

TRAVEL ON A SONG—THE ROOTS OF ZANZIBAR *TAARAB*

by

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Introduction

Zanzibar, in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Tanzania, consists of the neighbouring islands Unguja and Pemba which are home to a music style called *taarab* – a distinct musical form that blends Arabic and African as well as Indian, Latin, Indonesian and European influences. This style of music can be found with variations all along the Swahili Coast in Tanzania and Kenya, with the degree of influence from different musical cultures varying from place to place. Egyptian Arabic influence is most audible in Zanzibar *taarab*, while Mombasa (Kenya) exhibits a more pronounced Indian influence and Lamu (Kenya), has remained closer to its Yemeni origins.

When referring to the chronicle by Shaib Abeid of Zanzibar's oldest *taarab* orchestra – Nadi Ikhwan Safaa – most Swahili texts focus on the Zanzibar court as the source of *taarab* in East Africa (Saleh 1980, 1988a, 1988b; Mgana 1991; Hilal 2007). According to this version of events, the rich and well-traveled Omani ruler of Zanzibar, Sultan Barghash (1870-1888) introduced *taarab* to Zanzibar. Among his many achievements, which included building palaces with elevators, and introducing plumbing and electricity, he also decided to establish an orchestra. He chose a talented youth by the name of Mohamed Ibrahim to travel to Egypt. This young man went with the explicit purpose of studying *taarab* music and when he returned, he had gained sufficient knowledge and acquired enough instruments to form a court orchestra, which from then on would not only entertain the Sultan and his guests, but was to become the foundation of a music style which would spread all over the Swahili coast. This version of events is generally considered to be the historical truth in Zanzibar. Other scholars have proposed a more diversified approach, taking into account the simultaneous divergent development of *taarab* music along the Swahili coast (Graebner 2003, 2004; Askew 2002; Fair 2001).

This paper examines the origin of Zanzibar *taarab* by considering the relationship between the two closely related music styles in Zanzibar and Egypt. The investigation draws on existing literature on *taarab's* history, with a special emphasis on the musical culture of both countries. A comparative analysis of the music will determine the intrinsic characteristics of the two genres and establish the relationship between the two. Interviews with musicians, analysis of rehearsal and performance practices in

both countries¹ and an analysis of recordings from Zanzibar and Egypt will support the conclusion that the local version of taraab's origin is merely a part of a more complex history of cultural amalgamation.

Tarab and Taarab – a definition

For the purpose of distinction, two commonly used, yet different spellings of the English transliteration will be used throughout the text: *tarab* referring to the Arab and *taarab* to the Swahili tradition. The Arabic word *tarab* is derived from the root letters ت - ر - ج and means 'to be moved (with joy or grief)', 'to be delighted or enraptured' as well as 'to make music', 'to sing, vocalize or chant' (Wehr, 1976). The term appears widely in medieval writings on music and musicians (Racy, 2003). In the Arabic use of the term, we can distinguish between several closely related meanings of the word. Firstly it can refer to a state of being, an elevated, if not ecstatic state of mind that is induced by the pleasure of listening to music. The ecstatic state can be induced by a highly gifted and professional musician in the proper mood-enhancing setting, including skilled and appreciative listeners (*sammi'*, *sammi'ah*), or by a group of skilled (professional) musicians who are playing together. The Lebanese writer Rabih Alameddine (2009) summarises a definition in his novel *The Hakawati*: "*Tarab* is musical enchantment. It's when both musician and listener are bewitched by the music". Secondly it can be a reference to Middle Eastern urban 'art music', specifically the performance practice that began before World War I and developed to the height of its fame during the 1950s and 60s when the music of world renowned singers such as Umm Kulthum, Mohamed Abdul Wahab, Farid el Atrash, Asmahan and many others was broadcast worldwide through recordings, radio and film. The *mutrib* (singer who induces the *tarab* state through his/her singing) is usually accompanied by an ensemble of musicians. Around the turn of the century, this was most commonly a *takht* ensemble, consisting of a *ney*, a *qanun*, an *oud*, a violin and percussion (*dumbak* or *riq*). Later on, the *takht* ensemble often gave way to elaborate orchestral arrangements, which included strings, accordion, *ney*, woodwinds, *oud* and *qanun*, percussion etc.

The Swahili usage of the same word, which is commonly spelled '*taarab*', marks a specific music style. In classical Swahili *taarab*, a large orchestra with violins, cello, bass, accordion, keyboard, *oud*², *ney* (flute), *qanun*³, percussion – *dumbak* (goblet drum), *riq* (tambourine) and bongos – accompanies the solo singer (male or female), as well as a chorus consisting of female singers. Older recordings from the 1930s feature

¹ The author rehearsed and performed as a violinist with the groups *Nadi Ikhwan Safaa* in Zanzibar and *Qitharah* in Egypt between 2000 and 2010.

² The *oud* is a pear shaped stringed instrument, an ancestor of the lute.

³ The *qanun* is an important instrument used in the performance of Arabic music. The word "qanun" means "law" in Arabic. It is difficult to build, transport, tune and maintain, since it is rather large and every pitch has three different strings. Due to the nature of its design, including little metal plates that can be raised or lowered at the peg side of the strings, quarter tones can be played with accuracy, which makes the *qanun* a reference point for pitch and tuning. Its function within the Arabic musical context is comparable with the piano in Western music.

smaller ensembles, consisting of an *oud*, a violin and percussion, and on occasion a *ney* accompanies a singer. Classical *taarab* uses deep lyrics, with difficult and often archaic vocabulary, full of double entendres and metaphorical meanings, and is performed to a seated and (ideally) attentive and reflective audience.

Zanzibar musicians and audiences mainly enjoyed *taarab* music for leisure, as opposed to their counterparts of the Arabic *tarab* tradition, who were predominantly professional (even though *tarab* can also be experienced in amateur circles). The enjoyment of making music together is implicit in the usage of the term in both countries.

Tarab in Egypt – a brief history

The birthdate of Arabic *tarab* remains unclear. According to some contemporary musicians, it goes as far back as Pharaonic rule (Interview: Dr. Alfred Gamil, 23 July 2008). For the purpose of comparison, this paper traces the historical background and development of *tarab* music from the time of Khedive Ismail, who ruled Egypt from 1863-1879.

Khedive Ismail's early reign enjoyed a period of expansion and relative wealth, which provided an important backdrop for the development of the arts and international exchanges that influenced composers and musicians. The economic boom was fueled by the increased demand for Egyptian cotton due to the American Civil War, which halted cotton harvesting and its export in the United States. These years saw substantial infrastructural development in Egypt with building projects including public schools, bridges, canals, parks, railroads, harbours, the development of downtown Cairo with the National Museum, the library and the opera house. Khedive Ismail invested in the army and navy as a way of expanding his empire and launched military campaigns in East Africa. This brought Egypt in direct contact with Zanzibar and the Khedive hosted the Zanzibari Sultan Barghash at his court for two weeks in 1875 (Meyer 1992). Though no records remain of how this contact influenced the development of cultural life in Zanzibar, it demonstrates the political significance of territorial claims and the ensuing encounters.

The culmination of this glamorous period was the inauguration of the Suez Canal in the year 1869, which was attended by many important dignitaries from all over the world. Culturally, much happened during this time that would orient the Egyptian city towards modernisation and ultimately British subjugation from 1882–1922 (Goldschmidt 2008). The Cairo Opera House, which was an exact replica of La Scala in Milan, was completed in 1869 to host Verdi's *Rigoletto*⁴ on the occasion of the Suez Canal opening. The opera house seated 750 people and featured mainly European music (LePaitre 1963). The Opera House acted as a catalyst for musical development – in the 19th century, public performance venues increased dramatically with the

⁴ The famous opera *Aida* was commissioned for this purpose but not finished by Verdi in time for the opening.

establishment of the theatre district around the Opera House and Imad el Din Street in downtown Cairo. According to Danielson (1997), in her book *Umm Kulthum – The Voice of Egypt*, many young singers began their career with performances during the intermission of productions. General Frederick Kitchener (1923) recalls the musical life of Cairo during the 1920s:

Music – Arabic music, of course plays a large part in the lives of the Egyptians. But the real Arabic music in no way resembles the make-believe Oriental music which is dished up to the unsuspecting British public by certain ‘ultra-modern’ British composers.

Where was “real Arabic music” (as Kitchener referred to it) taking place? The Oriental Music Club, established in 1906, became the first music training center. Prior to this date, no music institute or music school existed, yet musical entertainment occupied an important place in Cairo city life. Where did musicians learn their trade?

Musical training in Egypt before the turn of the century centered mainly around three musical forms of training: recitation of the *Qur’an*, Western style military music and live street performances.

Training in recitation of the Holy Qur’an

In-depth study of the art of reciting the Qur’an included lessons in singing techniques, breath control and vocal placement, in-depth knowledge of *maqamats* (Arabic scales) and theory of the classical Arabic language. Throughout the 20th century, most famous and serious singers had a background in religious training, a characteristic much praised and appreciated by trained and cultivated listeners (Danielson 1991).

Training in Western style military marching music

Mohamed Ali Pasha I, who ruled Egypt from 1805-1848, established a school and orphanage for young musicians. This music was western in orientation and execution. It involved training mostly in brass and woodwind instruments as well as various flutes played in military bands made up of police and firemen. These bands performed publicly in various venues for the enjoyment of the public. Most teachers were foreign, but some students were also proficient in Egyptian music and began to fuse the genres (Interview: Gamil, 23 July 2008).

Training as an entertainer and performer

In the late Ottoman period (late 17th century until 1914 when the Ottoman Empire joined the central powers of World War I) musical performances tended to center around private events (*sahrahs*) typically associated with weddings. These performances could be attended by neighbours and were thus semi-public. The so-called *Aawalim* (singular: *Aalma*) – now often referred to as belly dancers – were often highly-skilled singers and performers who were hired to entertain the guests with dance, acrobatics and music. These musical events were closely associated with the *takht* ensemble. Other performance venues at this time were coffee houses, where one could encounter poet-

singers performing national epics and accompanying themselves on the *rabab* (one or two-stringed fiddle). By the end of the century *tarab* performances had become part of the repertoire of coffee houses (Racy 2003). Another group of musicians were called *Il Hawi* – entertainers who performed a sort of one-man show/theatre in the streets. Playing *riq*, tambourine and *mizmar*, their performance included juggling, clowning and fire eating and they were sometimes accompanied by a monkey or other forms of entertainment (Interview Gamil, 23 July 2008).

During the time when Mohamed Ibrahim is said to have come to Cairo, the musical life of the citizens of the city centered around the above-mentioned theatre district, including the Azbakkiya Gardens, which featured entertainment kiosks and open-air music halls, as well as the grand Imad el Din Street, on which a variety of cabarets and theatres could be found. The venues featured theatricals and performance of different music genres, and were host to many performing musicians. Close to the Azbakkiya Gardens was Muhamed Ali Street, where many musicians had their living quarters, and, in most cases, rehearsed and played together. Music shops lined the street and continue to do so even today.

Important *tarab* musicians of the 19th century were the singer Abduh al Hamuli and his wife Almaz al Hamuli, and the composer, performer and theorist Kamil al-Khula'I. Around the turn of the century, there was Sayyid Darwish, Salama Hijazi, Fathiyya Ahmed, Badi'a Masabni, Fatma Sirri, Hayat Sabri, Munirah al-Mahdiyya and many others⁵. Starting around the turn of the century, amateur musicians gathered in private clubs and rehearsed known and new compositions, which they would perform publicly at suitable occasions, such as religious holidays, engagements for weddings, government functions, etc.

The most famous *tarab* singer, Umm Kulthum, began performing around 1910 and had moved to Cairo by the 1920s, where she rose to fame, starting as a virtually unknown peasant girl singing religious repertoire, and becoming the biggest star of the Arabic music world. Around the same time, the young singer, composer and actor Mohamed Abd el-Wahab also began to rise to international stardom. With the advancement in recording technology, radio and later film, their voices would be heard and imitated in large parts of the world.⁶

Taarab in Zanzibar – a brief history

Little is documented on early performance practice of *taarab* music before and during the reign of Sultan Barghash who ruled Zanzibar as part of the Omani empire from

⁵ See CD: *Women of Egypt*, 1924-1931, Topic Records.

⁶ Wide scale commercial recording on cylinders and discs began in the early 20th century, but was replaced by radio and film from the 1930s onward. The first Egyptian film premiered in 1932 and quickly replaced the gramophone in terms of musical dissemination. In the early 1930s the Egyptian government established Egyptian radio, which became a central part of popular culture beyond the borders of the country. Umm Kulthum's legendary concerts on the first Thursday of every month were a prime example.

1870-1888. Like his contemporary, the Khedive in Egypt, he is associated with a certain glamorous lifestyle and orientation towards modern innovations during his reign, as well as an economic boom preceding a decline that led to the final subjugation by colonial powers. Zanzibar became a full British protectorate in 1890. After a failed attempt to challenge his brother's claim to the throne after the death of their father in 1856, Sultan Barghash spent several years in exile. During this time he got to know the culture of India, Arabic countries and Europe. In 1869, upon the death of his brother, he was called to seize the reign of the extensive Zanzibar Empire. Sultan Barghash built much of the infrastructure of what is known today as 'Stone Town', the historical part of Zanzibar city. He introduced streetlights, public water supply and baths, improved roads, parks and a hospital. During his reign he built six palaces, one of which is the 'House of Wonders', which was designed with the intention of introducing modernity into a ceremonial context. The palace was named *Beit el Ajaib* (House of Wonders) because of its many innovative features, including electricity, an elevator, wide balconies surrounding the entire building and an unprecedented scale of rooms and structures. In the year 1873, under pressure from the British, he signed a treaty against the trafficking of slaves. He also introduced and supported a steam-powered fleet of ships and a modern military force, which increased Zanzibari authority along the East African coast. It is this that brought him in direct contact with Egypt, though ironically, on a discord far from the harmonious sounds of *tarab* music.

In 1875, as part of Egypt's expansive foreign policy, Egyptian forces invaded Zanzibar territory. The territory in question was the mouth of the Juba River, located in today's Somalia, and a long way from Zanzibar Island. This resulted in a two-week visit by Sultan Barghash to Cairo as guest of the Khedive, who royally entertained him without discussing the military breach. In one of his letters the Khedive wrote:

During his stay in Cairo, the Sultan of Zanzibar notified me of his claims to all the coast as far as Cape Hafoun. I did not wish at the time to dispute his claim, as he was my guest, and silence was imposed on me by the elementary laws and custom of hospitality, and he went so far as to inform me that it was his intention as soon as he returned, to hoist his flag on the Juba River and Cape Hafoun (Stanton 1935).

This stay and the official connections with the Khedive may have inspired the Sultan to invite an Egyptian *takht* ensemble to perform at the Sultan's palace. Barghash and other Sultans invited foreign music groups to perform at their palaces on a regular basis. One of the catholic priests who lived in Zanzibar during the time of Barghash mentions in his chronicles:

... His highness understood this and ordered for musicians from Goa, made up of an almost complete orchestra, to come. Afterwards Sultan Barghash attracted Egyptians to Zanzibar, who he contracted as entertainers and part-time musicians, employed primarily for the leisure of the harem, to entertain on the one hand with clowneries and magic tricks on the grounds of the palace underneath the women's windows, and on the other hand for playing Turkish or Arabic tunes. These melancholy and dire melodies were much more appealing to the poor enclosed recluses than the French quadrilles or pas redoubles (Bureaux des Missions Catholiques 1886).

The chronicle of Zanzibar's oldest *taarab* orchestra, *Nadi Ikhwan Safaa*, written by Shaib Abeid, is generally referred to as the basis for the Egyptian claims to the origins of Zanzibar *taarab*. In this text, he makes reference to Sultan Barghash having a *takht* ensemble perform in his palace, inviting a group of musicians from Egypt as well as sending a young man named Mohamed Ibrahim to Cairo to study *qanun*.

The premier performance of this newly built orchestra took place in the magnificent *Beit el Ajaib*, which became a venue for regular dinner entertainment for the Sultan and his guests (Askew 2002). The musicians who performed at *Beit el Ajaib*, started to secretly train other musicians. *Taarab* was intended as a mode of entertainment exclusive to royalty and forbidden to be performed outside the palace. It was used as a means of sustaining the difference in class between the wealthy and the poor and to signify power that differentiated the ruling Arab-Omani elite from the general population (Fair 2001).

The year 1905 saw the establishment of the first public *taarab* club, *Nadi Ikhwani Safaa* which translates “Club of Brothers of Purity”, referring to a secret society of Islamic philosophers. This was an important 10th century Sufi brotherhood from Basra, Iraq that produced an extensive philosophical and religious encyclopaedia, *Rasā'il ikhwān as-safā' wa khillān al-wafā'* (*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and Loyal Friends*) and expanded substantially on existing Arabic theories on music (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).⁷ Some disagreement exists as to the repertoire of the early days of the club's performances. According to Fair (2001) the members prided themselves on performing precise copies of Egyptian tunes available on gramophone recordings or *taarab* pieces as performed (and probably taught) by the Sultan's Band, whereas Werner Graebner points to Shaib Abeid as a source of information that refers to performances of Swahili songs in the Lamu style.

It was not until the 1920-30s that more light was shed on the early days of Zanzibar *taarab*.⁸ The music moved into an increasingly public sphere around the turn of the century with musicians performing *taarab* for purposes other than entertaining the affluent class. By the advent of Siti Bint Saad in the 1920s, now often nicknamed the ‘mother of *taarab*’ for having popularized the genre along the Swahili coast and beyond with a stellar career and prolific recordings, Arabic songs were adapted to the Swahili language, which was the spoken language in the Sultan's palace by the turn of the century. Siti Bint Saad is generally credited with popularizing the genre by being the first performer to sing in Swahili. Since earlier recordings in Swahili by different singers exist, her significance is more likely related to the wide distribution of her recordings. Contrary

⁷ It is likely that the name for this group was chosen because of the Sufis *Ikhwan al Safaa* philosophical connection and understanding of music as communication with God as well as the secret nature of their gatherings, which would have found resonance in the furtive gathering of musicians outside of the Sultan's sphere of influence.

⁸ Carl Meinhof made the first recordings in East Africa in 1902/3 but it was not until the 1920s that European companies began to investigate the East African market for recordings and sales. By that time, Indian records had the largest share of sales (Graebner, 2003).

to Graebner's ironic reflection that she may have reached her status as Zanzibar's most famous *taarab* singer due to coincidence and the sharpness of her voice cutting across the din of heavily used and scratchy shellack records (Graebner 2004), it is more likely that Siti Bin Saad had a special gift and made a unique contribution to the *taarab* genre at a time of great political and social changes. Similar to Umm Kulthum, she received a solid training in recitation of the Qur'an involving mastering pronunciation, breathing and vocal techniques. As a gifted performer and composer, her witty songs utilised language well and commented upon contemporary issues that were often viewed as controversial by the ruling powers. In 1928, Siti Bint Saad and her group of musicians went to Bombay to record with His Master's Voice (HMV), followed by two more recording sessions in 1929 and 1930. The spread of her recordings is one of the reasons for her immense fame as few other musicians of this time enjoyed similar widespread publicity.

The years following World War II saw the recording industry expand in East Africa, but by this time, the *taarab* style or genre had undergone major changes, being transformed from a small ensemble featuring an *oud*, a violin, a drum and a singer, to a large scale orchestra often heard in Egyptian movies, records and on the radio. In the 1970s, a multitude of *taarab* groups existed both in Zanzibar and in coastal towns on the mainland, a few of which are still active today – Nadi Ikhwan Safaa and Culture Musical Club being the principal groups. A modern development of the classical *taarab* style in the 20th century is called *rusha roho* or *mipasho*. It has changed the traditional instrumental set-up to a pop format, using mainly electric keyboard, drum set and guitar to accompany the singers in songs that use explicit lyrics and thrive on statements degrading a rival, gossip or crude allusions to sex.

Relationship between Egyptian and Zanzibar repertoire – a listening analysis

Part of the Zanzibar *taarab* repertoire is known to be an exact replica of Egyptian pieces, while other Zanzibar songs use only a melody, a rhythm, or a phrase from the structure of an existing composition. Together with musicians from the group *Qitharah*, I analyzed more than one hundred (100) Zanzibar *taarab* songs to investigate just how strong the relationship between Egyptian and Zanzibar repertoire is, and whether there are detectable changes over time. The musicians from the group *Qithara* were selected for their encyclopaedic knowledge of traditional Egyptian *tarab* pieces and their familiarity through previous exposure with Zanzibar music.⁹ Zanzibar songs were chosen from a variety of music groups and recording dates. We listened to one hundred Zanzibar songs and evaluated their closeness to Arabic *tarab* on a scale of 1-10. No relationship was rated as 0, unspecific responses such as “if the words were in Arabic, this would be an Egyptian song” classified as 1, similarities to certain styles or phrases of certain songs classified as 2-4, direct quotations of musical phrases rated between 5-8 and copies of entire songs and melodies were rated 9-10.

⁹ Special thanks go to Dr. Alfred Gamil, Mohamed Aly and especially Ahmed Mohsin for his vast musical knowledge and memory, as well as his patience in listening to endless Zanzibar songs, many of them with abominable sound quality.

Out of the one hundred randomly selected Zanzibar *taarab* songs from various recordings and groups, thirty-eight elicited a direct or indirect association with Egyptian repertoire. A total of six songs were rated with a strength factor of 9 or 10. For example, the Swahili song *Mkuganya*, recorded in 1950 with the Dar es Salaam based *Jauharah Orchestra*, directly quotes an Umm Kulthum song by the composer Mohamed al Asabgi in the instrumental prelude. Four songs quote musical phrases or parts of a piece, Eighteen songs show similarities with existing pieces and ten songs show a marginal similarity in style, and are rated 1.

I also looked at the spectrum of performers, which are most frequently alluded to as being musically influential by Zanzibar musicians and historians.¹⁰ The fact that Mohamed Abd el-Wahab seems to have had the most direct impact on Zanzibar repertoire seems surprising at first, since Umm Kulthum is always mentioned as the first source of inspiration by local musicians and the *taarab* club *Nadi Ikhwani Safaa* continues to assimilate some of her songs as a standard part of their performance repertoire up to this day. But, this can be understood in the context of the singer's repertoire – Umm Kulthum's performance repertoire featured highly sophisticated, hard to imitate phrases with long through-composed pieces in the form of *dawr*, *qasida*, *muwashshah* or difficult *monologues*. Mohamed Abd el-Wahab's music on the other hand was "lighter", more accessible and easy to learn and known for his "modernisation" and ingenious absorption and imitation of different music styles – a practice that was part of Zanzibar's melting-pot culture for many centuries. He integrated many features of Western orchestral and operatic music into his compositions, outlined chords as part of the melodic structure, used large orchestras, added harmonic accompaniments to melody, and introduced cello, double bass and other instruments that were not previously part of a traditional Arabic ensemble.

Going back in time, it seemed reasonable to postulate that the Egyptian influence would be stronger in the earlier pieces of Zanzibar *Taarab*, if the theory of Egyptian origin was true. A separate listening analysis of nineteen songs paid special attention to the early recordings of the 1930s by Zanzibar singer Siti Bint Saad in reference to her contemporary Egyptian singers. Results show that fewer of her earlier songs are related to the Egyptian repertoire than those from 20 or 30 years later, but quotes of melodies and songs are more direct.

Out of nineteen songs, four quote Egyptian pieces directly. This suggests that the Egyptian style became more assimilated with Zanzibari music as time went on, while it tended to be a process of imitation or copying in the beginning. An interesting observation is also that *maqamats* used in the earlier Zanzibar repertoire tended to be similar but not the same as in Egypt. The relation between individual notes of the *maqam* in microtonal steps differs from the known Egyptian scales, suggesting other cultural influences. The chart below shows the analysis of Siti Bint Saad's repertoire

¹⁰ In a July 2008 interview with Bi Kidude, Zanzibar's oldest active musician, she recalled "I used to go to the cinema two or three times for the same film in order to learn a certain song by Mohamed Abd el-Wahab or Umm Kulthum. No one taught me, I just went until I knew the song."

	Arabic	Siti bint Saad Song Swahili	Comment	Strength
1		Baba Pakistani		0
2		Beru Beru	strange distance between tones, like kurd but different maybe Iraqi style? maqam lami – Iraqi?	0
3	Mhd Abd el-Wahab Film: <i>دي بس موي</i> Year: 1939-1940 Song: <i>يلائح يوحوري يلى بئنا كنا هيا</i>	Enyi wa Hiyari	music intro only, exact copy of melody and instrumentation but variation in rhythm Arabic song part starts at 1.24 Arabic: Maqam Bayati Swahili: starts at Maqam Nahawand	7
4	Umm Kulthum Form: monologue Composer: qasabgi Year: 1926 Title: <i>كفويط ي نراز</i>	Ilahi wadudu	music intro only Dulab from Maqam Hijaz	7
5		Juwa Toka	like maqam Bayati, but also different tonal steps	0
6	Umm Kulthum Form: Dawr song from 1920s Title: <i>هللا نم صلح ي دد و د</i>	Nacheka sina furah	musical intro, first half from Umm Kulthum song maqam zingaran in Egyptian song (higaz + nahawand) Swahili: in between Ajam and Siqa	6
7		Nilikwenda matembezi	maqam: like huzam, but different tonal steps	0
8		Njia ngurusumbwe	maqam unclear, steps	0
9		Siku hizi	like children's song, but not Arabic Sudanese flavour? maqam Ajam	0
10		Subira nangoja	Swahili intro: dulab huzam	0
11		Suhuba ya dai		0
12		Taireni waganga	strange maqam, like Beru – different	0
13		Tausi		0
14		Uchungu	maqam sika, rarely used	0
15		uchungu wa mwana	like Hijaz but different microsteps	0
16		Unguja ni njema	maqam Nawa Athr, dulab in Nawa Athr	0
17		Muhogo wa Jan'gombe	nearly Bayati, but different	0
18		Nimekwisha Swalitika		0
19	Dulab	Wewe Paka	famous Dulab in intro. Nahawand	4

Figure 1. Analysis of Siti Bint Saad repertoire.

In summary, of the songs that were analyzed, 40% of those from the 1940s or later show a relation of varying strength to Egyptian music as opposed to only 20% before 1940. Contemporary Zanzibar *taarab* retains a striking similarity to the Egyptian style of *tarab* music. The following overview demonstrates that a significant amount of Arabic influence is traceable in Zanzibar music up to today, taking into consideration that the presence of Arabic *tarab* and film in East Africa has dwindled to a negligible size. Following is a comparative analysis that outlines musical characteristics in Egyptian *tarab* and Zanzibar *taarab*.

Tonal structure

African *taarab* and Arabic *tarab* are based on the same tonal structure – the Arabic melodic modes or scales, called *maqam* (plural - *maqamat*). A *maqam* is usually composed of two tetratones (*jins*) and the tonal center revolves around the base of each *jins*. Modulation occurs usually in the second *jins*. Unlike western modes, the *maqamats* are not evenly tempered and many *maqamats* include microtones that are notated with half flats and half sharps. In performing these *maqamats*, the actual pitch may include many more microtonal variations than the written quarter notes, depending on the position within the scale, and the mood of the *maqam* and regional traditions. There are hundreds of *maqamats*, involving different use of microtonal steps, such as special Iraqi or Turkish *maqamats*, not common in Egypt. When compared to the traditional Egyptian repertoire, early recordings of Swahili songs indicate a different microtonal distribution and understanding of tonal space. This points to early non-Egyptian influences, or possibly a different understanding of tuning, which may be related to other indigenous forms of Zanzibar music.

Songs composed after the 1950s can be identified as one or other of the Egyptian *maqamats*. There are five basic *maqamats* which do not utilise quarter tones and can therefore be adapted to western instruments. With the advent of keyboards and an increase in Western influence, the variety of *maqamats* has decreased in Egypt as well as in Zanzibar. Especially in later Zanzibar repertoire, composers increasingly prefer *maqamats* without quarter tones.

Instrumentation

A classic *takht* ensemble in Egypt featured an *oud*, violin, *qanun*, *ney* and *riq* or *tabla* as percussion instruments. Beginning in the 1950s, big orchestras became popular, with a large violin section, cellos, bass, accordions, several *neys*, *ouds*, *qanuns* as well as pianos or keyboards. Other wind instruments as well as brass could also be incorporated for dramatic effect. Accordions were modified from western tuning to incorporate quarter tones. The early Swahili *taarab* groups were closely related to small instrumental ensembles common in the entertainment venues of Cairo in the 1920s, comprising of an *oud*, a violin and percussion accompanying the singer. The post 1950s Zanzibar *taarab* orchestras featured the same instruments and a similar set-up as Egyptian film orchestras. Differences occurred in the percussion section which in Zanzibar incorporated bongos and relied less on the tonal colours of the *riq* and *dumbak* if they were present at all. Accordions in Zanzibar did not have quarter tones and did not perform in certain melodic sequences or songs.

Melody/Harmony

Arabic melodies are long and complex and take – to the Western ear – continuous unexpected turns and twists. Their artistic execution is closely linked to something called “*ruh sharqiyya*” (“Oriental spirit”) or “*nafas Sharqi*” (“Eastern breath”), essential to Arabic music essence (Shannon 2006; Racy 2003). Western harmonisation through

vertical chord structure is generally foreign to Arabic repertoire; harmonisation could be melodically perceived through varying timbre of instruments or the layering of the vocal part and instrumental accompaniment in horizontal affect. An entire orchestra will play more or less one melodic line, changing the tone colours frequently by the interplay of voice and instruments or different timbres taking on individual parts of a melody.

What Racy (2003) describes as heterophony in Arabic music applies similarly to Zanzibar *taarab*:

As a cultivated form of artistry, heterophonic interplay is a primary feature of *takht* music... realized spontaneously in actual performance, heterophony is a highly coordinated process rather than a mere confluence of isolated musical renditions or a collection of simultaneous variations of one fixed tune.

However, the melodies tend to be less complex and lyrics carry greater significance than vocal improvisations.

Improvisation

Instrumental fillers '*lawazim*' (pl. of '*lazimah*') are a very important element of Arabic music. Notation only outlines the most basic form of the melody, which is ornamented with slides, trills and embellishments by all musicians. A *taqsim* displays the virtuosity of an instrumentalist and plays with the tones and mood of a *maqam*. It can precede a song or occur in the middle section of a song before going back to the initial melody or chorus line. The free use of the tonal material is closely related to the concept of 'Eastern feeling' (see section on 'melodies and harmony') as the modulations, treatment, variations and ornaments, manipulation of tone and microtones are essential for the execution of a successful *maqam*. Vocal improvisations are called *layali* or *ahat* passages and they are an important vehicle in displaying the artistic virtuosity of a singer. These improvisations can stretch over long parts of the song and are usually encountered in the tradition of the *layali* (on the words *ya leyl, ya ain* – "oh night, oh eyes") or *ahat* (on the sound 'ah'). Instrumental improvisation (*taqsim*) or improvisations (*taqasim*) are common in Swahili and Arabic repertoire and resemble each other closely in style.

Short instrumental fillers between vocal phrases are standard in all Zanzibar *taarab* songs. They can bridge one line with the next or echo part of the melody line. These fillers in Swahili *taarab* appear frequently in a repetitive mode, but use the same ideas and musical vocabulary as Egyptian repertoire: repetition or reiteration of part of a melodic phrase, embellishment of important tonal centers, steps and cadences leading from the ending note to the beginning of the new phrase. Since lyrics are very important in Swahili, the song texts tend to be less sparse than in any of the Arabic forms and stretching of texts is not generally utilized to fill a melodic line. Vocal improvisations – though less common in Swahili *taarab* – are called *mawali* in contemporary Swahili, which is an adaptation of the Arabic form of *mawwal* originating in Iraq which signifies a vocal improvisation that uses a colloquial poetical text and is typically preceded by a *layali* section.

Musical forms

Prominent musical forms in Egypt include *muwashshah*, *dawr*, *taqtuqa* and *dulab*. A *dulab* is a short instrumental prelude that is frequently used as an introduction to a song and establishes the feeling of a *maqam*. The *taqtuqa* is an old form of light strophic song in colloquial language, most common in entertainment music from around the turn of the century. In the development of this genre, five different steps can be outlined in its earliest form, as follows: 1st step – chorus and verses were sung in the same tune, with the chorus reiterating the melody of the individual verse; 2nd step – an instrumental introduction was added; 3rd step – diversification of verse and chorus; 4th step – musicians composed each verse in a different melody; 5th step – an instrumental introduction was added to each section.

Several prominent musical forms appear in the Swahili repertoire, most notably the Turkish *bashraf* (a precomposed instrumental genre). A typical *taarab* performance will open with a *bashraf*, a term which has come to mean “instrumental *tarab* composition” in Zanzibar. The early repertoire of Siti Bint Saad makes frequent use of the *dulab*. Zanzibar *taarab* songs also typically feature *taqtuqa* in the second or third development with one repeating chorus.

Discussion and conclusion

What do these facts then indicate about the theory of origin of Zanzibar *taarab* and its supposed origin in Egypt? In summary, the listening analysis confirms a close proximity of contemporary Zanzibar *taarab* to the Egyptian style, yet points to the fact that Zanzibar *taarab* repertoire before the 1950s exhibits a diverse range of influences with a few direct imitations of Egyptian pieces. These findings correspond to investigation on the origins of Zanzibar *taarab* as done by Graebner (2003, 2004), Askew (2002) and Fair (2001).

Work by ethnomusicologist Werner Graebner, who designed a listening analysis with a number of professional musicians in Mombasa and Zanzibar of recordings from the 1930s and recordings from the coast made in the late 1940s and 50s, has revealed a diversified music style with influences from a wide variety of sources: local Ngoma, Indian, Arabic Gulf and after 1950, European and Latin as well. Interestingly enough, the participants expressed surprise at this outcome, since they had expected a stronger influence from Egypt and India in the early *taarab* repertoire (Graebner 2004). Since Graebner used recordings from all along the coast, it may be less indicative of the origins of *taarab* from Zanzibar since in other parts of the Swahili coast, *taarab* developed differently than on the island of Zanzibar, the seat of the Omani Sultan. Nevertheless, it points to a very important aspect in the history of Zanzibar *taarab* – the development of a musical genre that cannot be attributed to one influential factor only. It suggests that Zanzibar *taarab* developed over the course of centuries through trade and travel of cultural goods. On the long journeys across the ocean, sometimes with days and weeks of lingering without a trace of wind, the crew, who often brought instruments along, sang songs for entertainment and comfort. They also performed and shared music at the docks, where evening entertainment by *dhow* crews made the

docks a popular meeting spot. The precursors of *Nadi Ikhwan Safaa*, the first *taarab* club to perform for an audience outside of the Sultan's palace, were in fact *ngoma* groups based among kuli (slave portering) gangs at the port. This early form of music was not regarded as *taarab* because it was performed by slaves and working-class men of Hadhrami and African descent who sang in Kiswahili and performed at the docks. The *dhow* crews that frequented Zanzibar's wharf were widely known for their lively nightly performances, which incorporated some of the instruments, rhythms and melodies of *taarab*, but were nonetheless still regarded as something "other" (Fair 2001).

If we imagine the birth of *taarab* to have taken place somewhere between the splendor of the Sultan's palace and the earthy (or rather salty) reality of the harbour docks, it invariably brings up discourse on society and class. As Fair (2001) mentions, the working class men of Hadhrami origin were poor members of society who were striving to make a living in a reality that included slavery as part of working life (Askew 2002). The ascent from this level to a higher standing would have been a preoccupation and ambition of many living and working within this society. Shaib Abeid's text mentions that the founding members of Zanzibar's first *taarab* orchestra were Hadhramis, immigrants such as those mentioned above who worked in the port. Clearly, the association with the Sultan's palace, with the "royal birth" of their music style would have helped to enhance the status of their club, the status of their music and ultimately their own status.

The preference of colonial scholars was to understand a complex and highly developed culture in what they considered an inferior environment as created and shaped by outside forces rather than an inherent and organic development of a living society (Askew 2002). Beautiful and complex music would be more understandable as imported and at home in the foreign Sultan's palace, rather than the inherent expression of an understanding of self and life in the context of a multifaceted society. Ultimately the question of origin is again connected to the question of identity.

Why then is this legend of a foreign cultured, high-class birth of *taarab* music so faithfully adhered to amongst Zanzibar musicians? Is it because of its romantic appeal, of the distant dream of glamorous roots, in spite of the violent revolution in 1964 that expelled and killed many Zanzibar Arabs? Is it the longing for a better world that is long past, an echo perhaps of the original dream of belonging to the Sultan's palace? Does it have to do with the status of Cairo and Egypt in the Arabic world? Or is it, as Graebner suggests, a result of later retrospective thinking?

It is an interesting phenomenon that Egypt's influence is so clearly traceable through almost a century of music. After the 1950s, Zanzibar was exposed to cultural influences from all over the world. People on the mainland of Kenya and Tanzania took a strong liking to Congolese Music with Latin rhythms, and even though Zanzibar *taarab* incorporated many styles, it remains predominantly Egyptian up to this day. The Indian influence of film and recording was just as strong, if not stronger. Why can we hear Umm Kulthum's and Mohamed Abd el-Wahab's tunes in Zanzibar music from Siti Bint Saads' time up to today?

A certain amount of cultural isolation during the socialist era, and the role of *taarab* in the development of Tanzania cultural politics may have contributed to this (see Askew 2002 for an in-depth analysis of *taarab's* role in the development of Tanzania politics), but most certainly it has to do with an affinity and a resonance of feeling and mood that matches the sound of the island. My research leads me to postulate that Egyptian music was built on a preferred music style, and echoed with a sentiment and feeling that was prevalent in the music, culture and lifestyle on the island.¹¹

Had Mohamed Ibrahim indeed gone to Cairo and studied *qanun*, his knowledge of this instrument would have enabled him to train musicians who had some background in *maqamats* and an understanding and first-hand feel of Arabic music upon his return. It would not have been possible to build a *tarab* ensemble without musicians who were already familiar with Arabic music and trained in other instruments, such as the violin or *oud*. It takes years of practice to perform well and it is indeed very difficult to get the feel for the “Eastern breath” or “spirit”. It is therefore impossible to imagine that he single-handedly taught and trained an ensemble of instrumentalists to perform the complex *tarab* music in the Sultan’s Palace to everyone’s satisfaction without musicians and a musical pool that had already been prepared to draw upon.

Further research on this matter warrants investigation of the ongoing cultural connections between Zanzibar and Egypt in the 21st century, a similar repertoire comparison with Indian, Gulf and Yemen songs, and it would be advisable to investigate the Zanzibar Qur’an schools and the connection to Cairo’s Azhar University. It is very likely that Sultan Barghash built the foundation for a musical development that was later heavily reinforced by radio, film and recording technology. If members of his orchestra trained the *Nadi Ikhwan Safaa* musicians, there is some basis to the legend of Egyptian origins after all. However, the findings of this investigation suggest that the locally accepted version of Egypt as the origin of Zanzibar *taarab* can only be accredited as a partial insight into multifaceted, complex cultural phenomena.

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¹¹ As early as 1886, the Catholic priest noted that Arabic tunes constituted the preferred music for the audience in the Sultan’s palace, even though his interpretation of this fact is strongly colored by colonial perception.

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