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Mālūf revival in the Tunisian Diaspora in Italy: the case of Marzouk Mejri

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RESUM

D'acord amb els estudis sobre migració ja existents (Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes 2006), aquesta investigació indaga la integració i la identificació musical transnacional de certs músics tunisians en circumstàncies migratòries. Responent a aquestes tendències migratòries, la meua investigació gira entorn de les produccions posteriors al ressorgiment de la música *mālūf*, un dels principals gèneres musicals urbans de Tunísia (Guettat, 1980; Jones, 2002; Davis, 2004; Davila, 2013). Analitze com la inevitable recontextualització cultural del ressorgiment del *mālūf* ubicat en contextos migratoris, tant geogràfics com socials, condueixen a canvis en la naturalesa de la seua transmissió i difusió. A través del cas del músic tunisià Marzuk Mejri, qui busca fer del *mālūf* un tipus de veu híbrida en els cercles locals de Nàpols, Itàlia, explore les tensions entre les nocions de purisme i sincretisme, la interacció de continuïtat i transformació, i com les identitats culturals són recuperades en integrar la pràctica històrica amb l'experiència contemporània (Livingston 1999; Erll & Nünning 2008; Mitchell, 1988; Sassen, 2006).

Paraules Clau: Migració; Magreb; Revival

RESUMEN

En línea con los estudios sobre migración existentes (Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes 2006), esta investigación indaga la integración y la identificación musical transnacional de ciertos músicos tunecinos en circunstancias migratorias. Respondiendo a estas tendencias migratorias, mi proyecto gira en torno a las producciones posteriores al resurgimiento de la música *mālūf*, uno de los principales géneros musicales urbanos de Túnez (Guettat, 1980; Jones, 2002; Davis, 2004; Davila, 2013). Analizo como la inevitable recontextualización cultural del resurgimiento del *mālūf* ubicado en contextos migratorios, tanto geográficos como sociales, conducen a cambios en la naturaleza de su transmisión y difusión. A través del caso del músico tunecino Marzuk Mejri, quien busca hacer del *mālūf* un tipo de voz híbrida en los círculos locales de Nápoles, Italia, exploro las tensiones entre las nociones de purismo y sincretismo, la interacción de continuidad y transformación, y cómo las identidades culturales son recuperadas al integrar la práctica histórica con la experiencia contemporánea (Livingston 1999; Erll & Nünning 2008; Mitchell, 1988; Sassen, 2006).

Palabras Clave: Migración; Magreb; Revival

ABSTRACT

In line with existing migration studies (Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes 2006), this research investigates the integration and transnational musical identification of certain Tunisian musicians under migratory circumstances. Responding to these migratory trends, my project turns to post-revival outgrowths of *mālūf* music, one of urban Tunisia's foremost musical genres (Guettat, 1980; Jones, 2002; Davis, 2004; Davila, 2013). I discuss how the inevitable cultural recontextualisation of the *mālūf*'s revival located in migratory contexts, both geographical and social, lead to changes in the nature of its transmission and dissemination. Through the case of the Tunisian musician Marzuk Mejri in Naples, Italy, I explore tensions between notions of purism and syncretism, the interplay of continuity and transformation, and how cultural identities are reclaimed by integrating historic practice with contemporary experience (Livingston 1999; Erll & Nünning 2008; Mitchell, 1988; Sassen, 2006).

Keywords: Migration; Maghreb; Revival

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Introduction

This research follows in the footsteps of the internally diverse body of studies in revival (Nooshin, 2014; Hill, 2014; Hill and Bithell, 2014), specifically of transferring musical elements from the past to the present, from the centers to the peripheries or from one cultural group perceived as preserving lifeways that are in direct continuity with the past to a cultural group that perceives itself as being more modern. One of the major concerns of this article is to demonstrate how Tunisian migrants' music making configure relations with local and national identities, contributing to its meanings. I argue that auditory memories and nostalgia (Erl and Nunning 2008; Boym, 2001), entail a decontextualisation and a recontextualisation of identity, or what Owe Ronström [quoted in Hill, 2014 (1996)] refers to as shifts. Through Marzouk Mejri's work, who seeks to make *mālūf* more of a hybrid voice in local circles, in Naples, I focus on themes related to composition, interpretation and music revival that the music itself helps to explore. Whether it is the place of memory, a particular melody, sound or a musical instrument, such idioms of nostalgia enable people to connect with others, thereby generating a certain kind of shared experience.

Some of the conceptual challenges I faced in this research were similar to those faced by ethnographic researchers for decades: coping with insider/outsider dichotomies; balancing objective, subjective and reflexive interpretation gaining the trust of consultants, and managing one's place in relation to competing interests and pre-existing social hierarchies, tensions and rivalries. I conducted the main period of fieldwork for this research between February and July 2016, and in 2017. The majority of this time was spent in Naples in Italy following Mejri musical activity. I regularly listened to *mālūf* recordings through the digital national archive of the Centre of Arab and Mediterranean Music (CMAM) website, watched videos online as well as in the form of YouTube clips and read websites. Another component of my research method is concerned with music analysis of a number of *mālūf* pieces. This research, however, does not specifically use descriptive-analytical methods which provide objectively quantifiable and analysable data as tools for discovering musical intents and specific performance practices according to a model.

The transcriptions, made in western music notation (five-line system, no tempo measurement or bar divisions), take into account notes and alterations of the Arab-Tunisian music system (*tbu'*) by adapting the procedure of analysis used by Zūārī (2006). According to Zūārī, the transcription examples are divided in segments, in order to define meaningful musical units by establishing boundaries at relevant points in the musical flow, for example: a distinctive closing formula. Both music symbols and Arabic names of notes refer to the *Maqāmāt al-Mūsīqā al-'Arabīyya* (Modes of Arab Music) by al-Mahdī (1982), from which I borrow the Arab notes nomenclature (49 notes), from G *yakāb* to G *jawāb nawā* (1982: 24). Concerning the specific Tunisian modal system, I use the terminology employed in the *Initiation à La Musique Tunisienne I*, edited by Rashīd Sellamī, Lassad Kria and Mourad Sakli (2004). The transcription criteria were also prepared and checked according to the procedure used by my Tunisian 'ūd teacher Kamel Gharbī to classify methods in practice performances. Mejri's "*Alif ya Sultan?*" is taken from the original score (unedited manuscript) kindly donated to me by the author.

I start from the premises that *mālūf* plays a key role in Tunisian Arab culture providing a complex artistic heritage of poetry, music and history and that it and its practices both reflect and shape social, cultural and economic transformation. *Mālūf* is the most complex musical genre in Tunisia. Its complexity is a result of its inclusion of multiple musical forms (*nūba*, *qaṣīda*, *shughūl*, *bashraf*, *istikhbār*, *ẓendelī*, *mūwashshahāt* and *ẓajāl*) and its lack of connection to specific religious, ritual or ceremonial contexts, making it the go-to genre for many leisure,

celebrations and stylistic influences (African, Egyptian and Turkish Ottoman). Defining *mālūf* is a difficult task. On the one hand, *mālūf* varies a great deal according to historical moment, geographical area, social class and performance context in Tunisia. On the other, the difficulty also has to do with the fact that other genres in neighboring countries may refer to similar styles of *mālūf* using different terms, which also vary according to geography, social class and history. Most Tunisians I encountered referred to *mālūf* simply as *mūsīqa taqlidiyya* (literally, ‘traditional music’). Generally, *mālūf* can be read as more or less synonymous with what Ruth Davis refers to as “Tunisian art music” (2002: 505), and Maḥmūd Guettat refers to as *nūba* (2002: 449). However, such terms rely heavily on context. They are also used to refer to a vast array of Tunisian musical practices including distinct regional styles, as well as genres that are perceived to be less traditional, artful or sophisticated, for example, the *ughniya*, (Tunisian popular songs), variously performed by the *jawq de mālūf*, the *firqa classique*, *l’orchestra de l’harmonium* and the *jawq nouveau*, and in different performance contexts.

In many parts of Tunisia, particularly among urban centers, *mālūf* is such a general term that it is sometimes a synonym for ‘music’ or ‘song’, which tends to display certain key characteristics. They can be condensed in what Guettat calls the ‘edifice’ of *mālūf*, namely the *nūba* (musical session or suite) (Guettat, 2002: 446). Rhythmically, the *nūba* is based on continually repeating units made up of compound sequences. One can usually discern this rhythmic pattern in the instrumental accompaniment (often percussion) rather than the melody, which is typically heavily accompanied. In modern *mālūf* performance, each *nūba* is named for one of the melodic modes, and each in turn is divided into several rhythmic movements based on primary meters.

In North African music, the mode system differs from the eastern one. In Maghreb, the term traditionally used for mode is *ṭab’* – pl. *ṭubū’a* (nature, effect, temperament), which means to “imprint”, “embed”, while the modal unit tetra-chords are named *‘iqd* – pl. *‘uqūd* (Davis, 2004: 15). Tunisian modes *ṭubū’a* incorporate for the most part micro intervals that are not common in other Arab Levant musical traditions of *maqām* (Iraqi and Egyptian) such as: *ramal*, *dhil*, *ramal mēya*, etc.. Few modes have pentatonic characters (e.g. *dhil*). Each mode is associated with a particular hour of the day, the natural elements, aspects of the human emotional or physical condition, and through these, potentially, the broader concept of ethos.

Urban music is related to African-Tunisian rhythm, which is usually intensely joyful, in contrast to the haunting sub-Saharan slave (trade) music *Ṣṭambelī* and its incessant percussive *shqāshiq* (Jankowsky, 2010: 35), or again to the *shahāda* in accelerating high-pitch climax of the Sufi *dhikr* practice. From the initial 2/4 *barwal* or its variation of *dakḥūl barwal* with 3 *dum* to the 3/8 *kbatam*, or the slow 6/4 *kbaḥḥif* and the more complex *mṣaddar*. Tunisians discuss the problem of modernisation and identity endlessly, examining them from all angles in search of a solution. Sociologists and anthropologists study it, musicologists listen to it in concerts and debates in lectures. *Mālūf* fans, traditionally, pass the time in constructing complex personal philosophies of life, sometimes mystical Sufi, that surprises outsiders who do not expect such elaborate abstraction as a common theme in popular Tunisian culture. “We are Sufi”, Sedirī, a choir member, told me during rehearsal in Zīād Gharsa’s *mālūf* club of the capital¹. Historically, music was so central to many *ṭuruq* that they were perceived as music schools of the prestigious Andalusī musical tradition (Davis 2004). Many icons of *mālūf*, such as Aḥmad al-Wāfī (1850– 1921) and Khamaīs Tarnān (1894–1964), were influenced by their musical experiences as members of Sufi orders (Jones 1977: 30).

¹ Zīād Gharsa is the son of the *shaykh* Ṭāhar Ghara, who was pupil of the legendary *shaykh* Khamaīs Tarnān, and therefore a direct lineage of transmission with the musical heritage. He is in his forties and lives in the capital. Like his father, since the age of four, Zīād has lived a music culture context centred on the Rashīdīa Music Institute and various private *mālūf* associations. His knowledge of *mālūf* and technical skills on the instrument are recognised and appreciated widely.

Sufi lodges in Tunisia, as in other Muslim countries, constituted the foremost places to pass on music. Therefore, *mālūf* does not seem to belong exclusively to a specific Tunisian identity, where a clear-cut division between musical genres is evident. Instead, it encompasses features, stylistic phrasing and tempos that are shared among much Tunisian music.

In the article "Arab-Andalusian Music of Tunisia" (1996a), Davis echoes the historical account of the origins of this distinctive Arab musical tradition dating back to the early 9th century. In Davis's words: «According to popular belief, this music was imported to North Africa by so-called Andalusian refugees-Moslems and Jews fleeing the Christian reconquest of Spain from the 10th to the 15th centuries» (Davis, 1996a: 423).

Despite all the musicological efforts to trace historical boundaries, this music is seen as a co-existence of two languages: "classical" and "popular", both urban, with their variety of styles which are often a mixture of art-music *mālūf* and religious music (Sufi) (Davis, 1996b: 315). In Tunisia (Davis, 2002: 510) and elsewhere in the Maghreb, every instance of al-Andalus as lived experience evokes the memory of a grand civilisation, one that competed with other civilisations and came out on the top. Drawing attention here to this specific phenomenon helps contextualise my argument. Davis refers to this music as: «being labelled 'classical' or 'art music' by both Tunisian and Western scholars, promoted as such by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and generally considered the foundation of all Tunisian urban music and historically the 'tradition'» (Davis, 1996b: 313).

In her extensive research of Tunisian *mālūf*, she reminds us that, in the 20th century, this music had been linked to an ideology of national identity and nostalgia for a past golden age. As Davis pointed out, this explanation was supported by drawing on the myth of the *mālūf*'s Andalusian origins to justify the authority of the canon of *mālūf* published notations (1960s) after independence: *al-turāth al-mūsīqī al-Tūnisi* (Tunisian Musical Heritage).

Between 2012 and 2016, five years after the revolution of 2011, the government introduced legal reforms to innovate the cultural sector, offering a new vision of Tunisian cultural policy based on cultural rights, private investment, heritage tourism, digital culture, copyright etc. (Aboudī, 2016). The aims were: (1) decentralisation and local governance of culture, (2) the promotion of creative and cultural industries, (3) the transversality of cultural sectors with other sectors such as education and youth (2016: 6). In order to effect its policy, the government established a network of International Cultural Cooperation (TCP) with the EU, UK, Germany, UNESCO and other players. The cultural policy advisor, Bilēl Aboudī, told me in an interview² that the notion of national culture, "culture as a vector to educate the nation and build human resource capacities", promoted a few years after independence (Kacem, 1973 [quoted in Davis, 1997: 1]), is now completely absent from the major axes of cultural reforms, although public funding for the sector reaches 80% of the overall sector spending.

Today, *mālūf* is played throughout urban Tunisian centers (Tunis, Sfax, Soussa, Monastir), parts of North Africa (Algeria and Morocco), and in a range of diasporic communities from France to Italy. *Mālūf* coalesces also in a variety of sites: concert halls such as the *Masrah al-Baladī*, *Acropolium Chartage*, *Rashīdīa* Institute of Tunis, Sfax, Monastir, Kairouan; practice rooms of the *Institut Supérieur de Musique*, *mālūf clubs* such as Conservatoire al-Farabi, teaching studios, one example being *Les Jeunes du Malouf Tunisien*, private homes, museum collections in London, Brussels and Tunis, online Facebook groups, such as: *Le Malouf Tunisien*, *al-Mālūf club de Chant Arabe*, *Rashīdīa* - Monastir; YouTube channels like: Jalēl Benna with 1.647 followers and ‘Alī Sayarī with 9.431 followers; instrument

² Bilēl, Aboudī. Tunis, Tunisia. 23 November 2016, 10 March 2017.

makers' workshops (Tunis, Sidi Bou Said, Hammamet); websites (oudmigrations.com, chikioud.com, christianrault.com), outdoors spaces (*Ennejma Ezǧabra*), and recording studios, to give only a partial list. In migratory contexts for example, the "*Mālūf Tunisien*" is the landmark group in Paris among the other three Tunisian associations: *ṭārab*, *Fundou*, and *Club of Malouf* of Sirīne Ben Mūssa. The first two ensembles do not perform *nūba*-s but popular songs, and Ben Mūssa's association is only a school of *mālūf*, which does not perform publically. Particularly within the Parisian-Tunisian community, sound mainly acts as a powerful imaginary that provides ways of engaging with a distant musical tradition.

Sounding Tunisian, Revival and New Directions

A new figure made an appearance in the Italian folk music life in the mid-2000s: a guy from the urban scene of Tebourba: Marzouk Mejri. A few years ago, Marzouk performed a concert of Tunisian *mālūf* including his own compositions during the concert *La Voce dei Migranti* – The voice of Migrants - organised by the cultural association "Arts Migrants" in Naples, affirming his prominent role as an international Tunisian artist devoted to issue of migration. "Arts Migrants" is a cultural association created by two Tunisian artists: Marzouk and Marwen, an *'ūd* player who is resident in Rome, and an American trumpet player who now lives in Tuscany, Charles Ferris. They all share the same experience of migrating from their country of origin. The association has the aim to reunite in music collaborations migrants who come from anywhere in the world and are resident in the Campania region of Italy to help and improve their quality life. Although this and other events in Italy and abroad, Marzouk has a local attitude for the Tunisian *mālūf*, which is clear in his commitments concerning the repertoires and the "renewal" of this tradition (Nooshin, 2014; Hill, 2014; Hill and Bithell, 2014). Marzouk feels *mālūf* familiar, close to his North African-Arab origins. In our first interview he remarked that: "it became important for me to play traditional Tunisian music, particularly because I migrated away". That first encounter left me with the feeling that Marzouk looks at this tradition with a degree of nostalgia, reinforced by the fact that he sees himself alone in his commitment to a struggling musical revival. On that occasion, at the *Galleria Principe* in Naples, I had turned up exceptionally early to talk to him. I quickly discovered that he wasn't sure about the future of his projects. At that moment, Marzouk recalled and reinforced anxiety about a "lost tradition" (Glasser, 2016). But at the same time, I was sure, Marzouk was to be distinguished from the other revival Tunisian groups in France and could be seen as a member of the rising generation of popular artists, indeed a leading north African composer.

Marzouk's practice endows traditional instruments with the same importance of the moderns, and the various melodic possibilities are his main focus. His position as migrant in Italy, his many musical collaborations with Italian artists, and roots in a peripheric Tebourba make him an emerging figure of *mālūf* distinct from both the traditional official ensembles in Tunisia and the more private world of home ensembles in France.

Marzouk was born in 1966 in Tebourba. At an early age, he started playing the drum *darbuka*, a custom for music students who had to choose among common and readily available instruments. Since 1998, Marzouk has performed extensively within ensembles of north African music, and with both Italian and Neapolitan musicians in Italy and abroad such as: Daniele Sepe, James Senese, Peppe Barra, Enzo Avitabile, Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare, Peppino di Capri, Orchestra Arabo Andalusia di Tebourba, Eduardo De Crescenzo, at the *Incontri Internazionali della Musica* in Salerno, *Sentieri Mediterranei* (Summonte), World Music Festival (Rome), *Musiche dal Mondo* in San Severino Lucano, Manifestazione "B.M.T." in Naples, at the *Festival del Mediterraneo* in the island of Procida and so on.

In co-production with Dublin Films, *France Télévisions*, *Al Jazeera* Documentary Channel and with the support of *Regione Campania*, the Italian film maker Ernesto Pagano made a documentary about Marzouk's life *Vita di Marzouk* (Life of Marzouk), soundtrack by Marzouk Mejri and "Fanfara Station", launched in Italy and France in 2017 by the Production Ladoc and Rai Cinema. Below a quotation from the documentary trailer:

A Tunisian musician, his Italian wife, and their marriage crisis. A trip to his *bilad*, his home town, for the first time with his children instinctively in search of his homeland and of his identity. Life of Marzouk is an intimate portrait of an attempt at integration which finds in love its only possible solution.³

After 20 years in Italy and the birth of two children, Marzouk's marriage to Elvira is falling apart. One summer, Marzouk leaves alone with the children in his hometown. While the children immerse themselves enthusiastically in the culture of their father, Marzouk, after many years in exile, experiences a new sense of alienation from his land. These and the modern casual clothes, black trousers and shirt, during most of his concerts and public appearances, suggest an objective decency but without any pretention of traditional-Andalusian recall. This "normal" outfit in contrast with stereotyped iconography⁴ points to connotations of a certain familiarity and to the artist's effort to be modern. This, at *La Voce dei Migranti*, was my first "encounter", with Marzouk, but I have known him in a variety of ways.

During one of my visits to his apartment in 2017, he described the steps of his migration to Italy, having been moved from Tebourba to Bergamo and then Aversa in the province of Caserta at the age of twenty-eight in 1994 (the 14th December), followed by a definite move to Naples in 1996. Why Italy? I asked. "Because during those years it was easier to obtain a VISA for Italy rather than for France", Marzouk replied. He recounted that he never thought of succeeding in being a Tunisian musician abroad, in Italy. It started by chance, when he brought along his *darbuka* during a concert in Aversa performed by Moroccan musicians' resident in Italy and organised by the Cultural Association *Quarto Stato* of Antonella Avolio. With the help of this association Marzouk was introduced into cultural and artistic local events until the Neapolitan musician Daniele Sepe saw him in a concert and asked to join his new band during the tours "*Jurnater*" in 2004, "*Nia maro*" in 2005, and especially in the album "*Una banda di pezzenti*", in which they performed an atypical version of the song *Alif Ya Sultani* from the *mālūf* established repertory (Davis, 2004). It followed Marzouk's first solo album *Genina* (2008), which is of a composite work, a migrant's blend: of old and new; of attachments to other lands and to new homes; of the spirit of creative reinvention and nostalgia (Boym, 2001). The name's title of Marzouk's mother *Janīna*, recalls of memories as well as texts about peace, life escaping, nostalgic glances, tyranny, destiny and hope, point out the significant social message this music could have conveyed on its own.

This first encounter with Marzouk, somewhat expected, sticks in my mind for two particular reasons. The first concerns a new style of presentation I observed from my initial view of Marzouk, constructed on the basis of his photos and videos. He appeared to me as a grown-up migrant, who lives in this moment of "in-between-ness" and is an example of what Larbi Sadiki calls as "trans-democratic exchange" since the eruption of 2011 uprisings (Sadiki, 2015: 688). According to Sadiki, North Africa has historically featured as a contributor to Euro-Med cultures and civilisations. Marzouk's music making is a dynamic process which involves reception as well as transfer of learning which challenge both his homeland and the Euro-American centers of knowledge-making. Alongside

³ <http://www.ladoc.it/portfolio/the-life-of-marzouk/> [accessed 30/09/19]

⁴ Contemporary ensembles of *mālūf* typically wear similar outfits to each other that symbolise Tunisian national identity but the new sartorial style adopted by most wedding singers, including Gharsa's performing in those places, is influenced by western clothes: suits and ties replace *jubbas* and *sheshbias* in these specific music contexts.

his work as a musician, Marzouk is leader of the presidio “Slow Food Tebourba”, which helps sustain a traditional hand-worked *cous cous* made with whole grain heirloom wheat grains. The second one, not in contradiction, concerned the presentation of *mālūf* as a migrant genre of hybrid musical contexts, which involve sounds of myriad of Tunisian traditional musical instruments and demonstrate Marzouk's innovative ideas for this music as well as his personal approach. Marzouk develops this *mālūf* practice on an everyday basis in Italy and outside musically strict Tunisian communities in France.

A remarkable example of this new course for *mālūf* was the concert he gave recently with “Fanfara Station” in spring 2018 (4th May). During those days before Ramadan 2018, the Cultural Association for migrants at the occupied *Lido Pola* in the quarter *Bagnoli* in Naples, hosted and sponsored an evening of music and dance. Fanfara Station's concert, most of it on the traditional Tunisian musical instruments such as *ney*, *darbuka*, *bendir*, *zokra*, as well as electronics on laptop, loop stations, trumpets and trombones, seemed such a distinct world of *mālūf* to me, firstly because it was a dance event, secondly because it was scheduled in an odd venue for *mālūf* players who prefer more “classical” theaters and auditorium. But also because I felt, even if we were not in Tunisia, that people looked at the players like a strange creature holding those instruments. These traditional instruments had never been prominent in such musical spaces.



Fig 1. “Fanfara Station” at Lido Pola (Naples).

“Fanfara Station” is a trio, Marzouk Mejri – Charles Ferris, and Marco Dalasso in art “Ghiaccioli e Branzini”, that brings the power of brass band and electronics to North African vocals and percussions. Inspired by Marzouk’s memories of his father’s brass band, Fanfara Station celebrates the epic feats of the Mediterranean’s migrants, the musical cultures of the African diaspora and the flows that have long connected the Middle East, the Maghreb, Southern Europe and the Americas. In short, Fanfara Station is a celebration with a brass band, an entire North African rhythm section and contemporary electro Dance beats. It is a dance party created live by only three musicians thanks to the use of loop stations for live over-dubbing. Usually, the stage is filled with instruments: percussion: *scascika*, *tar*, *bendir*, *darbuka* and *tabla* next to the trumpet, trombone, clarinet and three Tunisian woodwinds: the *ney*, *mizued* and *zokra*. Then there are dozens of wires connecting loop stations, controllers and an array of effects pedals. A myriad of acoustic and electric sounds dialogue and sustain the voice of singer and song writer Marzouk. The brass of Fanfara Station brings folk blues and Balkan accents into an electro acoustic North African universe represented by layers of percussion instruments, woodwinds and *mālūf* singing. Fanfara Station’s first demo EP was completed in May of 2016 and their first full album is slated for a fall 2017 release. The album is the fruit of ten years of collaborating between Marzouk and Ferris in Naples, a unique music scene in Italy that embraces both rootedness and hybrid innovations, and of Dalmasso’s experience with innovative electro-acoustic creations.

Moreover, Tunisian *mālūf* sensibilities are threaded into a contemporary electronic sound, which results in a pure “dance fabric”. This “dancing” idea, although rhythms, movements and folk dances are essential to north African music cultures, is new to the *mālūf*'s canon established during the Bourghiba cultural policies (Davis, 2004) of the 1960s, and then absorbed into the official education system of private conservatoires and Higher Music Institute around the country throughout the 1980s until today. In Fanfara Station, Marzouk is the only one from Tunisia. Although Tebourba is a large town on the northern inland, a de-centralisation of the music culture as well as a local figure from the “periphery” contribute to fuel *mālūf*'s development, particularly its reinvention. This contemporary musical activity abroad, that sees Marzouk as prominent concerning the Tunisian *mālūf*, also reveals historical interests for *mālūf* in the past decades which developed somehow in the shadow of the well-known activities of the capital. Nevertheless, Tebourba has its own music history. The first brass band of *mālūf* music which accompanied Bourghiba during his propagandas was made there in the 1940s, and documented by archival photos and recordings (Meddeb, 2016). This orchestra gathered every time there was an occasion for traditional *mālūf* music events regionally, and in national and international festivals, for example the one held in Testour. Marzouk's father was the snare player and had a prominent role in the band of the Bey during the 1950s as well as for music education in Tebourba. Wind and brass musical instruments were normally thought. Historically, clarinets and brass instruments were known and played since the 19th century in Tunisia.



Fig. 2. Bourghiba's Fanfara. On the left side is Marzouk's father (courtesy Mejri's family).

Officers at the military School of Bardo, which was created in 1840 by Aḥmad Bey I (1837-1855), compiled a manuscript of *mālūf* compositions in western musical notations titled *Safāim al-mālūf al-tūnisi* (the "boat", a metaphorical guide to the Tunisian *mālūf*) and *Dhawabīt ta'lim al-ālāt wa nawbāt al- mālūf* (Methods of teaching musical instruments and *nūbas* of *mālūf*), both for military fanfare orchestrations and traditional ensembles in 1872. The unedited manuscript contains scores in western notation of *nūba-s dhīl*, *ḥasīm*, *ramal*, *raṣd dhīl*, *aṣba'in* along with their texts, and description of instruments such as: clarinet, piano, violin and *rebēb*, and *'ūd 'arbī*. Those visual sources of the various instruments provide images of the instrument and the players in various contexts highlighting how it is embedded in different social and ethnic milieu. They also help hypothesising a 19th century use of the instruments, possibly detached from national identity and ideology. This manuscript originates in an era of modern Tunisia, which has routinely been understood as a secular modernising state due to its cosmopolitan construction during the 19th century (Chaldeos, 2016: 381).

Since 2007, Marzouk has tended to combine the Tunisian rhythms of *mālūf* and the melodic lines of wind and brass instruments which historically is not alien to this musical genre. As well as developing this new sound of *mālūf*, that is detached from the strict *mālūf* events happening around the country but especially in the capital, Marzouk has created a new way to experience *mālūf*. This development of a new canon for the instrumentation

happens within the strict use of musical instruments common to all genres in Tunisia. *Talila*, for example, is a song of celebration and well-wishing; it's an evocation of the life inspired by *mālūf* wedding songs. But the instrumentation makes an atypical sound effect. Ferris' trumpets follow Marzouk's double-reed *zokra* and echo Macedonian dances, while the trombones tap into a cyclicity that is typical of both sub-Saharan *Ṣtambēli* music (Jankowsky, 2010) and African American work songs. *Rabil*, instead, speaks of one of the many challenges faced by migrants who have found the courage to leave their country of origin only to find themselves blocked in a new city, in a single neighborhood, in a small marginalized space. And they give up and cease to seek the change that first drove their departure.

From a metropolitan capital perspective and considering the absence of a local Tunisian community in Naples, Tebourba may well be a provincial city for *mālūf*, but it is also in its own way a thriving, traditional place for Tunisian musical identities. Today, major parts of *mālūf* music life grow in the ISMs⁵ around the country, through syllabus, wide repertoires and practical skills. This fact, one that not everybody in Tunisia knows, is worth stressing here. To me, Marzouk's roots, education, search for modernity and life of a migrant, mean that he may reinvent this music while distancing himself from the *shaykh* stereotype (Gharsa) and the culture of oral transmission emanating from Tunis and from other associations in Paris.

I am especially interested in Marzouk's contribution to *mālūf* as performer and composer, an approach that synthesises elements from a variety of traditional forms to create a separate music aesthetic of the genre, something I grasped at our initial meeting. Critical commentators on Marzouk's playing the Tunisian *mālūf* have begun questioning his modernist approach and scarce authenticity that normally sustain the life of the genre in Tunisia and France. Marzouk's activity reveals an inner rural-working class beats associated with *mizwid* musical genre, migration and social emargination in the African- Maghrebian *mālūf*, and a reinvention of unsuppressed pre-protectorate "brass band" influences that flourishes in his compositions.

I am going to explore those aspects of Marzouk's *mālūf* performance through a song from the *mālūf* repertory *Alif ya Sultani* recorded for the first time in his album with Daniele Sepe of 2005. Since then this song in several versions and with many different ensembles Marzouk collaborates with is always performed. Not only another North African genre (Jankowsky, 2010), affirming its identity and role internationally and for the attention of scholars, but it could also have transformed the idea of *mālūf* as a genre not only of Arab-Andalusian belonging (Davis, 2004). The detailed analysis of the following pages draws attention to one specific aspect of Marzouk's approach to the *mālūf*. It concerns the relationship between Tunisian traditional musical forms and modes (*barwal*, *mazmoum*) and their players' use in identifying themselves with that musical tradition. I want to show how what Marzouk considers appealing and modern for Tunisian musical traditions, might also be considered in terms of a new identity, transversally distant from the *shaykh* tradition of "classical" Arab Andalusian bonds.

The piece is instrument specific, being composed in a particular Tunisian mode *mazmoum*, which gives a unique sonic reference to Tunisianness like many famous songs of the heritage in this mode of which the phrasing immediately recalls a local Tunisian world. I think of songs ranging from *Yakollak Aman*, and *Ya Kalbi Tassabar* in their several versions of Gharsa, Salih, to the several *nūba Mazmoum* sections etc. The authentic Tunisian version of *Alif ya Sultani* is composed of three basic melodic phrases which is in rhythm *barwel* (al-Mahdi, 1960: 6). Its rhythmical section is, in some ways, perfectly rendered by the unique rhythmic beat *dum* and *tak*. In technical terms, the typical profound and face-touch darbuka beats for the rhythmical sections, highlight one of the main

⁵ *Institute Supérieur de Musique.*

characteristics of this genre: its rustic, earthy and heavy beat. However, Marzouk's reworking of the tradition lies in other qualities. Marzouk sought to connect what he describes as "two different styles of *mālūf* performance and music", one oriented towards the past, its revival and a sense of authenticity embedded in the *shaykh* tradition, the other towards a renewal and transforming tradition. An example of the latter is the melodic treatment of *Alif ya Sultani*, and that most conspicuous feature of this piece is that it does not go deep into the mode modulations and the modal clichés are not the guide anymore.

The first part, an introduction to the traditional melodic line, can be defined as a repeated base quavers passage which ends in ascending intervals towards the tonic C. Here and elsewhere, the linear movement of the up and down melody recalls other Tunisian styles, which is supported by a static passage, as in the following example.

ALIFSULTANI MALUF

Fig. 3. Incipit of the song "ALIF YA SULTANI" by Marzouk Mejri.

Then the refrain (*taslim*) opens from that note and is based on the note C (see bar 11-20).⁶

Fig. 4. Main melody of the song "ALIF YA SULTANI" (traditional *mālūf*).

The second and third *kbana*-s are melodic variations of the initial part, mostly consisting of descending formulas and 4-5 notes scale passages.

⁶ The original *mazmoum* mode is on the note F. Here Mejri transposes it on the note C.



Fig. 5. Variations of "ALIF YA SULTANI" composed by Marzouk Mejrl.

Here, there are somewhat external notes to the mode which create an abstract nature effect to *mazmoum*.



Fig. 6. Pivotal and modulation notes in "ALIF YA SULTANI".

As a result, the Tunisian modal cliché and the shifts of registers have disappeared. For one thing, the composition is remarkably quick, in *accelerando* towards the end, not a rule for the *barwel*. Marzouk's revival music cultural event, which he put together by creating his own canons of repertoire is modeled on identifying his as part of a unique tradition. This looking back and forth between the past and present of the instrument somehow creates a juxtaposition of nostalgia and melancholic attitudes, which interfere greatly with players perception of this instrument. Those connections between tradition and transformation extend into a variety of musical features, a sort of creative editing of the piece. The piece is not, however, without loud, dynamic passages. In particular, it is punctuated by the loud theme on the scale *mazmoum*, which Marzouk repeats in *accelerando* for a speeded up *grand final*.



Figure 7. Final section of "ALIF YA SULTANI" composed by Marzouk Mejrl.

In this respect, the player adapts the melodic transformation to hybrid solutions aiming at reworking its identity. But this identity is not completely transplanted into a new musical context, but rather still uses idioms that belong to the Tunisian musical world, for a Tunisian musical taste and appeal. Among the small circle of *mālūf* connoisseurs outside Tunisia, Marzouk's style is often undervalued, mainly because, although consistent, has not yet been publically settled. Put simply, the creation of a new repertory and its place in the broader debate about orality and transmission surrounding *mālūf* continues to pose questions.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined how players reflect and shape ideas about *mālūf* in migratory contexts. I have explored the associative process of Tunisian migrants' music making in configuring the relation with local identity and auditory memories, contributing to its meanings. The life of players outside the Tunisian circles outlined in here, is a deep-seated part of the cultural values and practices surrounding *mālūf* music. Of several musicians dedicated to the Tunisian *mālūf* I met around the country and abroad, Mejri's approach and experience differs most widely from the public activity of Gharsa and the clubs in France. First, the city of Tebourba and Naples situate *mālūf* in a contrasting space versus the *shaykh* tradition of the Tunis capital and Tunisia.

Second, through Marzouk's work, I focused on themes related to composition, interpretation and music revival that the music itself helps to explore. Importantly, this process also creates a new canon, as if *mālūf* is finding a new dimension. So far, this musical genre has existed as a national symbol, with many unsolved questions, and existed in variant forms. If this new canon were seeking to be called a revival terrain, it depends on the identification of a tradition for the *mālūf*, in which players in general place themselves in relationship to it, inside it. A prerequisite for someone who transforms this tradition then is a shared sense of the tradition as well as a notion of how participants relate to that tradition. However, Marzouk encourages continuity with the past, but at the same time he recasts the music and culture he refers to. As a player, he achieves his own momentum through the performance, with its own standard and new repertoire, style, and its own selective view of the past.

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Cita recomanada

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