

Musicians and Artists in Exile: Preserving, Creating or Eulogizing Syrian Culture?

Workshop, 13-15 October 2022

“Everything useful [for artistic inspiration] was sold and looted during the war.”
- Syrian fine arts student in Istanbul, Oct 2020



Workshop overview

Since the start of the Syrian civil war, nearly 11 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced from their homes (UNHCR 2021). In the midst of the humanitarian crisis triggered, and in the struggle to control Syria’s political and social narrative since 2011, Syria’s artists, musicians and cultural advocates have been all but side-lined.

This workshop aims to correct this lack of attention by inviting select researchers from Europe and the Levant to work side by side with Syrian musicians and artists currently living outside of Syria. Presentations will be based largely on on-going research examining Syrian aesthetics and cultural production in exile, and will be further developed in breakout sessions and a roundtable discussion with musicians and practitioners (those working for Syrian NGOs and cultural organizations) throughout a two and a half day event. Although unusual to see musicians and scholars engaging together at an academic workshop, it is envisaged that this pairing will encourage researchers and “those being researched” to have a more equal dialogue when exploring cultural production in exile. Furthermore, this workshop will create new connections among scholars, musicians, artists, writers, architects and practitioners working on issues of displacement and forced migration and further strengthen existing networks on aesthetics, migration and mobility. In addition to the traditional panel and roundtable format, an evening of musical performance will complement a public lecture delivered by a Syrian poet or writer in exile addressing the theme of cultural identity and lost heritage. The outcome will be either a special issue of an academic journal or a docubook that combines scholarly articles with artist memoirs and vignettes.

Some key questions this workshop considers include: How do Syrian musicians and artists respond to their changing social and historical circumstances? What happens to artistic and musical tradition in exile? How does forced migration shape a community’s cultural and aesthetic forms of expression? To what extent is creativity hindered by displacement? To what extent does displacement provide positive spaces of integration and creative productivity? Is there a possible cross-cultural dialogue between migrant and host that enriches cultural and musical traditions?

Workshop Schedule

Day One: Thursday 13 October

11:00-13:00 Arrival and check-in at Westminster College

14:00 - 14:45 Registration

14:45 - 15:00 Welcome and Introduction to Workshop [Dunya Habash]

15:00-16:00 **Panel 1:** Aesthetics & Forced Migration [Dawn Chatty and Dunya Habash; response by Ammar Azzouz]

16:00-16:30 Coffee Break

16:30-17:30 **Panel 2:** Musical Innovation in Exile [Serkan Hakki and Bassel Hariri]

17:30 - 19:30 Free time / Cambridge Tour

19:30 - 20:30 **Conference Dinner, St. Edmund's College**

Day Two: Friday 14 October

9:30-10:30 **Panel 3:** Aesthetic Agency and Political Expression [Tom Western and Shayna Silverstein]

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-12:00 **Book Launch:** Khalid Said on the Role of Literature in Exile [this session will be conducted in Arabic]

12:00 -13:00 Lunch

13:00-14:30 **Panel 4:** In conversation with Andalusia Trio [Hazem, Ward, Osama; chaired by Jonathan Shannon]

14:30 -15:00 Coffee Break

15:00-15:45 **Lecture:** Yammen Jazbeh on Teaching the Next Generation in Exile

15:45-16:30 Breakout session and closing

16:30 – Free time

18:30 – **Public lecture** [Issam Kourbaj, *Leave to Remain: 139 moons and counting*]

19:30 – **Concert** [Yammen Jazbeh & Andalusia Trio]

Day Three: Saturday 15 October

9:30-10:30 **Keynote:** 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning: Thoughts on Cultural Preservation, Innovation, and Loss in Troubling Times' [Jonathan Shannon]

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-12:00 **Roundtable:** Where are we now? [All participants to discuss next steps for publication and beyond; chaired by Dunya Habash]

12:00 - Departure

15:00 **Jam Session:** Faculty of Music Recital Room [Bassel Hariri & Co.]