

Performing the Maghreb: The *Tarab* Cityscape in Montréal

“No one lives in the world in general – everybody, even the exiled, the drifting, the diasporic, or the perpetually moving, lives in some confined and limited stretch of it – the world around here,” (Geertz 1996:262).

Research Question:

This research project explores the formation of Maghrebi-Canadian identity through an exploration of contemporary soundscapes. In particular, I examine how physical and conceptual spaces hosting *tarab* culture – traditional Arabic music – evoke musical rapture in Maghrebi-identified individuals living in Montréal, Québec. I aim to examine the extent to which intense emotional connection (*tarab* experience) to this music serves to recall and reinforce a collective Maghrebi identity that binds past and future. The *tarab* experience has been defined as a form of affect, musical rapture, ecstasy or enchantment (Danielson 1997, Shannon 2003). My project aims to analyze the memories conjured up and evoked from the *tarab* experiences of Maghrebi people in Montréal, and investigate the implications of *tarab* culture’s effect on current socio-political, religious, and cultural landscapes and domains with a view to understanding how such performances shape identity-formation in this diasporic community (Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995). In this analysis, I ask: How is *tarab* culture mapped out in the city of Montréal, and on what media is it being performed? How does the music’s medium affect the meaning of the performance and its resulting *tarab* experience for participants? How do Maghrebi performers articulate their individual experiences of *tarab* – what memories are they digging up or burying – and how do *tarab* culture and *tarab* experiences shape the collective identities and narratives of Maghrebi people in Montréal today?

Context:

Ethnomusicologists have determined that Arabic music generates emotions and sensations through a powerful connection between the listener and performer. This connection relies strongly on techniques of repetition (Deleuze 1994[1968], Rouget 1985), where the musician uses ornamentation to embellish repeated melodies; and detemporalization and retemporalization, which takes the audience member out of structured time, improvises and flows through scales, and then retemporalizes them back into the structure of the song (Shannon 2003). Through these techniques, the musicians are able to evoke intense affect and musical rapture in their audience participants, ascending them into an ecstatic state, or in Arabic, a state of *tarab*. Audience members react through audio-visual responsorial conversations amongst themselves that include bodily movements, and vocal expression through exclaiming words such as “Allah!” amongst other abstract reactions. Furthermore, because of the sensorium of the Arab world that puts emphasis on not only the visual and sonic, *tarab* culture involves more than just a spectacle of sound. The *tarab* scene is thus a performance – a political representation of a place far away or that once was – including the musical ability of the *mutrib* (the singer invoking *tarab*) and instrumentalists, and often occurring in the sensory environment of a locally embodied, specific setting such as a nightclub filled with cigarette and waterpipe smoke, incorporating the scent and taste of small local dishes (Racy 2003, Qureshi 1994, Sutton 2001). Within this sensory environment, audiences and musicians recreate and reproduce their identities (LaBelle 2006) and enter states of what Rouget (1985) defines as “trance,” which are nonsensical events (Deleuze 1990), and “ecstasy”, which have a linear

vision. Trance and ecstatic states are “in-motion” (Massumi 2002) and interlock as “musicking” and “trancing” (Becker 2004), a mutual process where music and trance maintain each other. Once the trance is evoked the music maintains it, and without the trance the music would not go on. I argue that the *tarab* experience could include both trance and ecstatic states.

Scholarship that focuses on the genre of *tarab* (Danielson 1991, Frishkopf 2001, Racy 2003) concentrates primarily on musical and social parameters; few authors examine *tarab*'s power to reproduce individual and collective identities, especially in the diasporic context where this emergence into the imaginary collective is abstract, in motion, and mimetic (Anderson 1991[1982], Massumi 2002, Taussig 1993). This reproduction of identity is seen through multimedia that express the forbidden elements within the narrative of Maghrebi experience (Said 2000) – an experience that became publicly exposed in the mid-1970s (Slyomovics 2005) through literature that displayed the narrative of youth and their sexual becoming, queer experiences, issues within class structures, and drug and alcohol use. These elements were located within a lifestyle that was publicly controlled by authoritative groups, forcing Maghrebi people to socially and ethically navigate through private and public spaces (Hirschkind 2006, Kapchan 2007, Skinner 2010) through methods of assimilation such as “*politesse*” (Rapport 2001) where people perform, for example, a pious or national identity (Gupta 2003, Skinner 2010, Mahmood 2001) in public – social actors who perform the counter culture are often judged by their community (LeVine 2008) – and in private, act in a completely different manner (Bourdieu 1977, Skinner 2015), especially in regards to the Muslim woman (Danielson 1999, Frishkopf 2010, El Khachab 2010). Having their lived experiences performed in heterochronic spaces (Foucault 2008[1967]) within their diasporic community, where they can participate in the counter cultural lived Maghrebi experience for an isolated moment in time, allows them to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of nostalgia, and long for their utopian “Home” (Harvey 2000, Alajaji 2015) away from home. Depending on their experience in the diaspora, positionality within the Maghrebi community and greater Montréal, and reason for displacement, social actors might use the sensory environment of the *tarab* scene to conjure up these memories, or they might use it to forget them all together – amnesia, the remembering that happens through forgetting (Makdisi and Silverstein 2006).

Literature and Significance:

My research project draws from the Anthropology of Sound, Performance Theory, The Anthropology of Space and Place, The Anthropology of Religion, Sensory Anthropology, The Anthropology of Politics, Affect Theory and Interiority, and Ethnomusicology. My objective is to contribute to theories of how sound – a both boundless and site-specific entity (LaBelle 2006) – creates collective memories and identities, and forms of modernity in the performance of the everyday (Schechner 2006). More particularly, my study will provide a ‘deep listen’ into the promiscuous soundscapes of contemporary Maghrebi-Montréal society (Becker 2004); “promiscuous” because it is out of place (Leyshon, Matless, and Revill 1998), and thus a temporal meeting point for social actors in space (LaBelle 2010). Through an in-depth study of the performance of *tarab* culture and experience, I seek to examine the different contexts where performances occur, utilizing theoretical models of performed space, such as the Lefebvrian tripartite model of lived, conceived, and perceived spaces (Lefebvre 1991, Skinner 2010) with Skinner’s (2014) addition, performative space; heterotopias and utopias (Foucault 1967[2008]); “absently present” spaces (Skinner 2015); and the space distinctions of the polite and the vulgar (Leppert 1988, Leyshon, Matless, Revill 1998). I explore the ways in which

these sensory spaces evoke emotions and memories through the *tarab* experiences of the performers/audience, and through “language performance” (Frishkopf 1999), or the way that language/speech forms identity through the way that it is performed. Hillel Schwartz (2011) states that sound is our most vulnerable sense, and very connected to our memory, which is why it can evoke such vivid memories – or “sound souvenirs” (Schafer 1977) – and emotions within listeners; soundscapes thus can act as an intangible artifact of a physical space that one is no longer inhabiting, and also act as infrastructure connecting social groups both globally and locally.

One of the main theoretical ideas I draw upon for my work is Steven Feld’s “acoustemology”, a way in which we can know and understand the world through sound (Feld 2012). From this perspective I will seek to ascertain how sound – as the meeting point between people and space – has the ability to establish and recreate collective identities (Cohen 1995), and how the promiscuity inherent in sound (LaBelle 2010) because of its uncertainty can either generate a sense of belonging or a lack thereof. Methodologically, I take on the idea that identities reconstructed through sound are best depicted through stories, or “oral histories” (Baker 1998) because they best represent interlocutors by keeping their voice present (Abu-Lughod 1993, Zayzafoon 2005), especially when discussing the intricacies of variables that construct identities, such as emotion, place, and gender (Magowan and Wrazen 2013), and their positionality in private and public spaces (Afsaruddin 1999).

An important practical aspect of my project is to provide an ethnographic archive of Maghrebi *tarab* performance, sound, and expressive arts and the contexts of their production in the Montréal diaspora. The results of this project will help to establish a deeper understanding of contemporary Maghrebi expressive culture as a vehicle of social and political transformation in diasporic communities, and an alternative mode for relating to the environment (Magowan and Wrazen 2013).

Methods:

I will undertake this project through preliminary literary research and multi-sited fieldwork methods where I will be situated in the various Maghrebi performance contexts of Montréal, Quebec, the Canadian/Québécois centre of the Maghreb, home to a vast array of people and spaces, including but not limited to: secular art musicians, Maghrebi nightclubs, and formal concert halls. These heterotopic spaces are located in *Le Petit Maghreb* (Little Maghreb), the Maghrebi quarter of Montréal, which is pushed to the margins of the city, and has been divided by class and ethnicity into “great and little traditions” (Wolf 2009) where the Maghrebi part of the identity is the “little” folk tradition that acts as a piece in the mosaic of the “great” Québécois identity. In Montréal, I will converse with and interview musicians and audience participants in various spaces; I will make sound and video recordings of audience participation in events and the listener’s transition into *tarab*, and I will use participant-observation methods by both learning from, and playing music with the musicians, as well as attending events as an active audience member. Merging these methods with theories of sensory anthropology and “storied memoryscapes” (Feld 2012) – where both writing and collected photographs create the ethnographic detail – I will produce a performative art installation that captures both *tarab* culture and *tarab* experience through the Maghrebi sensorium – the “world of sense” (Classen 1993) through which Maghrebi-identified individuals have come to know the world, particularly in Montréal. The sensory environment I will create will seem schizophrenic, anxious, and paranoid (Deleuze 1990, Harvey 2000), as is the post-modern era, and as are the lives of social actors living in a diaspora community where their sensory orientation is flipped upside down and they lose their sense of self. I will create this environment through what Deleuze calls “moments of pure becoming”, or nonsensical, non-linear happenings, through: electroacoustic soundscape composition; live and pre-recorded song, quotes, and poetry collected from the field; projected video and images; burning musk incense and/or waterpipe smoke;

traditional Maghrebi cooking; and live *taqsim* and *mawwal/layali* (instrumental and vocal improvisation) to detemporalize the audience between musical idioms, which I will electronically control. This interdisciplinary amalgamation of methodology will best articulate the poetics that these encounters display from a local Maghrebi-Canadian perspective, aiding participants through a live demonstration of ascension into *tarab* or musical rapture, in which they will either lose themselves as well, or witness their fellow participants do so. This, along with my dissertation, will give the Maghrebi diasporic community a platform to discuss their *tarab* experiences, what *tarab* culture means for them away from “Home”, and what their hopes (intangible moments of the future filled with affect and potential) and desires (tangible moments based on memories of the past) are as members of a diaspora community (Alajaji 2015, Crapanzano 2003). Revealing these stories through an interdisciplinary study is important because this realm of hope and hoping is a subjective realm that forever presses upon and into the manifested realm, and because of the way that these hopeful moments within the *tarab* experience recreate a collective identity amongst performers through the context of Montréal and the greater Maghreb region. I believe that this project will fill the gaps in the narrative of the diasporic experience of Maghrebi-identified individuals living in Montréal, Québec.

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Jillian Fulton is a Ph.D. student in Social Anthropology at York University. Her primary area of research is the Maghrebi diaspora community in Montreal, where she studies the socio-religious phenomenon of sound and space, and the nostalgia evoked from live performances through the concept of *tarab*. She completed her M.A. in Ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta, where her research explored the means by which Moroccan Muslim youth of today are creating modernity through sound and space. Jillian also holds a B.Mus in piano, and B.Ed in primary/junior education from Queen's University.