

**FROM  
TRADITION  
TO  
TELEVISION:**  
*Diverse Perspectives on  
Afghan Music*

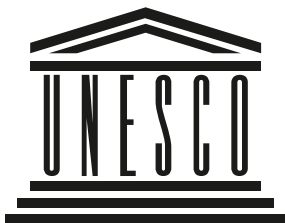
Edited by Peter Lell

With Texts by Linus Bahr,  
Sophie Huber, Josepha Kießling,  
Lolina Neumeier, Sabine Roselt

Peter Lell (ed.)

*„From Tradition to Television  
– Diverse Perspectives on Afghan Music“*

*Sounding Heritage Volume 6  
Ongoing Research in Transcultural Studies*



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



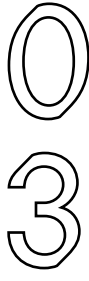
• UNESCO Chair  
• on Transcultural Music Studies  
• Weimar, Germany  
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University of Music  
FRANZ LISZT Weimar

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# *WELCOMING ADDRESS*



The research on Afghan music has quickly become an essential pillar of the Weimar Chair of Transcultural Music Studies (TMS). Since 2012, it has flourished through the collaboration of Afghan musicians and musicologists and the Chair on Transcultural Music Studies (TMS) on various projects, initiatives and publications. As part of the cooperation, the Afghanistan Music Research Centre ([www.amrc-music.org](http://www.amrc-music.org)) was founded in 2014 at the TMS Chair to pursue manifold activities related to Afghan music and musical heritage. One landmark, in terms of research collaboration, was an international symposium with Afghan and European participants in 2014 that led to the publication “Music in Afghanistan – Tradition and Transformation”, one of the few recent publications on the music of the country including scholarship from Afghanistan itself. In 2017 the Chair was promoted to a UNESCO Chair, thus gaining even better conditions for researching and documenting Afghan music as living musical heritage.

Following up these endeavors, we are glad to present the continuation of the research activities on music in Afghanistan with the present publication. Research activities of the AMRC on the traditional and contemporary music of Afghanistan continue and are expanding. In the winter semester 2019-20, a research seminar on Afghan music was held at the UNESCO Chair on TMS by the research associate Peter Lell on “The Doorway to the Soul – Die Rubab in der Musik Afghanistans”.<sup>2</sup> As a result, we can present a collection of essays dealing with various forms of Afghan music. The rich musical tradition connected to the rubab is equally included as are the important issues of musical censorship in the country, contemporary forms of music performances in the TV-Show “Afghan Star” and the transnational popular music of German-Afghan producer “Farhot”. These are original contributions to a research field that is highly underrepresented in contemporary music research: the music of Afghanistan. Through the present articles written by students of musicology and music performance at the University of Music FRANZ LISZT Weimar, we gain important insights and refreshing views into topics yet barely covered in academic writing.

It is to thank the students’ efforts and motivated work on their research matters and further refinement of the texts during the edition of this issue. Notably, we would like to thank Dr. John Baily and Veronica Doubleday for

providing the students with their expert knowledge on the music of Afghanistan. Moreover, the endeavors of Peter Lell are to be highlighted, his devotion to the research on the music of Afghanistan and conduction of the seminar as well as the efforts in editing this publication.

With the present textbook we hope to contribute to the growing interest in the musical diversity of Afghanistan and increase its visibility for academic researchers worldwide as well as for global public audiences, shaping through this the perspective on Afghanistan towards more “positive vibes than negative headlines”.<sup>3</sup> Last but not least, the main underlying research topic of the following selection of essays is true living heritage, despite all the threats musical practices and cultural live are still exposed to in contemporary Afghanistan.

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1. Philip Küppers and Laurina Bleier (eds.), Music in Afghanistan - Tradition and Transformation: Historical Perspectives and Current Positions on Afghan Music and Society. Weimar, 2016.

2. Translated into English: “The Doorway to the Soul – The Rubab in the Music of Afghanistan”.

3. Referring to the German title of the article in this volume “Positive Vibes statt negativer Schlagzeilen” (page 43) by Linus Bahr.

# 04 EDITORIAL

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The following texts present four views on the topic of music in, from, and related to Afghanistan. Whilst, on the surface, they seem to be dealing with very different phenomena, they are connected by their embedding in the historical and contemporary state of Afghanistan. The link between the texts can be found in their narratives, some-

times prominent or rather subtle, related to the displacement of Afghan people and musicians into exile all over the world. The roots of this are to be found in recent history. Afghanistan's seemingly endless conflicts have had a devastating impact on the country and its society, particularly on the scenes of cultural producers and musicians. What started with the coup by the Communist Party of Afghanistan in 1978 was followed by the no less devastating mujahideen reign and culminated in the Taliban regime from 1996 until late 2001. These difficult times proved disastrous for the music scenes and music was, apart from unaccompanied religious singing, in fact, banned. The years after the Taliban were filled with hope and the return of Afghans who had been in exile, including musicians. However, as years went by, the conflicts between a re-strengthened Taliban and Afghan- and foreign military forces arose once more. Today, we see the country still in a state of fragmentation and instability with growing numbers of attacks on civil society and especially on vulnerable musical events and musicians.

These four texts attempt to give four narratives on musical phenomena related to contemporary Afghanistan. They are the productive results of a research seminar on the music of Afghanistan held by myself at the UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies at the University of Music *FRANZ LISZT* Weimar [Peter Lell: "The Doorway to the Soul" – Die Rubab in der Musik Afghanistans]. While the main topic was the traditional music of the short-necked plucked lute rubab, which is often considered the national instrument of Afghanistan, the participants were especially encouraged to explore topics and stories of Afghan music yet uncovered in academic writings. All of them chose topics according to their own interests and experiences, ranging from traditional music of the Afghan rubab to popular music of Afghan-German hip-hop producer "Farhot". Due to the lack of academic sources on many of these contemporary topics, diverse sources were utilized: online sources such as websites, journalistic articles, blogs, social media sites and video platforms were

approached to gain insights into multifaceted musical phenomena. Additionally, important sources for most of the essays were several interviews conducted by the authors with musicians as well as non-musicians. Furthermore, the group of students was invited to meet two renowned British ethnomusicologists for interviews and discussion of their topics: Dr. John Baily and Veronica Doubleday, two of the most experienced Western scholars on the traditional music of Afghanistan.

The first article by Sabine Roselt "From Ustad to Shagerd: Teaching and Learning Afghan Music in Exile" follows four masters of the Afghan rubab and their teaching practices in contemporary times. Originally from different backgrounds, the four rubab players are connected through their experience and love for the music, as well as the experience of living outside Afghanistan – most of them as part of the Afghan diaspora. Sabine conducted interviews with three of them and tackled important questions on the theories and practices of the sharing of musical knowledge of a displaced musical tradition today.

One prominent topic, when dealing with the music of Afghanistan, is the censorship it has faced for the last decades. Since the Communist Coup in 1978, music was a central part of political and religious conflicts and playing, distributing and listening to music – or certain kinds of music – were prosecuted. In their article "Right behind the Taliban's Back – A Perspective on Music and Censorship in Afghanistan in the Last Two Decades", Josepha Kiebling and Lolina Neumeier follow the ways in which music censorship was and is practiced in contemporary Afghanistan and particularly, how it can be bypassed. Their perspective builds on literature and importantly, interviews with three exiled Afghans in Weimar.

The third article tackles the widely-known but rarely discussed TV-format "Afghan Star" – a sort of "American Idol" for the Afghan public. In her text, Sophie Huber asks if "Afghan Star" would rather be "A mirror to Afghan society or a parallel universe in a war-ridden country". She investigates the beginnings of the show and its communalities and differences from similar formats in the West. The main focus of her text is on the representation and perception of female musicians singing and dancing in the show. How do the Afghan public and religious fundamentalists react to women singing on the stage? Sophie tells us controversial stories from "Afghan Star".

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The fourth article connects the previous perspectives with contemporary popular music and takes us from Kabul up north to Hamburg, Germany. Linus Bahr explores the music of Farhad Samadzada, an Afghan-German hip-hop producer commonly known as “Farhot”. The text “Positive Vibes statt negativer Schlagzeilen” is written in German and traces the manifold musical

vibes in his works. Being born in Kabul, Farhot never returned to his birth country but – or precisely because of that – attempts to explore and understand Afghanistan sometimes explicitly and sometimes more subtly through his musical works. Linus takes an intense look at Farhot’s release from 2013 “Kabul Fire Vol. 1”, his highly successful cooperation with German rapper “Haftbefehl”, up to Farhot’s recent, comic-style and more electronic music affiliated Alter-Ego “Fuchy”.

All in all, the four articles give us glimpses into the diversity of the music of Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora and help to shape the Western views on the music of the country into more diverse perspectives. We move further away from the bias of the majority of media representations predominantly showing the conflicted sides of Afghanistan, at the same time avoiding a limiting and narrow view on Afghanistan with solely a musical tradition located in the past. These essays go beyond this and show that there are present forms of musical expression as well as a rich tradition of Afghan music. We move from “Tradition to Television” and beyond, exploring views on the future of music connected to Afghanistan.

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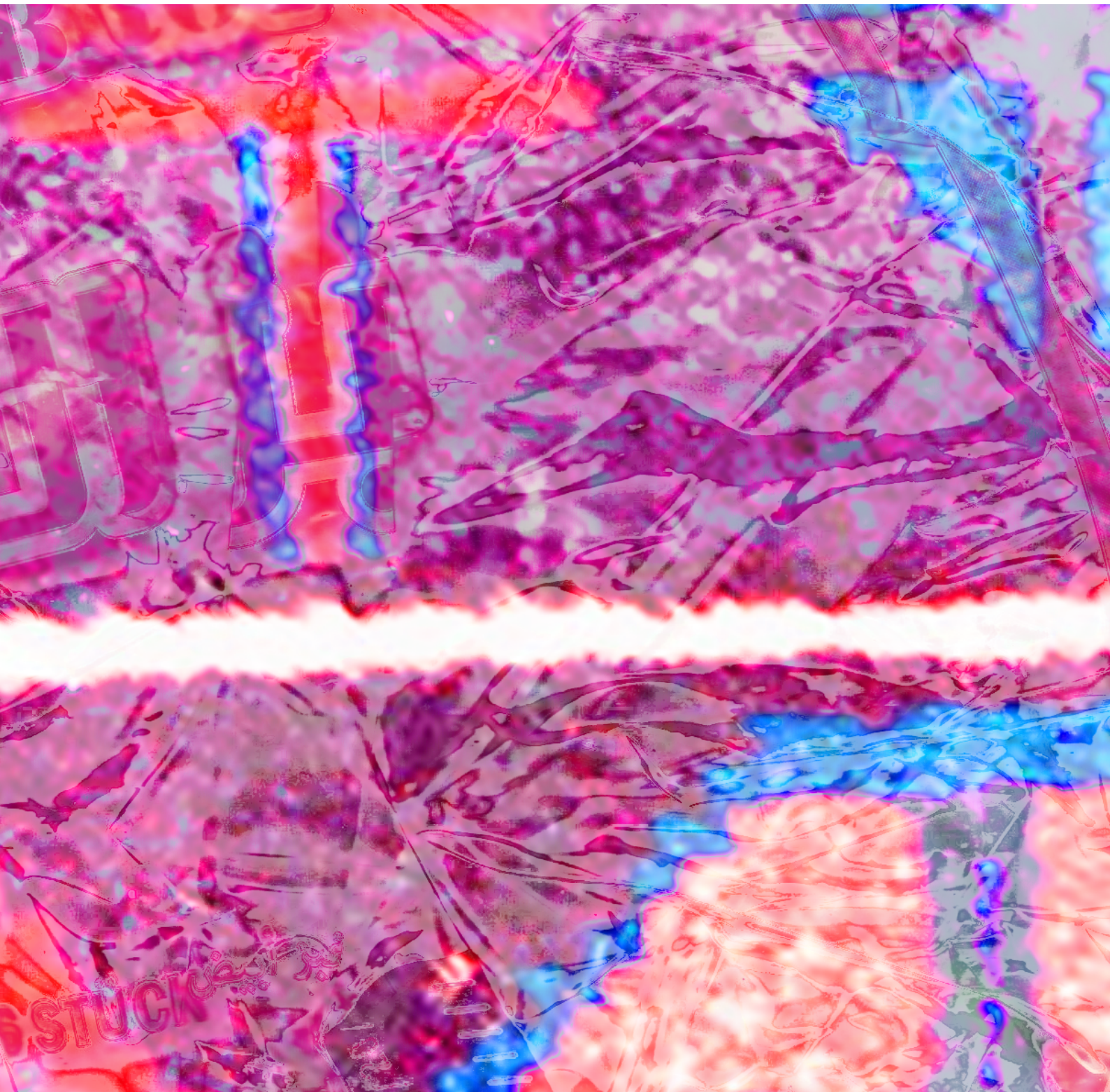
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# FROM USTAD TO SHAGERD:

*Teaching and Learning Afghan  
Music in Exile* A text by Sabine Roselt



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Fig. 1:  
The rubab, a  
short-necked lute  
from Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, traditional music training is strongly linked to the bond between a master, the so called “ustad”, and his student, the “shagerd”. Students take pride in tracing their ustad’s lineage to old masters, often dating back over several generations. The apprenticeship begins with a string-tying ceremony, in which “the string tied around the pupil’s wrist represents an unbreakable chain connecting teacher and disciple”.<sup>1</sup> Students pay for their lessons with service to their teacher, for example by making tea and helping around the ustad’s house. A strong relationship between teacher and student is formed through these actions.

The most important center for teaching music was the musicians’ quarter in Kabul, the “Kucheh Kharabat”. After the Afghan ruler Amir Sher Ali Khan visited India in 1869 and encountered Indian music and performance, he decided to invite Indian musicians and dancers to come to Kabul to play and teach at the royal court. They all settled in the same area which later became the musicians’ quarter. The Kharabat grew larger and “by the mid-twentieth century

several hundred musicians lived there”,<sup>2</sup> including many ustads. They had private music schools, teaching students from inside and outside the Kharabat-community. During the time of the Taliban regime, many musicians fled the country and most of the Kucheh Kharabat was destroyed. After the Taliban regime ended in late 2001, only few musicians came back to Afghanistan and many still live in exile today. For teachers and students of traditional Afghan music, this situation requires new dynamics for learning and teaching music. In this essay, I examine different experiences musicians have had with music training while not living in Afghanistan, both as a student and teacher. I focus on the example of learning the rubab, a short-necked plucked lute that is considered the national instrument of Afghanistan. I will examine the musicians’ methods of learning, collecting and preserving Afghan music in detail with the help of interviews I conducted in January and February 2020 as well as text and media sources. I will commence by introducing the musicians, followed by their experiences and opinions on this topic.

1. John Baily, *War, Exile and the Music of Afghanistan. The Ethnographer’s Tale*, Abingdon and New York 2015, p. 18.

2. *Ibid.*

# 1 Four Different Masters 1 on the Rubab

**Daud Khan Sadozai** is a rubab and sarod player based in Cologne, Germany. He grew up in Kabul, where he was a rubab student of Ustad Mohammad Omar, one of the most prominent rubab players in Afghan music history, in the Kucheh Kharabat for a brief time before he moved to Germany to attend university. He started to learn sarod, the Indian descendent of the rubab, with Ustad Amjad Ali Khan in India five years later. Daud Khan performs all over Europe and teaches both rubab and sarod.<sup>4</sup>

**John Baily** is an Emeritus Professor of Ethnomusicology and Head of the Afghanistan Music Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. Not only is he a renowned ethnomusicologist but also an active rubab player. He was introduced to the rubab on his first field work trip to Afghanistan in 1973 when he was originally researching the dutar, a long-necked Afghan lute which originally had two strings. He joined a class with Ustad Mohammad Omar in Kharabat for a few weeks and a year later he

met Ustad Rahim Khushnawaz who became his main rubab teacher in Herat for many years.<sup>4</sup>

**Qais Essar** is an Afghan American multi-instrumentalist from Phoenix, Arizona. He was born and grew up in the US but was still closely connected to his Afghan heritage through his family and surrounding community. Before he started to learn the rubab, he already played the violin, guitar and the tambour, a long-necked lute from Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> He studied music with several teachers, both eastern and western, and connects these influences in his music.<sup>6</sup>

**Quraishi Roya** is a self-taught rubab player based in New York City, USA. He started by observing and listening to village musicians staying at the family home in Kabul and learned to play folk music by ear.<sup>7</sup> After he moved to the US at the age of 18, he took lessons in Indian classical vocal music and tabla with various masters. He performs on international stages and teaches rubab as well.

3. This information stems from an interview the author held with Ustad Daud Khan Sadozai via telephone, referred to as Khan 2020.

4. This information stems from an interview the author held with Ustad Prof. Dr. John Baily at the Goldsmith University London, referred to as Baily 2020.

5. Rona Akbari, On rejecting schedules. <https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/musician-qais-essar-on-rejecting-schedules>.

6. Ibid.

7. Quraishi Roya was asked about his relationship to the rubab via an email interview, referred to as Quraishi 2020.

## Building Repertoire

To build up a repertoire, the main source of music for all interviewees is the knowledge they received from their teachers. Usually, ustad teachers teach ragas, which are melodic structures that form the base of classical Hindustani and Afghan music. Some ustad teachers teach by ear, having their student replay and memorize melodies and others teach with sheet music.

**Daud Khan** says that everything he knows about music is based on the ragas he learned from his ustad teachers, describing the knowledge about ragas as a “never-ending spring of water”<sup>8</sup> for new compositions. His first teacher, Ustad Mohammad Omar, taught with the help of sheet music which was helpful for Daud Khan.<sup>9</sup>

When he was in Germany, his father became a student of Ustad Mohammad Omar too and used to send the sheet music he received from his ustad to his son. This way, written music has always been an important part of Daud Khan’s music education.

**Quraishi Roya** began to learn the rubab through oral tradition by listening and repeating what the musicians at his family home played. However, when he took classes on Indian classical music he also learned to read and write music which helped him to broaden his playing.

For **John Baily**, his own recordings of his rubab sessions with Ustad Rahim Khushnawaz

8. Khan 2020.

9. Both Daud Khan and John Baily mentioned that Ustad Mohammad Omar used sheet music for teaching.

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*Fig 2: Ustad Ghulam Hussain (left) is one of the greatest masters of the Afghan rubab and was the master student of renowned Ustad Mohammad Omar. Here we can see him with his student Ahmad Samin performing in the concert "Safar – Musik aus Afghanistan" that was held in 2012 at the Chair on Transcultural Music Studies in Weimar.*



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were a vital resource for learning rubab. He used to analyze the recordings by listening and transcribing. On his first encounters with this music, he used Western staff notation, but he quickly realized that this notation did not fit the music and eventually changed to using sargam notation which derives from Hindustani music.<sup>10</sup>

Through Rahim's father, Ustad Amir Jan Khushnawaz, and Amir Jan's teacher, Ustad Nabi Gol, Baily was also able to collect many old compositions taught by Ustad Nabi Gol, especially in the field of "naghma-ye kashal" which are extended instrumental pieces usually consisting of four parts.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Baily's field work resulted in many recordings of different styles of music, both in audio and film.

Encouraged by his mentor, the renowned ethnomusicologist John Blacking, he always used film as a research and analysis tool, recording festivities, weddings, musicians and life on his field trips in Afghanistan. Over the period of his active work on Afghanistan, Baily has produced twenty documentaries which can also be seen as resources of music.

Being asked about the internet as a source for music, Daud Khan answered that "some old and rare recordings have been uploaded",<sup>12</sup> especially on YouTube, but that there are only a few ones of old ustads and rubab in general. Quraishi Roya also thinks that the internet is "like having many teachers. There was a time when I would look around in books and old recordings just to have access to specific raga skills. Now you could easily find them on the internet".<sup>13</sup>

10. Sargam notation is based on the solmization of different pitches in syllables (e.g. Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni). It is used in classical Hindustani music.

11. The genre of "naghma-ye kashal" is also known as "lariya" or "naghma-ye chartuk" (see Baily 2015, p. 92 and Ahmad Sarmast, "The 'Naghma-Ye Chārtuk' of Afghanistan: A New Perspective on the Origin of a Solo Instrumental Genre", in: Asian Music 38/2 (2007), pp. 97-114: p. 1.

12. Khan 2020.

13. Quraishi 2020.



Fig 3: Daud Khan (right) teaching a group of rubab students at a workshop.

## Tradition and Innovation

All four musicians play and compose classical rubab music, taking ragas or folk melodies as a base and combining them with rhythmic structures - the so called "talas". Qais Essar also has a different approach to working with music sources. Among other things, he is

known for reinterpreting existing Afghan folk songs or compositions from famous singers like Ahmad Zahir, especially on his three singles "I Am Afghan, Afghani Is Currency" (2015, 2017, 2019). He takes the songs and rearranges them for rubab in a more contemporary con-

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text for listeners who have “not been exposed to a lot of Indian or Eastern classical music”.<sup>14</sup> This often results in more minimalistic instrumental arrangements with a small ensemble. Generally, he sees his own music as a gateway to the more complex Afghan classical genre.<sup>15</sup> One could

also say that he makes two different kinds of music: On the one hand, he wants to make compositions that are easily digestible and on the other hand, he wants to keep classical rubab music alive and even evolve it.<sup>16</sup> This also provides an insight into his motivations as a musician since some of his goals are preserving classical and traditional rubab music as well as keeping the instrument itself alive and popular which again he tries to achieve through the more contemporary music. Similarly, **Qais Essar** and also

**Daud Khan** see music as a way of connecting people of different backgrounds and they hope to interest people in Afghan culture. They say that, through music and culture, people can get a different and more positive view of the country and its people, reducing stereotypes and supporting an international dialogue.<sup>17</sup>

For all four musicians, one main motivation for learning new music is expanding their repertoire because having broad knowledge of ragas and folk songs forms a good base for their own compositions. For **John Baily**, a large repertoire was a reason for his research on Afghan music and culture, including urban, rural, secular and religious music. Through his work, he wants to preserve Afghan music, which is a goal all musicians share. **Quraishi Roya** said his “first goal is to keep the traditional way of playing [and] Afghan folk melodies alive.”<sup>18</sup>

14. Michelle Santiago, Qais Essar. <http://majesticdisorder.com/journal-qais-essar>.

15. Ibid.

16. Ahluwalia, Jas and Ahluwalia, Kamaljeet: Absolute Focus. Ep. 3: Qais Essar, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oug-R5aCNxGc>.

17. Khan 2020; Atif Ateeq, Qais and the Rabab, 2016. [https://www.hyfn.life/blogs/news/qais-and-the-rabab?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=d219f55be&\\_ss=r](https://www.hyfn.life/blogs/news/qais-and-the-rabab?_pos=1&_sid=d219f55be&_ss=r).

18. Quraishi 2020.

## Teaching in the Diaspora

Besides maintaining the Afghan music tradition by performing, the four musicians teach the rubab to younger generations. They give lessons or conduct workshops, but they do not appear to achieve the distinctive traditional bond between the master and student that was mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Especially workshops are more of a temporary engagement rather than continuous lessons and teaching online might result in a more distant learning experience. However, online lessons and workshops open up possibilities for decentralized learning which can be important for people trying to connect to their cultural heritage in a diaspora. For educational purposes and preservation, **John Baily** also published an “Online Afghan Rubab Tutor” ([www.oart.eu](http://www.oart.eu)) where he introduces the instrument and gives basic lessons on tuning and playing techniques, focusing on the afore-mentioned genre “naghma-ye kashal” and a few popular ragas. He connects his personal learning experience with introductions to Afghan music using transcriptions, audio examples and video tutorials.

Talking about teaching, **Quraishi Roya**, **Daud Khan** and **Qais Essar** addressed several problems they see occurring in the Afghan diaspora regarding music. They all seem to fear the loss of tradition and a deep connection to the music. **Daud Khan** and **Qais Essar** both think that the understanding of tradition, technique and the context is subsiding, leaving students with the ability to play but maybe not understand the music and the heritage connected to it.<sup>19</sup> **Quraishi Roya** and **Qais Essar** also expressed their concern that many Afghans living abroad are only interested in Afghan pop music rather than classical music and that classical music is less popular in general. However, **Quraishi Roya** also pointed out that he encounters a great interest in learning to play the rubab which he appreciates a lot, but which also evokes other difficulties. Since the rubab is a rare instrument in most parts of the world, he cannot find enough instruments for students, so he is trying to connect them with rubab makers in Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> He did not comment on whether his attempts have been successful.

19. Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia 2019; Khan 2020.

20. Quraishi 2020.



# 1 6 *Uniting Different Experiences*

In conclusion, all four musicians have different experiences learning the rubab which often include learning and teaching abroad. From those four people, **Qais Essar** is the only one who did not study in Afghanistan at all and **John Baily** is probably the one who received most teaching there. Living abroad both **Daud Khan's** and **Quraishi Roya's** education was more influenced by Indian classical music. While **Daud Khan** and **John Baily** each refer to two specific ustads as their main influences, **Qais Essar and Quraishi Roya** studied with various teachers.

Even though their experiences in learning differ greatly, these four musicians share many values and also seem to approach music similarly. When it comes to building a repertoire, they all rely primarily on the music they learned from their teachers, work with written music and use the internet as a resource for new (or rather old) music to different extents. They are concerned about the status and depth of music

education, especially in classical Afghan music and so their greater goal is to preserve and share rubab playing and classical music by performing and teaching.

These examples show that the traditionally strong bond between a teacher and his student might not be achievable when learning rubab in exile. Some students still might have one or two ustads as their main teachers, but others also study with various teachers. The different approach to teaching and learning is also reflected in the way that the rubab is taught in the diaspora. Workshops and online lessons seem to be the preferred ways of teaching, allowing people from different countries to take part and giving the teachers more possibilities to reach students in different areas or countries. Even though these forms of learning often indicate a loss of depth and tradition, they still make it possible to learn the rubab in exile and carry on Afghanistan's musical heritage.

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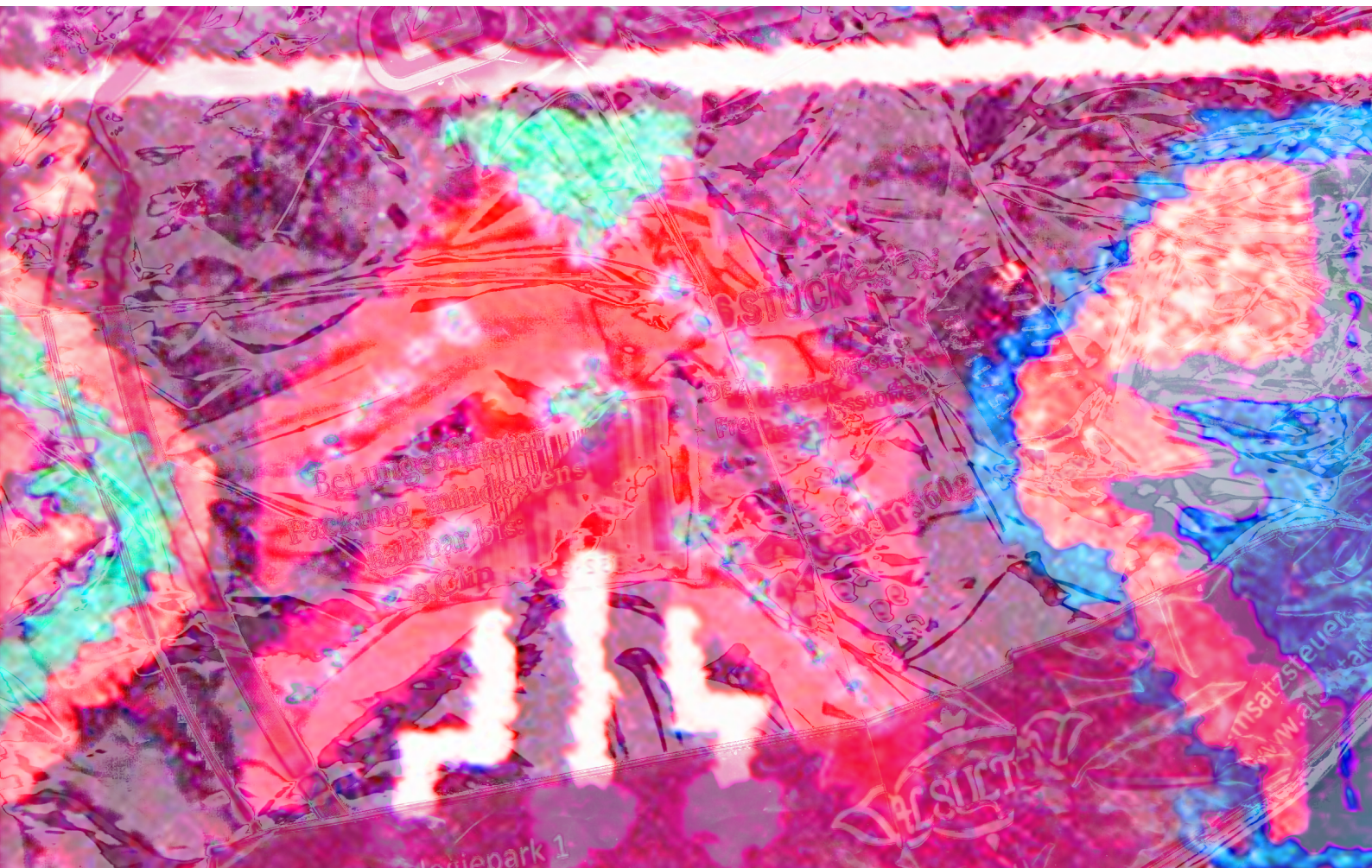
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# *RIGHT BEHIND THE TALIBAN'S BACK*

*A Text by  
Lolina Neumeier and  
Josepha Kießling*

*A Perspective on Music and  
Censorship in Afghanistan in  
the Last Two Decades*



# 20

In Afghanistan, the enjoyment of music - both active as well as passive - has been, if not completely prohibited, strictly censored in the areas controlled by the Islamic extremist group of the Taliban (1996-2001). But even before that, the Communist regime (1979-1989) that was later supported by the Soviet Union used restriction and censorship to its advantage, altering music for public broadcast in the country.

Under consideration of this background, we decided to take a closer look at the situation of music censorship in Afghanistan today within the framework of our course about music in this conflict burdened country. We asked ourselves what the experience of music consumption or practice might be like in a country that has been repeatedly under partial control of political ideologies or extremist religious groups, and what effects this might have on the associated population. This essay primarily addresses the question: Is there still music censorship in Afghanistan now and if so, how are people dealing with it?

As most media coverage of Afghanistan focused on the Taliban rule about 25 years ago

and only few sources report on the current situation, we decided to conduct interviews with Afghans who have recent experience in the country. Therefore, we conducted two interviews with three male individuals who are now living in Germany who, in one case, spent most of their lives in Afghanistan and in the other two cases most of their childhood and youth. The interviews were conducted in an informal manner. The participants were interviewed once in their homes and once at one of ours. This proved to be an easy way to create a safe space in a familiar atmosphere, so that everybody could talk more or less freely about all the emotional topics related to our interview questions.

Furthermore, we received the precious opportunity to talk to two of the most experienced researchers on Afghan music in Afghanistan itself, John Baily and Veronica Doubleday. Baily's publication "Can You Stop the Birds from Singing?"<sup>2</sup> about the censorship of music in 20th-century Afghanistan had already been a helpful source of context, but interviewing both of them on their experience, not only of the culture, but also of living in the country, also proved to be of high value for this research.

1. John Baily 2020. Interviewed by the Authors, London, 19. February 2020; Veronica Doubleday 2020. Interviewed by the Authors, London, 19. February 2020.

2. John Baily, "Can You Stop the Birds Singing?" - The Censorship of Music in Afghanistan, Copenhagen 2001. <https://freemuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Afghanistsats.pdf>.

## *“Music Censorship” in the Afghan Context*

Arguably, the term “censorship” can be interpreted in different ways. In the essay at hand, it will be used in a broad sense which includes the censoring of certain parts as well as a ban of whole music works and genres. This is what most commonly happened in Afghanistan during the last decades and, as we will address later, still happens in some regions today.

In the case of Afghanistan, it seems useful to also question the use of the term “music”. As Baily states, not all of the practices people socialised in the West would call “music” are considered equal in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> Unaccompanied singing is not considered to be part

of the category “music”, especially religious singing when reciting the Qur’an. This is crucial to understanding the dynamics of music censorship that was, and is, happening under the rule of the most recent censoring authority: the Taliban. However, to speak of a complete ban of music would, from a Western perspective, not be accurate as unaccompanied singing was still allowed to be broadcast e.g. to distribute the religious spirit in the country.<sup>4</sup> If adjusted to Afghan standards, however, unaccompanied singing is not perceived as music and therefore the Taliban measures can be rated as very strict.

3. Baily 2020.

4. Simon Broughton, Breaking the Silence - Music in Afghanistan. YouTube, 10.09.2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWU8FVLEw>.

# 2 1

The justifications with which the Taliban reasoned the ban of music lead back to hadith (reports of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammed) which classify the act of making and listening to music as behaviour which will be punished on Judgment Day.

Even though the authenticity of the hadith is questioned in certain contexts, “the Taliban, who gained control of most of Afghanistan in 1994, have nevertheless used it in support of one of the most grotesque social experiments in human history.”<sup>5</sup>

Many scholars question this as being the real motivation for the Taliban’s ban of music. In an interview with The Guardian for example, Baily points out that “music is widely recognised as something that can provide transcendental experience. People who want to control other people in terms of their spiritual life don’t like that.”<sup>6</sup>

Without any doubt, there are more harmful practices conducted under the rule of the Taliban. However, the relevance of this topic can still be rated as high, which we took as an impetus to deal with music censorship in this essay:

*For thousands of years, music has been one of the most essential cultural expressions. Music has been an important part of all cultures in their daily life, at celebrations, at ceremonies, for pleasure and serves as food for the soul. When music is banned the very soul of a culture is being strangled. Ban a music culture for a decade and a whole generation grows up without an essential cultural reference. Only through the documentation of music censorship can we discuss and understand the effects of censorship.*<sup>7</sup>

5. Nicholas Wroe, “A Culture Muted”, 2001. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/13/afghanistan.books>.

6. Ibid.

7. Baily 2001, pp. 5ff.



Fig. 4:  
A ride through an  
imaginary landscape  
of Afghanistan

## Looking for Answers

In order to better understand the current situation in Afghanistan in general, but also in relation to music, we interviewed three men who have first-hand experience. After a short

introduction of our interview partners, we will present the interview outcomes with particular emphasis on strategies against censorship in the following.

# 2 The Stories of Three 2 Young Afghans

We were not only interested in people who have a close connection to music but in an overview of everyday life in Afghanistan more generally. Nevertheless, we were more than lucky to have an artist among our interviewees to consult.

Our Afghan interview partners were three young men. To assure their anonymity, we changed their names to **Farid** [26], **Ashraf** [26] and **Khalid** [20] who share Dari Persian as their mother tongue and have been living in Germany for a different number of years.<sup>8</sup> They come from different cities in the eastern part of the country: Kabul, the Bamyan region and the city of Ghazni (Fig 5). They also have different education

backgrounds: **Farid** was educated in an Islamic mosque school until 6th grade, after which he moved to Iran due to health issues and attended school there. At the age of 22, he moved to Germany after losing his whole family in Afghanistan. **Ashraf** had spent 12 years of school and one semester of University in Kabul. He was an artist and actor on TV and in theatre there. After experiencing a bomb attack on a play he was part of, he came to Germany at the age of 23 where he also found a job at a theatre as an actor.

**Khalid**, the quietest of the three, told us that he had attended school for two years, but left to work in various jobs and positions, coming to Germany at the age of 17.

8. This section is based on the interviews: Ashraf, Farid and Khalid 2020. Interviewed by the Authors, Weimar, 12. February 2020.



Fig. 5. Map of Afghanistan with the three origins of our interviewees.

# 2 Experiences of the 3 Taliban's Power

Very little information gets out of the country due to the current situation. For our research questions, we were therefore dependent on the statements of our Afghan interview partners. For us, it is very hard to imagine what living under the Taliban is like, but we got a decent impression through the interviewees. **Khalid** grew up in the city Ghazni that has been continuously occupied by the Taliban oppression. He was confronted with them destroying the telephone and internet network again and again. This made it impossible to communicate with people outside the city. Furthermore, if someone wanted to play music, for example at a wedding or a big event, it was necessary to ask the Taliban for permission. There have been countless incidents of bombs and attacks murdering innocent people at such gatherings. **Khalid** told us about a car bomb that had been ignited right before the bride and groom arrived at their wedding location and about 100 of the guests ended up being killed.

However, **Khalid** told us that the face-to-face presence of the Taliban was not only felt on special occasions, but also on the streets in everyday life. **Khalid** experienced strict measures from the Taliban on a regular basis: When simply walking on the street, they might take your mobile phone and look through your pictures, contacts and everything you had on it. If they found anything they did not approve of, the person would be beaten and the phone destroyed in broad daylight. **Khalid** himself had this experience more than once and points out that it is still a very common practice in his area.

**Ashraf** told us about the Bamyan region. In order to visit his family, he could only use one street to the North which leads through a little territory occupied by the Taliban. Passing this region, every car is stopped by Taliban roadblocks and checked for forbidden objects and compromising material. He explained to us what technique the Taliban tends to use in order to find out whether the passers-by are trustworthy: The driver is interrogated and when they find contact details of family members in the mobile phone, those may be called immediately. Often,

they claim that the occupants had an accident and are dead in order to get more information about the individuals in the car, especially their professions. Also, outer appearance is crucial: A full beard and hair which is not cut too short as well as hijab (a veil for women) are important for looking inconspicuous.

**Ashraf's** hometown was witness to the very severe destruction of cultural heritage: The Buddhas of Bamyan, which were monumental statues cut into the rock in the 6th and 7th century, were demolished in 2001 by the Taliban because of their Buddhist origin.

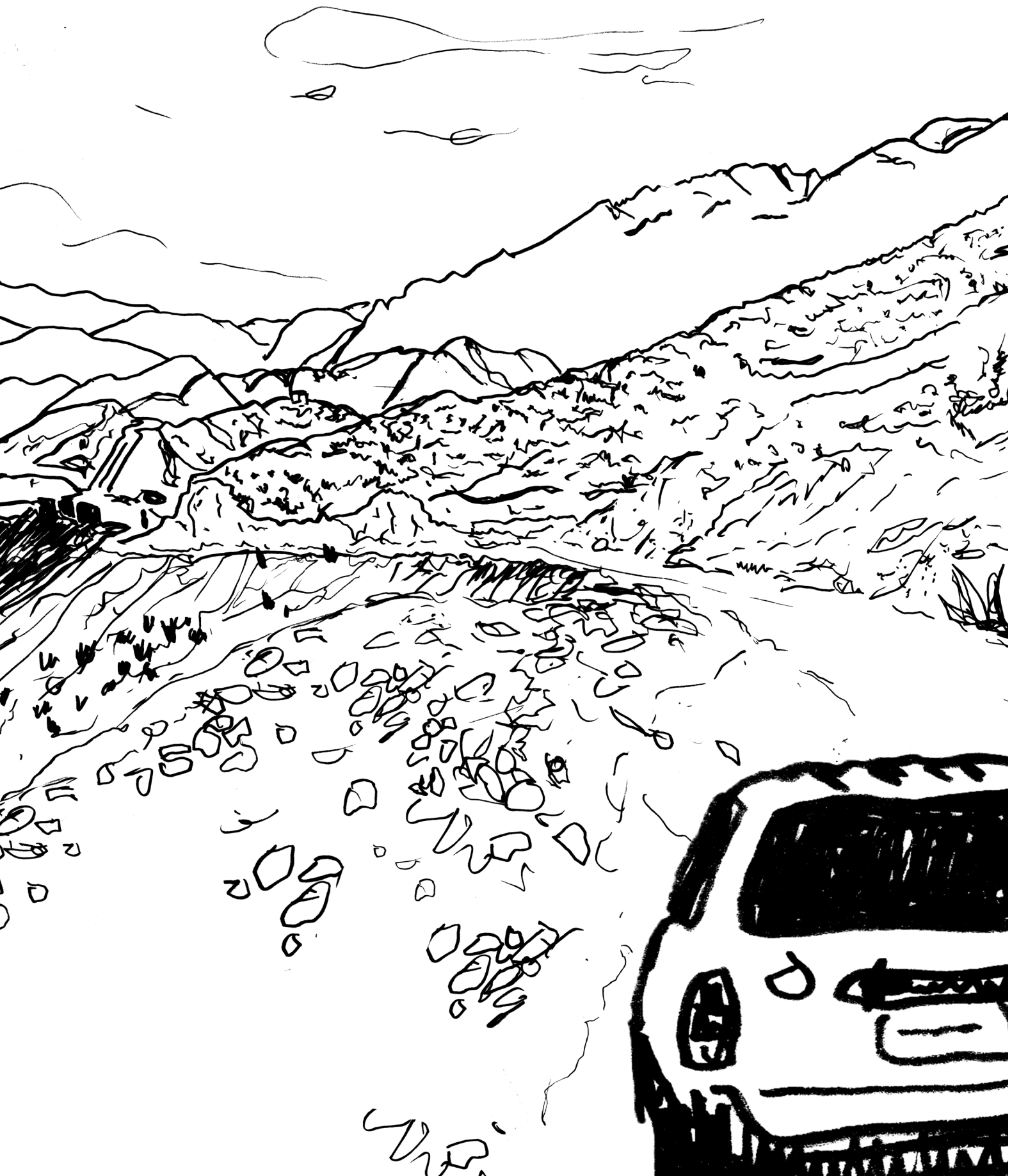
**Ashraf** had been working as an artist in Afghanistan. After leaving the country, he took up his profession again in Germany. As an actor in theatre and TV in Kabul, his status can be classified as very suspicious to the Taliban. He told us that he sometimes took preventive measures by disguising or hiding his face in public. Then, in the context of his work, he was part of a political staging that would eventually lead to his exile: The premiere of the piece "Heartbeat: Silence after the Explosion" was presented in December 2014 at the Istiqlal High School. It is a play about suicide attacks and trying to take a stand against terror by the theatre group AZDAR, which he was part of. During the performance, an actual bomb exploded. The audience mistook the explosion for part of the performance until they realised that people were actually severely injured or even dead. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing.<sup>9</sup>

The explanations we got from our interviewees presented the severeness of the population's situation under Taliban power to a large extent. Although not all of their stories happened in the most recent past, it helped us to get an image of what life must be like in the country at the moment. At the same time, we learnt that cultural activities and a life according to our standards is, with certain restrictions, possible in some regions - in the capital Kabul, of course. This led us to a rather broad perspective on the contradictions of the current situation of Afghanistan as whole.

9. Masoud Popalzai and Greg Botelho, "Deadly Suicide Bombing Interrupts Play Condemning Suicide Bombings", 2014, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/11/world/asia/afghanistan-french-school-attack/index.html>.



Fig 6:  
On the road through  
the mountainous  
landscape of central  
Afghanistan.



# 25 IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES

## Music

It is easy to imagine that the Taliban's power has had, and still has, a great impact on Afghan music. Everything that does not support Islam - or rather the Taliban's interpretation of it - or is in some way perceived as influenced by the West is getting destroyed. Possession of such things entails punishment which ranges from being beaten over jail sentences through to death. This, of course, includes musical instruments and recordings, both from the West as well as the East, for example the Afghan instrument rubab.

The implications are, obviously, quite dramatic. As Baily and Doubleday state: Many instruments have been destroyed and the only people who know how to build them leave the country more and more. Cultural heritage has gone missing, and many music teachers and ustadhs (a Persian term for a master of traditional Afghan music in this context,) have been leaving the country. Therefore, there are not many people who continue to produce new music, especially of traditional style. This situation can be seen as a mirror showing the slow process of desolation

in society. According to Baily and Doubleday, there is barely an educated audience for contemporary art that has a deep appreciation for arts and music as was once the case.<sup>10</sup>

All of this leads to a significant gap of musical and, also in general, cultural heritage. It is already visible for the last thirty to forty years. The censorship, persecution, and murder of artists has led to an "exodus of creatives" and a "fade of many artistic forms of expression"<sup>11</sup> that are proving to be very difficult to bring back. For that reason, there are not many musical and artistic sources of the last few decades which deal with impressions and consequences of the war and the state of the population. Aunohita Mojumdar describes this situation as follows: "What remains after years of violence and fighting, displacement and censorship, is a void. Built over years of absence of art and music [...] [t]his is an emptiness [...] It is also a void that is being filled too quickly and indiscriminately with whatever is at hand."<sup>12</sup> This is an obstacle that has been, and will be, hard to overcome.

10. Baily 2020; Doubleday 2020.

11. Till Ansgar Baumhauer, *Kunst und Krieg in Langzeitkonflikten. Visuelle Kulturen im Dreißigjährigen Krieg und im heutigen Afghanistan*. Berlin 2016, p. 55.

12. Aunohita Mojumdar, "Creating an Audience from the Void". 2009. <https://www.himal-mag.com/creating-an-audience-from-the-void>

## Personal Effects on our Interviewees

Understandably, many people live in constant fear that stays with them even when they move to a safe environment. This was also true for our interviewees: Ashraf told us he suffers from insomnia, severe anxiety and memory difficulties and loss, to name only some of the long term effects on his body and mind from his permanent fear of death.

Veronica Doubleday told us about her meeting many Afghans in exiled communities, for example in London and Hamburg, who were not able to make music anymore because of their traumatic experiences. Even she herself "lost

[her] heart for singing and playing the drum"<sup>13</sup> for some time. The history, memories and pain that is brought up by making music is unbearable for many Afghans. Even though some use music sessions to make themselves feel good again and to connect with their community, others cannot take it and see no other way out than by committing suicide, which is not a rare case. Mental health is a factor that will be relevant for many decades. The fear and loss have been imprinted in the minds of the people and will affect them and potentially even future generations.

13. Doubleday 2020.

# 2 6 EVADING MUSIC CENSORSHIP

## *Safeguarding Initiatives*

Many initiatives deal with rebuilding the foundations of music in Afghanistan to make sure that national music continues in society.<sup>14</sup> For example, in order to support the musicians and music educators, the Aga Khan Music Initiative developed a “country specific strategy that reflected the overall priorities, [...] as well as the recommendation of a needs assessment study”.<sup>15</sup> As a result, a small music school for educational music courses has been opened in Kabul and shortly after in Herat, where the focus lies especially on training instrument making. ANIM, the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, has made it to their mission to “revive and

preserve Afghan music” focussing on “supporting the most disadvantaged children”.<sup>16</sup> It is a music school that provides academic education and training in music including “instrumental lessons, Western and Hindustani music theory, ear training, music history and ensemble playing”.<sup>17</sup> It was set up in 2010, aware of its importance to save this rich and complex music history and its capability of “rebuilding a war-torn country” through “the healing power of music.”<sup>18</sup> This school enables young people, including women, to play musical instruments and possibly become music teachers who pass on the traditions and knowledge about the music and the community.

14. Islamuddin Farooz, “Musical Development and Challenges in Afghanistan during the Last Decade”, in: Philip Küppers and Laurina Bleier (eds.): *Music in Afghanistan – Tradition and Transformation: Historical Perspectives and Current Positions on Afghan Music and Society*. Weimar, 2016, pp. 21-30, p. 27.

15. Philip Jodidio, *Afghanistan: Preserving Historic Heritage*. Munich 2017, pp. 364ff.

16. “Afghanistan National Institute of Music” – About Us, <https://www.anim-music.org/about-us>.

17. “Afghanistan National Institute of Music” – Educational Programs, <https://www.anim-music.org/educational-programs>

18. “Afghanistan National Institute of Music” – Letter from the Director, <https://www.anim-music.org/letter-from-director>.



*Fig 7:  
The Taliban used to take musical cassette tapes, destroy them and hung up proudly for all transgressors to see.*

# 2 *Anti-Censorship Strategies*

## 7

The general population also tries to find their ways to circumvent the censorship. For example, cassettes and disks are being wrongly labelled, so that there seems to be no critical evidence during an inspection by the Taliban. Satellite dishes are secretly installed for watching TV on little television sets that are easy to hide. Also, many people possess two mobile phones, one that they have at home with music and pictures and their friends' contacts on, and one they carry outside of the house with no content that could reveal anything about themselves, as **Khalid** told us. Furthermore, people who know that they have to cross a Taliban territory have adapted certain strategies. For example, when **Ashraf** wants to visit his family, he grows his beard and hair for days and mutes the music when he is in the area so that he makes an unobtrusive impression and can pass the roadblocks.

Concerning music in particular, he revealed another anti-censorship strategy to us: Flash drives. When people go outside of a Taliban occupied city they take their flash drive with them and collect music from others, this can be friends or friends of friends. Copying MP3 files to flash drives does not cost anything and is, referring to our interviewees, common practice in remote parts of the country under Taliban control.

Furthermore, while interviewing Baily and Doubleday, it turned out that getting hold of "illegal" music is not actually impossible. Although they presented strategies used by Afghans up until 2001, similar behaviour happens today: Many shop owners who officially sell Taliban music (religious singing) sell other music under the counter, almost like drugs. As Doubleday stated, another practice of listening to and playing the forbidden music is put into practice at private homes: Because of the climate in Afghanistan almost every house has a cellar that can be used as a secret place for coming together and making music so that the neighbours cannot hear anything. Not only little secret concerts of this sort exist but also bigger music festivals occur regularly at secret locations. For the transportation of musical instruments, socks are often put under the strings of e.g. a sitar or rubab so that they cannot resonate and make any noise which would expose the musician. But it is also possible to continue even after having faced threats or even successful attacks: The recording of the TV-Show "Afghan Star" was continued without audience and at a secret site, after various threats appeared and a bomb attack occurred at a live event. However, the participants are still being intimidated and assaulted or, in one case, a competitor was almost murdered.<sup>19</sup>

19. Muhammad Lila, "Why Was 'Afghan Star' Winner Nearly Killed? A Masked Gunman Ambushed Him After a Performance." 2012. <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/navid-forugh-afghan-star-winner-killed/story?id=16389556>.

## *Deception in Song Lyrics*

The deliberate use of expressions which the Taliban do not perceive as an assault can be mentioned as a last way to circumvent censorship. Singer Nairaz did so already in the first Taliban period. After being asked to sing by the Taliban, he chose a song in Dari – a language the

Taliban did not understand as most of them were "proud Pashtu speakers". The lyrics go: "Remember the poor are protected by God/ One day he will answer their cries/ And their oppressors will be punished".<sup>20</sup>

20. Broughton 2002.

# 2 *Hopes for the future*

8

When we asked our interview partners about the future and if there is any hope left for music and a peaceful togetherness we received quite diverse answers. On the one hand, there were **Farid, Khalid** and **Ashraf** who were in Afghanistan and saw everything happening. They have felt the pain and anger of loss and have often been victims in arbitrary situations. So, it is not hard to understand that they did not have much hope left. Particularly, they expressed their worries about the current situation because so many countries are involved in Afghanistan's history and present, that are conflicted parties themselves with different interests and who are unlikely to cooperate. Another concern is that people with dreams and ideas different from the set of regulations of the Taliban simply get eliminated - just like the terror attack on the theatre piece about suicide bombing Ashraf himself was a victim of. Therefore, even the seeds of plans and ideas get exterminated before they can develop. Like artists,

many others do not want to take this risk and therefore stay quiet or leave the country. Additionally, there are a lot of people that are easily influenced and convinced by the ideology and may support the Taliban.

On the other hand, there are a lot of peace projects and initiatives for building up music and art again but only a few manage to last, like Aga Khan and ANIM. In the long run, they might make a difference which, however, is a slow process. It is hard to recruit people who are skilled and brave enough to work there for those projects and initiatives. In addition, the Aga Khan school for example, does not teach girls and music still is not part of the normal school curriculum, so there is still much to be improved even in this sector. An increasing number of pupil and student organizations, poetry slams and short documentary presentations in the diaspora lead to voices being heard outside the country as well, which could possibly slowly effect change.<sup>21</sup>

21. Baily 2020; Double-day 2020.

# 2 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

9

The current situation in Afghanistan reveals itself to still be quite severe – or rather, once again. The ban on music, as it was practiced during the reign of the Taliban (1996-2001), is being reimplemented in the regions under Taliban influence.

As our research has shown, despite the circumstances, people in Afghanistan do not let music be taken from them. They find ways and strategies to circumvent the censorship of music, several decades ago as well as now. Whether it is getting music on a cassette or a flash drive, having multiple mobile phones, changing their appearance, or playing in hidden places, music and its culture are being kept alive, although not to the extent that may be preferable.

However, Afghan people like our interviewees have managed to deal with these hardships. Talking to our various interview partners, we did not get a thoroughly pessimistic view. Rather, just as the severity of the situation varies from region to region, opinions on the future and the outlook seem to be diverse. Farid and Khalid, but especially Ashraf were rather hopeless when we asked about their expectations on the future – they could not imagine what the solution for the situation could be like, the main reason being that many countries other than Afghanistan itself would have interests in the region and that all of them would be entangled. From that point of view, obviously the outlook can be described as a rather pessimistic one, also for the musical development of the country and its traditional music preservation.

Experts on the situation also showed some concerns in regard to the outlook for Afghan music as Farooz states it: “Music plays an important role in the elimination of disorders and issues in society, [and] [m]usical policy is related to cultural development which leads to a systematic progress in the modern society.[...] Development of the importance of music in terms of national values can respond to the cultural and spiritual needs of the country, which can in turn aid the musical situation in the country.

However, the most important current challenges faced by the music scene are the lack of support for musicians and academic music students, [...] [a] lack of access to infrastructure of the national music [...] and the lack of an effective copyright law.”<sup>22</sup> Despite all these challenges, however, Baily summarizes pragmatically: “The Afghans will muddle through.”<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, there are a lot of areas in need of improvement in current Afghanistan. Apart from our literature and interview sources we found optimistic perspectives in young Afghan students. Being at a cultural charity event for Afghan orphans and talking to one of the young female students, however, a different perspective presented itself to us: This student was generally speaking positive about the future of her home country: she put her focus on the new initiatives and programmes that are happening e.g. in Kabul and was rather hopeful.

So, in conclusion, it is possible to say that the question of the current situation in Afghanistan and on the situation of Afghan music, is one that is only possible to answer in a nuanced way. Surely, many things will have to change to ensure a revitalisation of the musical and cultural scenes. For the time being, the continuing observation and support for this music culture is definitely something research and society can place emphasis on because: “[...] music is necessary to our society and has the capacity to ensure the peace, security and improvement of the mental health of the Afghan people.”<sup>24</sup> So, “[w]hatever comes out of this conflict, music will have an interesting place. It is a very sensitive indicator of other wider social and cultural issues.”<sup>25</sup>

For the future, the authors’ hopes lie in the strength of Afghan people to secure education about culture and especially music, incorporate music lessons into the curriculum and allow women to teach and learn. We hope that our work can contribute something constructive by outlining the complexities of music censorship and raising awareness to the censorship of music as well as peoples’ strategies around it.

22. Farooz 2016, p. 27.

23. Baily 2020.

24. Farooz 2016, p. 27.

25. Wroe 2001.

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Fig. 8. Judges – Season 14 (left to right): Saida Gul Maina, Aryana Sayeed, Mustafa Azizyar, Miri Maf-tun, Quais Ulfat.

We all know shows like “American Idol” in the US or “The X Factor” in Great Britain, which are popular all over the world these days. Diverse contestants, a more or less critical jury, and a big audience at home watching enthusiastically while one of the rising stars goes onto a [maybe not so bright] future in the music industry. But what happens if we transfer this concept to a country like Afghanistan? The show immediately takes on a new image: The jury is made-up of national music heroes, the contestants are not seen as a laughing stock whose only goal is

to be on television, and everyone, including the audience in the studio and at home, is facing a big risk by watching and supporting this very controversial show. Why is that so? Music in Afghanistan is not seen as something ordinary. Not so many years ago (1996-2001), Afghanistan was under the reign of the Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, who had forbidden any music in public or even inside people’s homes. Public displays of people making music and even women singing on a stage would have been impossible under the Taliban regime.

## The Beginning

The idea to initiate the show “Afghan Star” came from Daoud Sediqi in 2005, a young producer for the media company TOLO TV. After the long war, he wanted to “move people from the gun to music.”<sup>1</sup>

He hoped “the show would encourage national unity by urging people to vote for favourites across ethnic lines.”<sup>2</sup> He appeared to be right. “Different ethnic groups sat peacefully

next to each other in the audience. Hazara, Pashtuns, Pashai, nobody would have believed this.”<sup>3</sup> Not only does it seem to overcome ethnic differences, it also gives people a chance to experience some kind of democracy: “The whole idea of voting in any context was a new one for the younger generation of Afghans, who found this kind of ballot casting to be more involving than parliamentary elections.”<sup>4</sup>

Sophie Huber

1. Kenneth Turan, “Big win for ‘Afghan Star’”, 2009. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2009-jul-24-et-afghan24-story.html>.

2. Ibid.

3. Translated by the author; Anja Reich, „Früher Rebell – heute unglücklich“, 2010. <https://www.fr.de/panorama/frueher-rebell-heute-ungluecklich-11688540.html>.

4. Kenneth Turan 2009.

# 3 Same but Different

5

The format of the show is similar to shows like “American Idol” or “The X Factor”. Hopefuls aspiring to live their dream of being a singer fight for the title and a start in the music industry. Week after week, they have to show their talents in front of the judges, a live audience, and on television; week after week one hopeful contestant is voted out of the show by the audience. In Afghanistan, it all starts with auditions throughout the country, which have become more and more popular among the public in the last few years. There are so many people wanting to compete that there is even a line outside the studio in which the audition takes place. A panel of judges, containing national folk- and pop singers and other important personalities in the Afghan music world, chooses the best 12 singers through several rounds of auditions. Once the top 12 are named, the live shows start. From this point on, contestants are not only evaluated by the judges, but they also need to collect votes from the viewers. Everyone with a mobile phone in

Afghanistan (in 2018, about 77% of the Afghan population<sup>5</sup>) and viewers overseas can vote for their champion and every week the contestant with the least votes is voted out of the show.<sup>6</sup> The winner gets \$5,000 cash and a recording contract for one album.<sup>7</sup>

Adding to the remarkable aspects, the show also rediscovered traditional Afghan music. For years under the Taliban reign, this music had only been heard in secret. Contestants bring back traditional Afghan songs, which are highly oriented on Indian music, with tabla drums and sitar.<sup>8</sup> Even the traditionally Afghan rubab can be found in some of the songs. But there is a wide variety of music on the “Afghan Star” stage. There are different auditions for pop, rap and folk, but also for Ghazal and Mahali music. All this can be discovered on the official website of “Afghan Star” and their YouTube channel. The website, which is also available in English, has a lot of interesting facts and information on the show. You can find everything from old to new episodes, information on the judges, contestants and much more.<sup>9</sup>

5. “Digital 2018 Afghanistan”, 2018. <https://de.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2018-afghanistan-january-2018>.

6. “Afghan Star”, How to Vote. <https://afghanstar.tv/how-to-vote>.

7. Aryn Baker, “Afghan Idol: A Subversive TV Hit”, 2008. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1725113,00.html>.

8. Marc Thörner, „Böse Menschen haben keine Lieder“, 2013. <https://www.fluter.de/boese-menschen-haben-keine-lieder>.

9. “Afghan Star”, <https://afghanstar.tv>; “Afghan Star” - YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBahtf2w-ZzKc76BBXAM7Iig>.



Fig. 9:  
The auditions start



Fig. 10: Traditional Instruments are part of „Afghan Star“.

## Risky Business

The show does not only have fans. The conservative parts of the country, especially the regions under Taliban rule, have criticised and even threatened TOLO TV because of “Afghan Star”. The show has been a thorn in the side of the Taliban since it came into existence and it still is. The show stands for everything the Taliban oppose and tried to ban during their reign, particularly the public performance of music and women singing. Every once in a while, there are calls to remove the show and attacks against the contestants and employees.

In 2016, there was a terrorist attack on a shuttle bus from TOLO TV. The bus was carrying employees of the channel on their way to recording. Seven employees were killed immediately and approximately twenty were severely injured.<sup>11</sup> After the attack, the Taliban issued a statement calling TOLO TV “an intelligence network opposing our national unity and our religious and national values”<sup>11</sup> and “the country’s largest network for promoting

obscenity, irreligiousness, foreign culture and nudity.”<sup>12</sup> On the 21st of January 2016, the news broadcaster “Al Jazeera” reported:

[...] the Taliban openly threatened to target the television channel after they reported allegations of summary executions, rape, kidnappings and other abuses by Taliban fighters during the battle for Kunduz. [...] The Taliban said at the time that the Reports were inaccurate and threatened unspecified consequences.<sup>13</sup>

It was the first bombing of media associates by the Taliban, which makes the situation for journalists, in one of the most dangerous countries, even more difficult. The Taliban demonstrate their power and attempt to silence critical and controversial voices. However, this has the opposite effect on journalists, instead urging them to fight and show that they cannot be stopped even more fiercely.<sup>14</sup> Following the attacks, the set of TOLO TV was rebuilt as a high security building. Everyone who walks in and out is

10. “Taliban suicide attack in Kabul kills TV station staff”, 2016. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/1/21/taliban-suicide-attack-in-kabul-kills-tv-station-staff](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/1/21/taliban-suicide-attack-in-kabul-kills-tv-station-staff).

11. F. Brinley Bruton and Fazul Rahim, “Taliban Claims Responsibility for Targeting Tolo TV Workers”, 2016. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/tali-ban-claims-responsibility-targeting-tolo-tv-workers-n500971>.

12. Mujib Mashal, “Vibrant Lives of Afghan TV Crew, Erased in a Taliban Bombing”, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/world/asia/afghanis-tan-tolo-tv-bombing.html>.

13. “Taliban suicide attack in Kabul kills TV station staff”, 2016.

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7

strictly monitored. Freedom of the press is also assured by law in Afghanistan and any restriction of it is vehemently fought against.<sup>15</sup>

Sediqi, the founder of the show, now lives in the USA in political asylum. His life had been threatened multiple times and he was afraid that the Taliban would take over again.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, “Afghan Star” is still running, continuing with its 15th season in 2020.

The station TOLO TV belongs to exiles who have returned from Australia. This means that they are not dependent on state money. Their support comes mainly from outside the

country, for example from the US humanitarian organization USAID<sup>17</sup>, the U.S. organisation for International Development, which funds projects to help partnered countries on their way to self-reliance.<sup>18</sup> This, however, provides a different perspective on the show. What are the intentions of those investors? Being financed by US NGOs, it stands to reason that the show would be accused of being some sort of propaganda for a Western lifestyle. The USA have often been suspected of “Westernizing” the Middle East and in this thinking, a show like “Afghan Star” might be just another chance to show people in Afghanistan an idealized picture of what this “free Western life” could be like.

14. Mujib Mashal, “Vibrant Lives of Afghan TV Crew, Erased in a Taliban Bombing”, 2016.

15. Anja Reich, „Früher Rebell - heute unglücklich“, 2010.

16. Ibid.

17. Marc Thörner, „Böse Menschen haben keine Lieder“, 2013.

18. “What We Do” – USAID, 2020. <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do>.



Fig. 11: The Controversial Performance of Setara Hussainzada in Season 3.

## The Fight for Rights

The appearance of women in the show is probably viewed to be even more controversial than the sources of funding or the public display of music. Women in music has always been a controversial topic in Afghanistan. To fully grasp the importance and exceptional nature of Afghan Star, you have to understand the rather limited situation of women in Afghanistan. Women have always had minimal rights in the country. They oversee their families, but outside of this environment, they have no say: Not in their education, which tends to be minimal, their marriages or even their healthcare. This means that the biggest part of their lives usually happens in their family circle. This is why ‘Women’s Music’ is also mainly located in this area. They make domestic music, sing for their children or to pass time, and make music at weddings and big celebrations. Women and men generally

celebrate separately from each other, so women make music for the women’s celebration and men for the men’s. This music is mainly vocal and may be accompanied by frame drum. The frame drum is the only instrument that is played by women and it is also almost exclusively played by women.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the situation has changed since the days before the Communist Party takeover in 1978, but the rules concerning women and music are still very strict. Some say that the situation is even worse than before the Taliban, when female singers had been rather popular on the radio [then a newly invented media format].<sup>20</sup> These days, women singers are hardly accepted at all and especially not on television. “Afghan Star” is confronted with disapproval on a daily basis, as they allow women to compete together with men in front of and for a wide public.

19. Veronica Doubleday, The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments, and Power, in: Jennifer C. Post (ed.): Ethnomusicology – A Contemporary Reader, New York and London 2006, p. 109-133, p. 119.

20. John Baily 2020. Interviewed by the Author, London, 19. February 2020; Veronica Doubleday 2020. Interviewed by the Author, London, 19. February 2020.

# 3 Role Models for the Future

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Women have been singing on stage of “Afghan Star” since the first season in 2005. The simple act of letting them sing on stage was perceived as a huge step in this country. Most

people are not used to hearing a woman sing publicly, let alone to seeing her on television. Female participants have struggled against prejudice in society until today. While this has been a big reason for criticism since the beginning of the show, there also were quite a few ‘scandals’, or at least that is how they were perceived by some. The story of Setara Hussainzada, which has been covered in a documentary, is one example.<sup>21</sup> She had decided to dance, or rather move rhythmically, on stage and her headscarf slipped a little and revealed her hair for just a short moment. This led to national outrage against her. She was not able to go back home, as she would have been in serious danger in her hometown. She received death threats and had to fear for her life if she went outside. This happened in the third season and Afghanistan and “Afghan Star” have moved forward since then.<sup>22</sup>

Last year, a woman was the winner of the show for the first time. Zahra Elham, 19 years old, was voted for by the majority of viewers out of 12, mostly male, rivals. This can be interpreted as a sign that people’s mentality in Afghanistan is changing and people are getting used to women expressing themselves in public and proudly doing what they love. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go, as another story, that of Sediqa Madadgar, reminds us. Sediqa Madadgar was the only other girl competing alongside Zahra. She was said to be the better singer, even the jury confirmed this, but it appeared that Afghan voters were just not ready for a woman like her. She was voted out in the seventh round of the live shows. Sediqa has a very open personality, jokes with the boys and even rides a bike around Kabul. She does this dressed up as a man, as women are not allowed to ride bikes.<sup>23</sup>

She clearly did not fit the picture of what the majority of the voters perceive to be an honourable woman. Even though Afghanistan has made progress in terms of women’s rights, making it possible for women to per-

form in such shows and even let one of them win against male competitors, it is only up to a certain point. There is still a lot of work to be done for young girls and women to have the freedom to be and do what they want.

One person, who is very important for women in Afghanistan, but also for “Afghan Star”, is Aryana Sayeed. She is one of the very few international pop stars from Afghanistan, maybe even the only one. She was born in Kabul in 1988 but left the country at an early age due to the civil war. From Kabul, she and her family went to Pakistan, Switzerland, and finally settled in London which is also her current hometown. She still feels very connected to her home country and fights tirelessly for the rights of girls and women there. Through her activism and advocacy, Aryana has been a role model for millions of Afghan women in and outside of Afghanistan. In the past few years, Aryana Sayeed has also been a judge in “Afghan Star”, helping and coaching the female contestants, giving them strength and support.<sup>24</sup> The messages to women, especially women singers and musicians, that she gives in her songs are:

They should not give up. They should be courageous, they should be strong, they should look forward to the future. It’s not that they are nothing, the way people make them feel. That that’s not true. They’re human beings, they have as much rights as men do.<sup>25</sup>

Doing all this, she threatens the worldview of the conservatives and especially the Taliban extremely and that makes her a very prominent target. They try to turn society against her by making her and her songs the enemy of Islam. This has resulted in many threats and dangers for her both inside and outside Afghanistan. Her concerts take place under threats of suicide bombings and her person is also threatened. Blood money has even been offered by the Taliban: “The mullah on TV, he says whoever cuts Aryana’s head and they bring it, they are gonna go to heaven.”<sup>26</sup> When asked if this is not frightening for her, Aryana says she is terrified, but also feels that it is her duty, as a role model, to be strong for the girls and women of Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup>

21. Havana Marking: Silencing the Song - An Afghan Fallen Star, HBO, 2011, 34 Min.

22. Havana Marking: Afghan Star, USA 2009, DVD Zeitgeist Films 2009, 87 Min, here: 27:00-37:25 Min.

23. Sahar Zand, Afghan Star 2: Music, Tradition and the Taliban, 2019, 01:45-4:35 Min. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07lr772>.

24. “Aryana Sayeed - Singer, Songwriter and Women’s Rights Activist”. <https://nato-engages.org/speakers/aryana-sayeed>.

25. Sahar Zand, Afghan Star 1: A TV Talent Show, 2019, 15:12-15:27 Min, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07l4vcr>.

26. Sahar Zand, Afghan Star 2: Music, Tradition and the Taliban, 2019, 18:45-20:23 Min.

27. Sahar Zand, Afghan Star 2: Music, Tradition and the Taliban, 2019, 20:23-22:00 Min.

# 3 *Mirror and Parallel Universe*

9

Shows like “Afghan Star” might have had some positive impact on Afghan society, whether it is to be seen as their sole credit or not. Since the beginnings of the show in 2005, it seems like the country has taken big steps towards more freedom and autonomy. People are able to live in a safer, more self-determined environment. Music and dance have partly found their way back into day to day life and some girls are allowed to go to school and even university. This development seems to be mirrored throughout the show as well. “Afghan Star” evolved from a very small TV format to a national television highlight which is followed all over the world. People are voting for contestants from other families, a different ethnic background, and even women. On the other hand, “Afghan Star” might only be a big bubble, giving the contestants a fleeting glimpse of the Western music industry and open mindedness before snatching it away as soon as they are voted out of the show. When they leave “Afghan Star” full of hopes and dreams, normal life catches up to them rather quickly. For some, that simply means going back to their families and their

day to day life, like Sediqa Madadgar, while for others this is not an option, as the example of Setara Hussainzada shows. Especially for the girls and women on the show, it can be very difficult after they have to leave. A big part of Afghan society, especially in the Pashtun area, is still very conservative regarding the role of women in society. Women performing on stage visibly for everyone does not fit into this traditional picture at all. For some of them, these women have lost their honour and are a disgrace for their families. That is why, after they have taken part in “Afghan Star”, most of them are not able to go back to their normal lives and their hometowns.<sup>28</sup> A lot of the time, they are on their own.

The outer image of “Afghan Star” may give an impression of a modern Western-oriented and liberal country in which freedom and independence is possible, even for women, but in reality, people do not seem ready to let go of their traditions and beliefs yet. This leads us to conclude that “Afghan Star” is indeed a parallel universe. People enjoy watching it from the outside, but it can hardly be called an accurate mirror to Afghan society.

28. Bailey 2020; Doubleday 2020.



Fig. 12:  
Sediqa Madadgar  
(left) singing  
in Season 14.



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# *POSITIVE VIBES STATT NEGATIVER SCHLAGZEILEN*

Ein Text von Linus Bahr

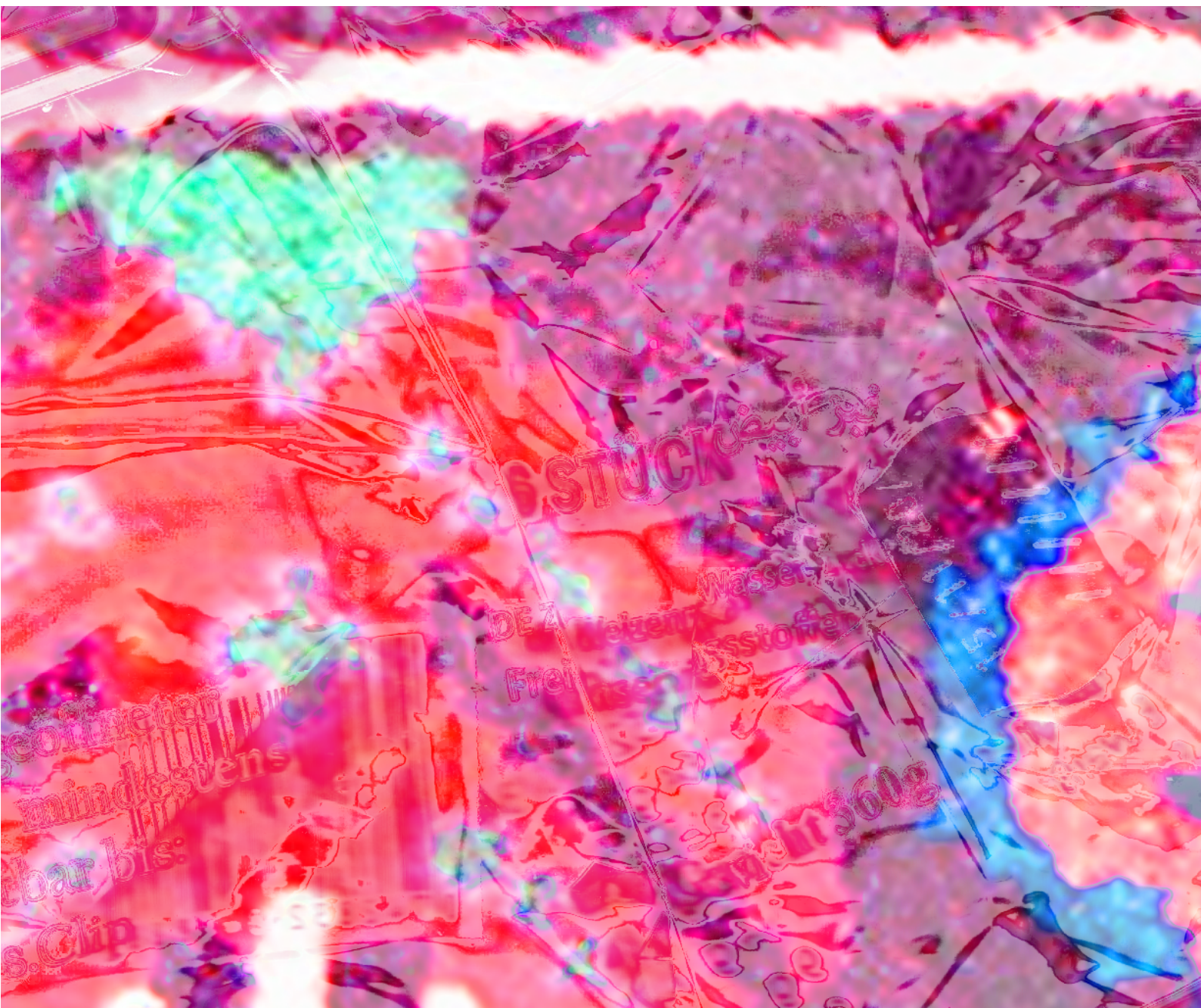


Fig. 13:  
Farhad Samadzada  
im Studio



Wenig junge Produzenten aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum haben mit einer derartig breiten Palette an internationalen Künstler\*Innen gearbeitet oder sie groß gemacht wie er: Farhad Samadzada alias Farhot. Neben Nneka und Talib Kweli arbeitete er bereits mit Haftbefehl, Cro und SSI0. Der afghanischstämmige Produzent kam direkt nach seiner Geburt nach Deutschland, wo er bis heute im Hamburger Stadtteil St. Pauli lebt und musiziert.<sup>1</sup> Und dabei macht er so einiges anders als viele seiner Kolleg\*innen, ohne jemals das Gefühl zu erwecken, er wolle sich aufdrängen oder würde sich verbiegen.

Einher mit dem Erfolg von deutschem Hip Hop und Rap geht der oftmals auftretende Konsens, sowohl deutsche Produzent\*innen, als auch deutschsprachige Rapper\*innen orientierten sich zu stark an Trends des US-amerikanischen Musikmarktes: wenig Eigenständigkeit im Hinblick auf Groove, Instrumentierung, Flow und Text. Einen beispiellosen Gegenentwurf lieferte 2012 der Offenbacher Rapper Haftbefehl, bürgerlich Aykut Anhan, in Zusammenarbeit mit

Farhot, als sie „Chabos wissen wer der Babo ist“ auf die Szene losließen. Im öffentlichen Fokus stand besonders der auch für deutsche Muttersprachler\*innen größtenteils unverständliche Text Haftbefehls, doch lieferte die Art der Beatproduktion eine Blaupause für den deutschen Straßenrapsound der darauffolgenden Jahre.

So lässt sich der Sound wohl am besten mit einer Zeile aus dem vorhergehenden Album des Rappers beschreiben. „Das ist kein Deutsch, was ich mache ist Kanackisch [Kanackiș]“<sup>2</sup> bezieht sich zwar in erster Linie auf das Textliche in Haftbefehls Musik, welches zum Großteil aus Lehnwörtern der kurdischen, arabischen, türkischen, sowie englischen Sprache besteht, doch treffen ebenso in der Produktion die kompromisslose Härte der Drums auf ein nach vorne treibendes Sample bulgarisch folkloristischen Chorgesangs, welches bereits 2009 vom amerikanischen Rapper Drake verwendet wurde.<sup>3</sup> Bunt gemischt also, aber entschieden und klar fokussiert. Diesen Sound verfestigte er im darauffolgenden Jahr auf seiner ersten Soloveröffentlichung „Kabul Fire Vol. 1“.

1. Frederike Arns, „Hamburger ist Musiker des Jahres - Chabos wissen, wer der Farhot ist“, 2017. <https://www.mopo.de/hamburg/ausgehen/musik---partys/hamburger-ist-musiker-des-jahres-chabos-wissen--wer-der-farhot-ist-25673292>.

2. Haftbefehl, Kanackis, 2012, CD, Azzlackz.

3. WhoSampled, „Samples of Pilentze Pee (Pilentze Chante) by Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares“, [https://www.whosampled.com/Le-Myst%C3%A8re-Des-Voix-Bulgares/Pilentze-Pee-\(Pilentze-Chante\)/sampled/](https://www.whosampled.com/Le-Myst%C3%A8re-Des-Voix-Bulgares/Pilentze-Pee-(Pilentze-Chante)/sampled/).

# 4 „She can do nothing 5 wrong, and sleep out in the rain“

Obwohl er Afghanistan seit seiner Geburt aufgrund der politischen Lage nicht mehr aufsuchen konnte, empfindet Farhot bis heute eine tiefe Verbindung. Afghanistan sei für ihn in erster Linie seine Familie und die Art, wie er mit seinen Eltern spreche und mit anderen Menschen umgehe. Diese kulturellen Umgangsformen seien aber so vermischt mit Hamburger Einflüssen, dass die beiden nicht klar trennbar wären. Durch seine Familie habe er schon immer mit Afghanistan zu tun gehabt, doch da er in Europa lebe,

wisse er nicht genau, zu was ihm das macht, ob Europäer oder Afghane. Die Inspiration zum Namen seines Labels und damit auch zum ersten Albumtitel kam von der nigerianischen Hip Hop- und Soulsängerin Nneka, mit der Farhot seine ersten größeren Erfolge feiern konnte. Als Reaktion auf seine Musik habe sie ihn mit den Worten „Kabul fire“ angebrüllt, woraufhin klar war, dass diese Wortkombination sinnbildlich für Farhots Sound und Machart stünde und so seinem Werk einen adäquaten Titel verpasste.<sup>4</sup>

4. Marc Übel, „Der Soundtrack von... Farhot - der Podcast“, 2019.



Fig. 14:  
Das Albumcover  
zu Farhots Debu-  
talbum

# 4 6

Das Albumcover [Fig.14] ist gespickt mit afghanischen Klischées. Umgesetzt von der deutschen Kinderbuchillustratorin Elsa Klever. Der Produzent Farhot, klassischerweise mit Snapshot dargestellt, sitzend auf einem zweiköpfigen afghanischen Windhund vor einem mächtigen Gebirge, dem

Hindukusch, und neben ihm gen Horizont steigend ein Flugdrache. Die Afghanischen Windhunde können einfach als Anspielung auf den Rassenamen dieser Hunde gelesen werden, der sie als „Afghanen“ bezeichnet. Der Hindukusch zeigt sich im Hintergrund als höchstes Gebirge und Schauplatz weltweit medial wahrgenommener Kriegshandlung. Der Flugdrache hingegen ist spätestens seit Khaled Hosseinis „Drachenläufer“ ebenfalls bekannt. Die Bordüren der Umrahmung dieses Bildes vervollständigen das Albumcover zu einem orientalischen Teppich.

Nach eigener Aussage möchte er mit seiner ersten Soloveröffentlichung der afghanischen Hauptstadt Kabul etwas geben, worauf sie seit 40 Jahren vergeblich wartet: positive Vibes statt negativer Schlagzeilen.<sup>5</sup> Und so gelingt ihm, ohne tief in die Klischeekiste greifen zu müssen, ein eigenständiger Gesamtsound, der ohne jeglichen Zweifel klingt wie Kabul. Farhot schöpft dabei aus einer fulminanten Bandbreite an Stilmitteln, um manchmal sehr direkt, teils collageartig vor dem inneren Auge des Rezipienten sein Bild der Stadt zu zeichnen.

Auf dem Track „Tanoohs“ beispielsweise führt er die Hörer\*innen durch Sampling von traditionell afghanischen Instrumenten neben selbst eingespielten Synthesizerstimmen, Nachrichtenwarnungen und Solomon Burke's „When A Man Loves A Woman“ in die Tiefe seiner Liebe zur Stadt.

Mit dabei ist stets ein düsterer Touch, der sich über sämtliche Tracks des Albums zieht. Ob durch konstante Alarmsignale und wackelnde Shaker mit Geigerzählersound auf „Hey Ya“ oder durch runtergepitchte Vocal-samples in Verbindung mit modularem Synthesizersound auf „System Down“ – Farhot schafft stets eine Atmosphäre, die auf unaufdringliche Art und Weise mystisch erscheint. Die Verbindung der einzelnen Tracks gelingt ihm, obwohl sich die Machart der einzelnen Anspielstationen doch gewaltig unterscheidet, unter anderem durch die mehrfache Verwendung einzelner Instrumente in unterschiedlichen Kontexten. Was andere Produzent\*innen durch Verwendung

verschiedenster, beliebig wirkender Synthesizer-Preset-Sounds auszugleichen versuchen, löst Farhot auf seine ganz eigene Weise: der gleiche Upright-Piano-Sound auf unterschiedlichen Tracks, mal klar im Vordergrund als Riff, mal mit tragenden Akkorden und mal Arpeggien im Hintergrund. Das macht den entscheidenden Unterschied. Das Piano aus seinem Hamburger Studio klingt und Farhot weiß es mit all seinen Schwelungen einzusetzen.

„Represented Heart“, beispielsweise, besteht zum Großteil aus einer eingängigen Pianomelodie mit Vocalsample über trockenen Drums. Im Hintergrund spielt eine verzerrte Gitarre verwaschene Lines. Doch statt den Beat pumpend zu gestalten, verzichtet er auf die im modernen Hip Hop meist verwendete Roland TR-808 als Bassinstrument und setzt ganz auf selbst eingespielte E-Bass-Lines. Hierdurch klingt das ganze eher wie eine sehr gut eingespielte Band, als wie ein Ein-Mann-produzierter Hip Hop-Beat. Das ganze mündet nach einigen Wiederholungen in einem ebenfalls tiefergepitchten Sample entnommen aus dem Film „The Usual Suspects“ aus dem Jahr 1995 (ursprüngliches Zitat des französischen Lyrikers Charles Baudelaire): „The greatest trick the devil ever pulled, was convincing the world, he didn't exist.“<sup>6</sup> Spätestens hier hält wieder das Düstere Einzug in seine Musik. Dieses Düstere begleite ihn musikalisch schon lange, da er bereits seit seiner Jugendzeit Cypress Hill und Wu-Tang Clan als seine Inspirationsquellen benennt.<sup>7</sup>

Diese beiden Gruppen sind dafür bekannt gewalt- und drogenverherrlichende Texte auf rohe und bedrohlich wirkende Beats zu rappen.

Seine musikalischen Roots sind deutlich hörbar. Das Projekt repräsentiere seine Liebe zu einem bestimmten Hip Hop-Stil: Einfacher und dreckiger Sound. Schnell produziert. Ohne allzu überdachte Elemente und sich auf das wesentliche des alten Hip Hop-Sounds beschränkend. Ein Sound, der keine anderen Erwartungen erfüllen möchte und im Grunde nur für Musikliebhaber geschaffen wurde.<sup>8</sup> Nicht aus Unvermögen, denn dass er auch ganz anders könnte, stellte er bereits auf mit Platin ausgezeichneten Platten unter Beweis. Doch auch hier sei das Entscheidende gewesen, dass er einfach gemacht habe, was er liebe. Und dieser Erfolg stelle die öffentlichen Auszeichnung komplett in den Schatten.<sup>9</sup>

5. Übel, 2019.

6. Bryan Singer, The Usual Suspects, USA 1995, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, Spelling Films International, 106 Min.

7. Übel, 2019.

8. Margaret Tra, „The Simplicity of Making Beats with Producer Farhot“, 2013. <https://www.stimulateyoursoul.com/interviews/2013/12/30/the-simplicity-of-making-beats-with-producer-farhot.html>.

9. Tra, 2013.

# 4 7 „Reppin’ Kabul, but I keep things global“

Ein etwas anderes Projekt verwirklicht Farhad Samadzada in einer Produktion, die bebildert wird mit Comicanimationen, in welchen das Alter Ego des Produzenten repräsentiert wird durch die Figur „Fuchy“. Der Name leitet sich ab von dem Glücksdrachen aus Michael Endes Roman „Die unendliche Geschichte“, der in Phantasien lebt. In allen Bild- und Videoproduktionen trägt Fuchy „Pakool“, eine traditionelle afghanische Kopfbedeckung, und Vollbart. Oft ist er aufbrausend. Ein Grund hierfür könnte der in den filmischen Sequenzen immer wieder angesprochene Bombenanschlag in der Vergangenheit liefern, der den Charakter dazu veranlasste seine Heimat zu verlassen.<sup>10</sup>

Die Musik ist seine Superkraft und mit dieser lässt ihn Farhad in den eigens produzierten Musikvideos im Stile des kultigen Fighting-Games „Streetfighter“ unter anderem gegen Adolf Hitler und Kim Jong-Il kämpfen. Dabei

geht es ihm allerdings nicht um Politik im herkömmlichen Sinne, in der Flüchtlinge in erster Linie als Verhandlungsmasse betrachtet werden. Vielmehr um die Faszination Hip Hop und dem damit verbundenen Rebellentum in einer kapitalistischen Welt, die hauptsächlich auf Sicherung eigener Vorteile ausgerichtet sei. Doch Fuchy sei kein politischer Mensch und wolle auch nicht als solcher wahrgenommen werden, sondern als Lebemann. Auf die Frage, woran er eigentlich gerade arbeite, antwortet Farhots Alter Ego mit den Worten: „Reppin’ Kabul. But I keep things global.“<sup>11</sup>

Der Produzent merkte zur Veröffentlichung der ersten CD „420“ im November 2016 noch an, dass dieses Projekt zu 100% ihm entspräche und nichts musikalisch so nah an ihm sei wie Fuchy.<sup>12</sup> Das änderte sich aber bereits bei der Veröffentlichung des Nachfolgers „Praliné“ im November 2019, da der Protagonist dazugelernt habe und dadurch gewachsen sei.<sup>13</sup>

10. Fuchy, 420, 2016, LP, Kabul Fire.

11. Fuchy, 2016.

12. Marcel Sigmann, „Wir haben Farhot in seinem Musikstudio getroffen!“, 2016. <https://www.noisiv.de/farhot-interview/>.

13. HHV, „Fuchy - Praliné - Vinyl LP - 2019 - EU - Original“, 2019. <https://www.hhv.de/shop/de/artikel/fuchy-praline-694534>.



Fig. 15: Farhots Alter Ego „Fuchy“ während des Kampfes mit dem ehemaligen Nordkoreanischen Diktator Kim Jong-Il



# 4 8

So hätte der Charakter sich nicht geändert, die Rolle hingegen aber deutlich. Er tritt zurück und überlässt Frauen die Bühne. „It’s about women, their grace, their struggles, their allure, their voices, and their stories. It’s about them being an infinite source of inspiration.“<sup>14</sup>

Musikalisch äußert sich der Schwerpunktwechsel wenig. Klar, zwischen den beiden Veröffentlichungen liegen mehrere Jahre und somit haben sich neben der neuen Klarheit im Gesamtsound beispielsweise die Drum- und Basssounds von tatsächlich akustischen Samples hin zu synthetisch Erzeugten bewegt. Die einzelnen Tracks lassen sich nun vielmehr als Songs beschreiben, da sie stärker auf die Vocals ausgerichtet sind. Der eigentlich Klang bleibt jedoch unverkennbar der von Farhad Samadzada.

„420“ steht dabei noch vielmehr im Sinne des Albums „Kabul Fire Vol. 1“: markante, harte, akustische Drumsounds, teils stark komprimierte Drumbreaks („In Love“), viel Distortion und wenig dünne Sounds, experimentelle Vocal- und Beatcuts, Noise statt längerer Becken und Gitarrensoli mit Hendrix-Vibe. Doch bereits auf dem Track „Kung Fuchy“ gewährte Farhot

Einblick in das, was noch folgen sollte. Stark verzerrter 808-Bass, rollende Hi-Hats und stärkeres Auflösen des Loopgefühls, in dem keine 4 Takte den nächsten gleichen, was auf dem Vorgänger „Kabul Fire Vol. 1“ noch etwas anders klang.

Klar heraussticht Track Nummer 5 der Platte: Auf „Melt“ findet sich ein völlig anderer, orchestraler Sound, durch sehr kurze, kaum akustische Drums, synthetischen und akustischen Bass, Streicher und alles was dazugehört, nur um aus dem Nichts zum typischen Farhotsound zu wechseln, der, kaum ist er aufgetaucht, wieder verworfen wird und schließlich in einen überaus harten, aber herum wabernen Beat mündet.<sup>15</sup>

Auf „Praliné“ feuret jeder Song eine\*n andere\*n Sänger\*in, was den Gesamteindruck zwar leicht ändert, doch ihm durchaus zu Gute kommt. Den Vorstellungen Fuchys lässt sich leichter folgen, da einzelne Elemente klarer in den Hintergrund rücken und sparsamer mit Variationen, plötzlichen Wechseln und zusätzlichen Stimmen gearbeitet wird. Deutlich wird auch, dass Farhad wesentlich weniger Distortion verwendet, die Instrumente dadurch etwas weniger voluminös wirken und den Hörer dadurch etwas mehr entspannen lassen.<sup>16</sup>

14. HHV, 2019

15. Fuchy, 2016.

16. Fuchy: Praliné, 2019, Vinyl LP, Kabul Fire.

## Abseits der Beatproduktion

Neben der Fülle an Soloveröffentlichungen und zahlloser Produktionen besonders englisch- und deutschsprachiger Rapper\*innen und Sänger\*innen in den letzten Jahren, engagiert sich Farhad ebenfalls in unterschiedlichsten sozialen Bereichen. So ist er unter anderem Botschafter beim Kinderhilfsprojekt „Visions for Children e.V.“, welches in Afghanistan Schulgebäude ausbaut, Klassenzimmer und Sanitärräume einrichtet, sowie die Schüler\*innen und Lehrkräfte mit entsprechendem Material ausstattet.<sup>17</sup> Um das Projekt auch finanziell unterstützen zu können, brachte er anlässlich des G20-Gipfeltreffens im Jahr 2017 die Compilation „20 Gs“ unter seinem eigenen Label „Kabul Fire Records“ heraus.<sup>18</sup> Darüber hinaus veröffentlichte er 2014 zusammen mit einigen anderen deutschen Hip Hop-Produzenten die CD „For The People“, deren

Einnahmen zu 100% an Leidtragende des IS im Irak und Syrien gingen. Außerdem gibt er seit einem Jahr unter dem Titel „Deep Fried“ jeden Freitag aufstrebenden Produzent\*innen aus seinem Bekanntenkreis die Möglichkeit einen Beat auf dem YouTube Channel seines Labels „Kabul Fire Records“ zu veröffentlichen.<sup>20</sup>

In nobler Zurückhaltung an den Reglern zahlreicher internationaler Künstler\*innen ruht er sich somit nicht auf den sprichwörtlich wohlverdienten Lorbeeren aus und bleibt seinem Erfolgsrezept dennoch treu: Die Verbindung brachialer Elemente mit schöner Harmonik. Dabei weiß Farhad Samadzada ganz genau, was er tut. Manchmal macht seine Musik einfach gute Laune. Ein andermal gibt sie pure Energie. Und wiederum ein andermal entführt sie die Hörer\*Innen in eine bizarre Welt.

17. Visions for Children, „Farhot“, <https://www.visions4children.org/farhot/>

18. Martin Backspin, „20Gs“ Compilation und Contest – Der Trailer mit Niko und Farhot“, 2017. <https://www.backspin.de/20gs>

19. Various Artists, For The People, 2014, CD, Jakarta.

20. Kabul Fire Records – YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/KabulFireRecords>

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Fig. 8: Afghan Star, <https://afghanstar.tv/sites/default/files/gallery/Team%20Pic.jpg>

Fig. 9: Afghan Star, [https://afghanstar.tv/sites/default/files/gallery/AfghanStar-Ep%20\(5\).jpg](https://afghanstar.tv/sites/default/files/gallery/AfghanStar-Ep%20(5).jpg)

Fig. 10: Afghan Star, <https://afghanstar.tv/sites/default/files/gallery/Afghan%20Star%20S%2012%20-%20Top%202%20%2812%29.jpg>.

Fig. 11: Zeitgeist Film

Fig. 12: Afghan Star, [https://afghanstar.tv/sites/default/files/gallery/Afghan%20Star%20Top%2012%20Elimination%20\(9\).jpg](https://afghanstar.tv/sites/default/files/gallery/Afghan%20Star%20Top%2012%20Elimination%20(9).jpg)

Fig. 13: Marcel Sigmann

Fig. 14: Elsa Klever

Fig. 15: Animation: Jan Van Der Toorn, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=104RQcnyvmY>

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