

Simone Kruger: Experiencing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Learning in European Universities

At Goldsmiths College London, I participated in a lecture-workshop on Palestinian music led by Reem Kelani, a London-based singer from Palestine. The sing-along participation induced positive and meaningful musical experiences in students through a state of embodied experiencing. The session was informative and stimulating as the tutor blended formal instruction with practical demonstrations and active audience involvement. For example, Reem Kelani vocalised melody and rhythm, sang (through improvisation) classical Arabic poetry, and demonstrated the *shabbaabeh* flute and *daf* frame drum. Students were completely immersed in their musical experiences. The tutor also approached students in a non-patronising, enjoyable manner, which was visible in their smiling and laughing. The following vignette helps to evoke the overall picture of this session, which intentionally avoids analytical and interpretive discussions. The rich and thick descriptions help illustrate the ways in which students experienced musical participation that led them towards deeper and more complete musical experiences. Yet it must be emphasized that such an ethnographic ‘impressionist’s tale’ is always shaped by the researcher’s own biases and preconceptions. The vignette thus serves the purpose of providing subjective insights into the ways in which simple, in-class imitations were utilised as an effective means for enthusing students that led not only to heightened levels of participatory consciousness but also towards an awareness that extended beyond the level of music’s sonic structure:

While we sat on chairs in a half-circle, the tutor started by asking us to put both feet firmly down on the floor and to think of them as our tonic centre, playing an extract of *Qur’anic* chant and writing the words *maqam bayati* on the whiteboard. She asked invitingly while smiling: ‘I would like to know what you felt’. We replied: ‘comforted;...it was very primal (?)...; it was very cosmic.’ A practical exercise followed during which we were asked to stand up and sing the same tonic pitch, on top of which the tutor improvised a melodic line, walking around the circle to hear each of us singing the tonic. Then she played a CD extract of a Christian hymn, suggesting: this uses melisma ...and ‘*ourab* (vocal ornamentations)...Any comments on this?’ We replied: ‘this seems to sound more Arabic’, upon which she answered: ‘Yes exactly. It’s Christian Arab. The recitation, NOT singing of the *Qur’an* is called *tajweed* or *tarteel*....and Qur’anic chanting is very close to Byzantine, also Greek chanting’.

‘Now I’m going to sing another example....’ The tutor’s voice is not only beautiful; she also demonstrated very clearly how improvisation works, how to ornament a basic melodic line. She invited us to join in by humming the tonic. We then commented about our reactions to the singing: ‘I kind of forgot the world around me and became totally lulled into the sound. I was really aware of the group of singers...’, upon which the tutor replied: ‘This is exactly the feeling and experience I hoped you’d have...’ We commented that: ‘After a while I felt that your singing left my head somehow, as if it was disappearing...’, upon which the tutor replied: ‘Yes I started singing in *maqam hijaz* and modulated to *sijah* and back to *hijaz*. This is called *qafalah*’, meaning to return to the original *maqam* and ‘closing’ the musical sentence. We asked why she covered her ear while singing, which some of us had seen on a picture

before. She did not answer this question, but instead encouraged us to try it ourselves while singing a tone. It worked, of course, to our astonishment: ‘Yes I can hear my own voice much better when covering the ear....’

‘The third part in Arabic music besides the tonic, which you sang, and the melodic mode, which I sang, are rhythmic patterns also called ‘*iqa*’, writing on the whiteboard: *dum, tak, silence, tak, dum, silence, tak, silence*. ‘This is ‘*iqa maqsum*’, inviting us to vocalise the rhythm. The tutor showed a *daf* frame drum and further explained the two basic drumstrokes, *dum* and *tak*: ‘Dum is produced by hitting the middle of the skin. Imitate the sound with your voice!’ We reacted rather shyly, upon which she really encouraged us to feel the *dum* as coming from the chest. She started imitating a Western aria in a high falsetto voice, pulling a funny facial expression, to our enjoyment. ‘Don’t sing like this! Sing out of your chest, like that!’, demonstrating that the *dum* is a much breathier and deeper tone.

The tutor bubbled over with enthusiasm, which made it much easier for us to lose our inhibition. We now sang much louder, more confidently and ... much better! While we now chanted the rhythm loud and clearly, the tutor started improvising elaborate rhythms on the *daf*, walking around, smiling and laughing with us. Everybody was completely immersed in this experience and enjoyed themselves. One after the other of us proceeded in dance-like motion, getting literally into the groove. A following exercise increased the intensity of the musical experience even further: one half of us now hummed the tonic, while the others chanted the basic rhythm, over which the tutor improvised an elaborate rhythm on the *daf* and sang a melody based on a *qasida*. The tutor kept moving around the group, smiling and laughing at us, and resembling a performance-like appearance with facial expressions and opened arms, which reminded me of performances by *Umm Kulthūm*. She showed her experiencing of emotions through tensioning her body and facial expression. Her voice was fantastic. Our music-making was thrilling. We truly experienced the groove. Afterwards, I remembered that I had completely forgotten the world around me. After ten minutes the tutor moved her arms in an inviting motion to become quieter and to finally stop, looking at us with honest appreciation and astonishment.

After this enthralling exercise, we discussed our experiences and all confirmed a deep, emotional response, upon which the tutor explained the Arabic concept of *tarab*, an ecstatic emotional response by performers and listeners at the heart of much Spanish and Arabic musical performance. Somehow it was possible for the tutor to convey some extent of *tarab* to us in this workshop.

The tutor now imitated the flamenco style of singing and laughed full-heartedly about her poor attempt. She demonstrated the grabbing and ripping-off of clothes by performers when *tarab* or *duende* is being experienced, commenting that still today many flamenco singers pull their shirts Encouraging shouts from the audience, such as *Ole* originating in the Arabic word *Allah* (meaning God) are used in praise of a good performance that is when *tarab* is being felt. The lively session ended and we continued talking, singing and playing long after the workshop had finished. (Fieldnotes, Goldsmiths, 13 February 2004)

Recreating the music by singing the drone and chanting the rhythms, while at the same time feeling the music's emotional content, clearly led students towards profound participatory experiences. The use of real musical instruments and imitations, together with the singer's melismatic, Arabic-sounding vocal delivery provided first-hand insights into the material culture so characteristic for Arabic music.