



**Moroccan Nights in Brussels:  
from Gnawa Rituals to Popular Weddings**  
Conference by Dr. H el ene Sechehaye Universit e Libre de Bruxelles

**12:30-1:45**

**Music Faculty Recital Room**

**January 25, 2023**

In Brussels, more than 15% of the population is of Moroccan descent, making it the second largest foreign national community in the Belgian capital. This lecture will focus on two musical practices studied during a ten-year field research.

The Gnawas constitute a brotherhood community whose ritual practices are abundantly documented in Morocco. Until this project, no research had been led in the diaspora. Circulations bear a historical significance for them: they are at the origin of their practice and they are also constitutive of their artistic or ritual career as well as of the initiation process. The second aspect is dedicated to the * a'bi* ('popular') repertoires played in non-mixed wedding ceremonies by female ensembles. * a'bi* music follows precisely the wedding ceremony, taking on ritual, symbolic and identity functions.

If, at first glance, one could imagine these two universes as completely opposite, theoretical categories are in fact very spontaneously transgressed through practice. Musicians not only cross paths and regularly spend time with each other, but also take on similar roles. Whether it is in relation to patriarchal societal norms, to overly strict forms of religiosity, to systemic racial discrimination or to other forms of identity essentialisation, these musicians transform the places they invest in into spaces of freedom, and free themselves, along with their listeners, for the duration of an evening.

Image by H el ene Sechehaye