not the first time that Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas seek to disrupt the national "good order" and to expose the breaks in its narrative, scribble over the image it wishes to paint. In the video installation Noon (2015) they present an item from Iraqi television

in which singer Nazem al-Ghazali's (1921–1963) blind *qanun* player is performing a solo piece. The film is stuck and keeps repeating itself, again and again. With Zienmanas' help, the *qanun* player's music becomes a Red Color alert siren. The siren is interrupted by the playing, the playing by the siren, the whole film is faulty. "Sorry, faulty broadcast," Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas seem to say. But the fault is not ours, the artists or the viewers—but yours, the policy determiners.

Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas yearn in their exhibition for a place that no longer exists, for a time that is no longer extant and perhaps never even existed for more than a moment. It is not only their own yearning, however. In recent years, longing for the time when Jews were part of Iraqi society can be found in Iraqi culture: in the documentary film *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection* (2002) by Swiss-Iraqi director Samir (Jamal al-Din); in the television series *Salima Basha* (2012) about the life of Jewish singer Salima Mourad; in the translation into Arabic of Israeli author Almog Behar's 2010 novel *Rachel and Ezekiel [Tshachla wa-Chazkil]* and its distribution in Iraq (2016); and in Marsha Emerman's documentary, co-scripted with Majid Shokor, *On the Banks of the Tigris* (2015), uncovering the hidden story of Iraqi music. Thus, Zlekha Levy and Zinemanas' yearnings become an action. An action of yearning which they share with those whom we are forbidden to contact.

The word *Maqam* is used in Hebrew, *makom*, in its physical meaning—a place, but is also one of the divine names, the Omnipresent, for example in the Passover Haggadah. The Arabic word *maqam,* however, has a multitude of meanings: place, status, musical scale, pilgrimage location, holy burial site, and more. The feminine form, *maqamah*, denotes a literary genre. Since the plural (masculine and feminine) is *maqamat*, the direct translation of the exhibition title as "Places" reduces the meaning of the word to its physical meaning, that of a locus, and the word loses both its musical facet in Arabic and the spiritual, even divine facet it has in Hebrew. Perhaps it is the same meaning, that has been lost.

The Iraqi delegation to the Cairo Congress of Arab Music (1932), courtesy of the National Library