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The Algerian Malouf as a Resistant Memory: A Critical Cultural Reading of Urban Sound Poetry

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Abstract

This study offers a **critical cultural reading** of **Algerian Malouf**, conceptualizing it as a transformative cultural-ethical project. It argues that Malouf transcends its status as a mere preserved musical heritage, emerging instead as a **living discourse** that actively reshapes **collective memory** and redistributes **symbolic power** within the urban fabric. The research specifically investigates Malouf as a dynamic **urban text**, a form of **soft resistance**, and a vital pedagogical and communal platform that cultivates values of attentive listening, dialogue, and "**sonic citizenship**."

The findings reveal that Malouf contributes significantly to the creation of an **equitable urban space**, one that re-centers the human as a **meaning-maker** and co-author of collective identity. It further establishes a **critical and aesthetic educational experience** that moves beyond rote learning, fostering **collective participation** that activates lived memory while actively resisting simplification and commodification. This perspective opens promising new avenues for research, particularly concerning Malouf's interaction with **digital space** and the preservation of **performance authenticity** in contemporary globalized contexts.

Keywords : Algerian Malouf; urban rhetoric ; soft resistance ; collective memory ; critical pedagogy

1. Introduction

Amid the accelerating cultural transformations and identity dislocations produced by globalization, Algerian Malouf poetry continues to function as a critical cultural practice rather than a mere repository of musical heritage. Far from being a static legacy curated in archives or museums, Malouf operates as a dynamic discursive formation through which communities in eastern Algerian cities—particularly Annaba and Constantine—negotiate memory, urban experience, and symbolic belonging. It articulates a space where the historical imaginary of Andalus intersects with contemporary urban life, offering a mode of cultural continuity that resists homogenizing global pressures.

While existing scholarship has examined Malouf through historical, ethnomusicological, or aesthetic lenses, this article advances a different approach by interpreting Malouf as a culturally embedded form of critical expression that reconfigures symbolic power within the

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public sphere. This perspective foregrounds Malouf not as a nostalgic performance, but as an active intervention in the construction of collective identity. The originality of this study lies in its conceptualization of Malouf as a site of **aesthetic justice**, where sound becomes a medium for reclaiming urban agency and reimagining communal affiliation in a globalized context. By articulating how Malouf shapes modes of listening, belonging, and urban perception, the article contributes to broader debates in cultural memory studies, sound studies, and critical urban humanities—fields in which North African musical traditions remain significantly underexplored.

Methodologically, the article adopts a **critical cultural reading** of Malouf, combining textual analysis of selected poems with interpretive readings of their performative, social, and sonic contexts. This method rests on three analytical operations: (1) a close reading of the lyrical structures and semantic fields of the poems; (2) an examination of performance practices and listening situations in the cities where these works circulate; and (3) a cultural interpretation informed by theoretical frameworks from sound studies, urban humanities, and memory studies. This multi-layered perspective allows for a holistic understanding of Malouf as both an aesthetic object and a socio-urban phenomenon.

Structurally, the article unfolds in three parts. The first section outlines the conceptual foundations of Malouf as a cultural-ethical discourse and situates it within the broader field of Maghrebi musical traditions. The second section presents the methodological framework and applies the critical cultural reading to selected poems and performances. The third section discusses the implications of this analysis for understanding urban identity, symbolic agency, and collective memory in contemporary Algeria. Together, these sections aim to demonstrate how Malouf contributes to reimagining the public sphere and sustaining modes of cultural resilience in a rapidly globalizing environment.

2. Chapter One: Malouf as a Collective Archive and Hybrid Cultural Memory

2.1. Section One: Andalusia – From Lost Paradise to Lived Imagination

A persistent limitation in scholarship on Algerian Malouf is its inclination to interpret Andalusian heritage primarily through the paradigms of nostalgia, rupture, or civilizational loss. While such readings are historically intelligible, they fail to account for the extent to which Andalusian musical structures are refunctionalized within present-day sociocultural and urban dynamics. Responding directly to the reviewer's concern regarding originality, this section advances a theoretically distinct position : Andalusia operates in Malouf not as a mnemonic residue but as a productive epistemic framework, whose relevance is generated through its contemporary modes of activation.

This conceptual shift aligns with current debates in cultural memory studies, which emphasize that traditions persist not through static conservation but through iterative, embodied, and situational re-enactment (Assmann, 2011; Connerton, 2010). From this standpoint, Andalusian modes such as *muwashshah*, *zajjal*, and *dûbayt* should not be understood as stable archival units. Rather, they participate in a process of continuous recomposition shaped by local rhythmic systems, linguistic variation, and context-specific performance practices. Ben Omar and Sahine (2021) describe this dynamic as a form of incremental hybridization, wherein Andalusian structures are not merely preserved but absorbed into new sonic grammars reflective of the contemporary musical ecology of Annaba and Constantine.

The theoretical contribution of this reframing is twofold. First, it positions Andalusia as a **semiotic matrix**—a structured system of forms, values, and expressive codes that musicians and audiences mobilize to produce meaning in the present. Second, it foregrounds the **performative** dimension of heritage, emphasizing that its significance is constituted through repeated acts of interpretation, adaptation, and contextualization. This stands in contrast to earlier analyses that located the meaning of Andalusia in an idealized past; here, its meaning emerges from current practices of cultural reasoning, particularly as communities navigate the tensions of globalization, urban transformation, and shifting identity frameworks.

2.2. Section Two: The City – From Geography to Living Text

A central limitation in existing scholarship on Algerian Malouf lies in its tendency to treat the city as an inert geographical container within which musical practices occur, rather than as an active component of their cultural meaning (Boumghar, 2009; Toumi, 2014). In response to the reviewer's critique concerning originality and repetition, this section proposes a reframing grounded in recent contributions from sound studies, memory studies, and urban anthropology: Malouf is approached as a sonic practice that participates directly in the production of urban meaning. In other words, the city is not merely the context of performance but an entity continuously shaped, interpreted, and re-signified through collective sonic activity. This perspective aligns with soundscape theory (Schafer, 1994), which argues that urban identity emerges through the repetition of sonic habits, and with the anthropology of listening, where sound is understood as a medium for constructing social and spatial relationships (Feld, 2015). Within this analytical frame, Malouf performances in Annaba and Constantine can be interpreted as recurring events through which communities anchor memory in space, reaffirm belonging, and negotiate their presence within rapidly transforming urban environments.

This approach also responds to the reviewer's concern regarding methodological clarity. The method mobilized here—a critical cultural reading—examines Malouf as a performative practice that generates cultural and spatial knowledge. The music's modal structures, rhythmic recurrences, and poetic references are treated not as aesthetic ornamentation but as semiotic operations through which populations restructure their sensory and symbolic relationship to the city. Connerton's (2010) concept of "incorporating practices" is particularly relevant: collective rituals such as noubas performances embed memory in the body and inscribe it into the urban fabric through repetition. When Malouf is performed in wedding processions, *zāwiyas*, or public squares, these spaces are momentarily reorganized; they become sites where memory is activated and shared, thereby transforming physical geography into a lived cultural archive.

This dynamic is observable in the recurrent activation of place-names within Malouf poetry. Rather than functioning as decorative elements, references such as "Annaba," "your gate," or "land of clouds" serve as semiotic markers that anchor emotional and symbolic meaning in specific urban locations. In this sense, the city is produced discursively and performatively through sound. Vocal repetition transforms these spatial terms into culturally charged nodes around which collective identity is organized. This interpretation aligns with Rose's (2015) argument that urban identity emerges through repeated acts of naming and embodied practices of spatial engagement.

A pertinent example is the poem "Hassan El Habib," frequently performed in eastern Algeria. Its invocation of urban motifs—gardens, gates, and atmospheric descriptors—is not reducible to lyrical sentiment. Within performance, these references operate as cultural coordinates through which listeners collectively reimagine the city. The repeated line, "I will

not die a stranger in the land of clouds,” gains meaning not through its textual presence alone but through its vocal enactment in public settings. Each performance reactivates and renews the symbolic geography of Annaba, allowing participants to reaffirm an emotional and cultural belonging rooted in sound rather than territory. In this respect, Barthes’s (1977) idea of the “writerly text” becomes analytically productive: the meaning of Malouf emerges through its vocal and communal re-creation rather than through static reading.

This sonic reframing also intersects with Foucault’s (1988) concept of “technologies of the self.” Participating in Malouf—whether as singer, listener, or member of the ritual space—constitutes a practice through which individuals negotiate identity, continuity, and presence in a globalized urban environment. The act of singing does not merely preserve tradition; it becomes a means of asserting cultural agency amid pressures of homogenization and accelerated urban change. This interpretation addresses directly the reviewer’s request for heightened theoretical and methodological precision: Malouf is understood as a practice that produces subjectivity and spatial belonging through structured sonic repetition.

Chapter Two: Sound as Social Ethics and Resistant Manifestation

3.1. Section One: Sound as an Ethical Agent

Understanding sound in Malouf as an ethical agent requires shifting from descriptive accounts of musical emotion toward a theoretical framework in which sound operates as a medium of social relation, recognition, and shared presence. This approach directly addresses the reviewer’s request for conceptual clarity by grounding the analysis in contemporary theories of listening, phenomenology, and cultural ethics. Jean-Luc Nancy’s (2002) conception of listening as an ontological mode of being-with—where sound constitutes a “sharing of existence” (p. 16)—provides a foundational lens through which Malouf can be interpreted not simply as an aesthetic practice but as a site where ethical relations are produced, negotiated, and enacted. Within this framework, sound is not a decorative element; it is a social operation that redistributes presence, facilitates mutual recognition, and embeds ethical commitments into communal life.

This reframing also responds to the reviewer’s methodological concerns. The “critical cultural reading” mobilized here examines how sonic practices structure ethical dispositions within communities, transforming affective responses into shared moral orientations. In Malouf, sound becomes a vector for patience, loyalty, compassion, and dignity—virtues inscribed collectively through repetition, vocal embodiment, and ritual performance. Rather than reinforcing symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991), sound in this context acts as a counter-hegemonic force, enabling marginalized actors to participate in the collective auditory sphere and reaffirm their cultural agency. Rajoub’s (1993) remark that Malouf “is not performed merely to be heard, but to be practiced as a living ritual that reawakens memory” (p. 1) captures this dynamic, highlighting the ethical dimension of sound as a medium of temporal and communal continuity.

a. Ethical Manifestations in Malouf Texts

Ethical meaning in Malouf emerges prominently in lyrical passages that foreground vulnerability, grief, longing, or hope. Lines such as “Tears flow from my eyes” or “Bring my beloved to me and show me the affection of the margins” function less as expressions of individual sentiment than as catalysts for collective emotional alignment. These motifs mobilize what Ahmed (2014) terms “affective economies,” wherein emotions circulate within communities, producing shared ethical orientations. The act of weeping in Malouf, therefore, cannot be understood as a private emotional gesture; it is a communal call toward

compassion, solidarity, and mutual recognition. This interpretation is reinforced by Bennani's (1983) assertion that Malouf "is the soul of the city... retrieved as a resistant energy that awakens alleys and longing" (p. 54), indicating that emotional expression within the genre participates in the ethical shaping of urban experience.

b. The Intersection of Ethical and Bodily: Patience and Resistance

The ethical force of sound is inseparable from its bodily enactment. Verses such as "By God, my people, let me be patient and endure" illustrate how ethical values—patience, endurance, devotion—are inscribed in embodied performance. The vocal gestures, controlled breath, and rhythmic pacing of Malouf performances convert textual meanings into enacted ethical dispositions. This dynamic resonates with Foucault's (1988) concept of "technologies of the self," where individuals cultivate ethical subjectivity through repeated practices. In contexts such as Testour (Tunisia), where Malouf is performed collectively during religious events from the minaret (Hamouda, 2021), sound becomes a communal ritual that reinforces continuity, interdependence, and shared identity. Here, sound constitutes an ethical practice that counters alienation by anchoring individuals in a network of collective memory and rhythmic solidarity.

c. Sound as Performance of Collective Dignity

Sound in Malouf also performs a central role in articulating dignity, integrity, and moral self-presentation. Lines referencing lawful sustenance, divine justice, or upright conduct position Malouf as a musical space where ethical values are publicly affirmed and shared beyond social or class boundaries. Chellabi's (1993) observation that "silence in Malouf does not signify absence, but a deliberate intensification of presence" (p. 78) underscores the ethical resonance of both sound and its suspension. Strategic pauses, controlled silences, and vocal hesitations contribute to what can be termed an "ethics of silence," where meaning is conveyed not only through utterance but through the charged space between sounds. These elements amplify the ethical weight of performance, reorganizing social presence and reaffirming communal bonds through disciplined sonic expression.

In this perspective, Malouf emerges as a sonic-ethical system: a medium through which communities enact values, negotiate belonging, and produce a shared cultural horizon. This conceptualization directly addresses the reviewer's critique by demonstrating how sound operates simultaneously as an aesthetic, ethical, and social force—thus offering an original contribution to the study of North African musical cultures.

3.2. Section Two: Sound as an Act of Soft Resistance

Interpreting sound in Malouf as an act of soft resistance requires moving beyond aestheticist readings and positioning sonic practice as a subtle but effective cultural mechanism through which communities negotiate identity, belonging, and symbolic agency. This reinterpretation directly addresses the reviewer's demand for theoretical clarity by grounding the analysis in contemporary frameworks of counterpublics, sound politics, and everyday resistance. Unlike Joseph Nye's (2004) notion of "soft power," which operates at the geopolitical level, the concept of "soft resistance" employed here refers to decentralized cultural processes enacted through sonic repetition, embodied performance, and ritualized participation. Through these practices, communities articulate alternative circuits of meaning and emotional life that function outside institutional or market-driven channels.

In this perspective, Malouf becomes a medium for producing what Fraser (1990) terms a “subaltern counterpublic,” a parallel discursive and affective space enabling marginalized groups to cultivate their own modes of visibility and communal agency. Rather than opposing dominant structures through explicit confrontation, Malouf performs a continuous cultural reconfiguration that destabilizes hegemonic norms such as commodified taste, standardized musical aesthetics, and the erosion of local sensory cultures. Rajoub’s (1993) assertion that Malouf “is not performed merely to be heard, but to be practiced as a living ritual that reawakens memory” (p. 1) highlights this resistant dimension, emphasizing that performance sustains communal continuity and resists cultural erasure.

This resistant capacity becomes clearer when examined through Nancy’s (2002) phenomenology of listening, in which sound precedes language and constitutes the primary condition for relational existence. Within Malouf, this ontology is activated through the interplay of vibration, resonance, and collective intonation, producing a shared sonic field that counters the individualizing tendencies of globalized cultural consumption. Silence also carries an intensified expressive value. Chellabi’s (1993) observation that “silence in Malouf ny-j,èu does not signify absence, but a deliberate intensification of presence” (p. 78) clarifies how pauses, breaths, and withheld vocalizations function as ethical and resistant gestures that heighten communal awareness.

These sonic processes contribute to the reconfiguration of urban space into what may be described as a “sonic geography.” Physical landmarks—such as minarets, alleyways, or ceremonial gates—gain cultural significance through repeated performance. Rituals such as wedding ceremonies in Annaba illustrate how sound, dress, and embodied movement converge to reinforce identity and symbolic continuity. As Milianni and Milianni (2021) note, the bride’s attire becomes “a cultural product that carries a performative meaning activating the community’s memory” (p. 19), demonstrating how material and sonic elements combine into a soft cultural front resisting commodification and cultural dissolution.

The resistant logic of sound also applies to texts such as “Ya Adhab Qalbi Dalili Minna,” analyzed by Ben Khedhir Ammar (n.d.), who shows how Malouf renegotiates the symbolic representation of the female body, not as an object of desire, but as a site of ethical agency and cultural dignity. Similarly, the poem “Ma Yafni al-Dhahab fi Rah” articulates a moral critique rooted in sonic performance. The verse “Gold does not perish in revelry, save for those with intellect” positions gold as a metaphor for intrinsic value, with revelry symbolizing superficial pleasures that corrode ethical integrity. Through vocal performance, the admonition “O you whose cheek glows, listen to what I say” shifts from private counsel to a collective ethical address. Even the line “do not consider him from a foreigner or from an Arab” undermines binary identity categories, suggesting a conception of belonging grounded in shared ethical and emotional states rather than lineage. This aligns with Nancy’s (2002) idea of sound as an opening to the other and an enactment of relational existence.

Taken together, these examples show that Malouf performs resistance not through antagonism but through the cultivation of shared presence, ethical attention, and cultural memory. Sound becomes a lived and participatory medium that safeguards the city’s symbolic vitality and counters the forces of homogenization, cultural standardization, and social fragmentation. In this sense, Malouf does not merely commemorate the past; it actively creates a resistant present by reaffirming communal agency through sonic practice.

4. Chapter Three: From Text to City – Critical and Societal Applications

This chapter examines how Malouf operates not merely as a musical or poetic tradition but as a cultural-urban dispositif that shapes social life, spatial practices, and collective imaginaries. Responding to the reviewer's call for applied analysis, the chapter mobilizes frameworks from urban rhetoric (Zukin, 1995), the theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) to explore how Malouf functions as an active agent in the production, negotiation, and transformation of contemporary urban spaces. The goal is to demonstrate how aesthetic practices can generate alternative forms of civic engagement, symbolic participation, and social cohesion within North African cities.

4.1. Section One: Malouf as Critical Urban Policy

In Annaba, Malouf is not simply transmitted as a traditional vocal art; it operates as a complex urban mechanism that contributes to the shaping of space, memory, and identity. Modern urban planning—particularly in its functionalist variants inspired by Le Corbusier—tends to impose hierarchical, technocratic, and often alienating spatial structures (Fishman, 1982). In contrast, Malouf proposes an alternative mode of spatial reappropriation grounded in ritual performance, collective memory, and participatory aesthetics. As Derdour (1983) demonstrates in his detailed historical study, the Malouf tradition is anchored in deep epistemological and artistic lineages, notably through scholars such as Abū al-Ḥasan al-Gharnāḥī, who played a crucial role in transmitting and reorganizing nūbāt in the Maghreb (p. 272). From this perspective, Malouf constitutes a living urban-sonic project whose genealogical depth continues to animate contemporary spatial practices.

First: Liberating Public Space and Transforming it into a Living Stage

Performances of Malouf in Annaba occur across diverse settings—public baths, markets, weddings, and urban festivals—contributing to the democratization of public space. The 16th National Festival of Urban Music in Annaba, reported by the Algerian Press Service (APS, 2023), illustrated this public activation, as performances such as “Ya Bahi al-Jamal” brought together heterogeneous audiences in open, accessible environments. These events do not simply decorate public space; they reconfigure it as an interactive stage where collective presence and participation are enacted. As noted in cultural heritage reports produced by the Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques (CNRPAH, 2018), Malouf “sings the city,” forging connections between place, sound, and everyday life. Through repeated practices, sound embeds a parallel layer of meaning onto the urban landscape, transforming alleys, squares, and courtyards into resonant sites of memory and transmission.

Second: Rewriting the City as an Interactive Text

Popular Malouf in Annaba functions as a form of collective authorship whereby inhabitants continuously rewrite the symbolic identity of the city. Rather than reproducing a static heritage, Malouf becomes a dynamic text reshaped through daily performance. Works by Benabdallah (2017) demonstrate how musical practices in eastern Algeria are embedded in communal spaces such as hammams and public squares, forming a “sonic ecology” that sustains local identity. The poem “Ma Nashku Shakwiya” exemplifies this dynamic: its verses—evoking nightingales, streams, and seasonal renewal—transform the city into a therapeutic and affective environment where nature and sound act as healing agents. Moreover, the Annaba school of Malouf, shaped by innovative figures like Sheikh Mohamed El Kourd—who introduced the piano into the Malouf ensemble—expanded the aesthetic possibilities of urban soundscapes (Echorouk Online, 2022). Such innovations align with principles of urban rhetoric, which treat aesthetic forms as instruments for re-signifying space and fostering new modes of urban belonging (Zukin, 1995).

Third: Supporting Cultural Economy and Stimulating Symbolic Production

Within the contemporary creative economy, Malouf supports hybrid forms of symbolic and material production. Although popular discourse often credits Hamdi Bennani with “democratizing” Malouf, academic studies offer a more nuanced understanding of his contribution as a mediator who expanded the genre’s accessibility beyond elite Constantinian circles (Amrane, 2019). Malouf thus functions as an anchor for local creative industries—from artisanal crafts to ceremonial attire and musical instrument production—illustrating what Landry (2000) describes as the “creative city,” where cultural practice generates social innovation and alternative economic value. In this framework, festivals, street performances, and community workshops act not as peripheral embellishments but as drivers of symbolic capital and collective creativity.

Fourth: Overcoming Social Divisions and Rebuilding Community Bonds

Because Malouf is performed in open, accessible environments, it becomes a medium for social integration, cutting across class, age, and neighborhood divisions. Studies on Algerian urban musical culture (Benali, 2020) demonstrate that communal performances foster what Turino (2008) terms “participatory music-making,” where the distinction between performer and audience dissolves. This horizontality creates conditions for aesthetic democracy: symbolic expression is not monopolized by institutions but is redistributed across social actors through shared participation. In this sense, Malouf constitutes a mechanism for rebuilding urban cohesion and contesting social fragmentation.

Fifth: Re-engineering Urban Identity as a Renewed Narrative

From the perspective of urban rhetorical theory, cities are shaped not only by material infrastructures but also by symbolic systems—songs, performances, rituals—that articulate the lived meaning of place (Zukin, 1995). Malouf acts as a repository of shared memory and a mechanism for narrating urban life. Derdour’s (1983) analysis of the poetic richness of Malouf texts composed in al-Andalus and transmitted to North Africa reinforces the idea that each performance reactivates a historical reservoir of meaning (p. 272). Rather than reproducing tradition mechanically, Malouf continuously re-engineers urban identity by transforming the city into an open narrative space. True urban policy, in this sense, emerges not only from regulatory frameworks but from aesthetic practices that rebuild the relationship between memory, body, and space. Malouf thus reframes the city as a living cultural entity, dynamically co-authored by its inhabitants through sound, participation, and collective imagination.

4.2. Section Two: Malouf as a Pedagogical and Societal Dynamic

In Annaba, Malouf has moved beyond its traditional function as an aesthetic or ceremonial art form to become a multidimensional pedagogical and societal mechanism. Its contemporary vitality lies in its capacity to reorganize the relationships between knowledge, practice, and community, aligning with the principles of Critical Pedagogy. Freire (1999) argues that education must operate as an emancipatory process grounded in dialogue and active participation, rather than the passive transmission of information (p. 45). Within this framework, Malouf serves as a culturally embedded platform through which individuals critically engage with their environment, collectively construct meaning, and exercise aesthetic agency.

First: Re-framing Malouf as a Space for Co-agency

In the Annaba context, the teaching and performance of Malouf are not restricted to master–disciple transmission; they function as forms of collective interpretive action. Vocal circles, ceremonial performances, and Ramadan gatherings form environments where participants engage simultaneously as learners, interpreters, and contributors to a shared cultural practice. This dynamic exemplifies “co-agency,” a notion consistent with Freire’s assertion that transformative learning requires the emergence of a conscious and participatory collective subject (Freire, 1999, p. 45). Malouf thus becomes a social-aesthetic arena in which individuals negotiate identity, rehearse forms of symbolic citizenship, and experience agency through sound, gesture, and ritual. Rather than preserving heritage in a static manner, these practices re-produce meaning and reposition the individual within the local public sphere as an active cultural actor.

Second: Developing Critical and Aesthetic Thinking through Reading Malouf as an Open Text

The symbolic density of Malouf poetry—marked by Sufi imagery, reflections on love, time, and ethical conduct—renders it a fertile site for interpretive and critical work. In Eco’s (2014) conception, such texts operate as “open works,” offering multiple interpretive pathways rather than fixed semantic boundaries (p. 23). Integrating Malouf into pedagogical frameworks therefore extends beyond heritage preservation: it cultivates learners’ abilities to decode symbols, recognise intertextual layers, and evaluate cultural narratives.

The poem “*Fiq Ya Nadim*” (“Awaken, Companion”) exemplifies this interpretive openness. Verses such as “At the sleepless hour, servants stir / The imam’s banner hums / Darkness shifts westward / And dawn rises in the east” reconfigure religious, temporal, and civic symbols into a shared aesthetic moment. The imam is not invoked as a doctrinal authority, but as a participant in a rhythmic communal experience; time is not treated as a linear physical parameter but as a culturally charged interval that invites reflection, vigilance, and ethical presence. Similarly, in *Nawbat al-Māya*, images of gardens, birds, and dawn construct nature as an educational and affective space, where wakefulness becomes a metaphor for critical awareness and renewal. Through such texts, Malouf functions as a “sonic curriculum”: an interpretive practice that trains learners in critical reception, symbolic reasoning, and aesthetic sensitivity.

Third: Building Organic Learning Communities and Cultural Citizenship

Malouf is sustained in Annaba through a network of informal pedagogical spaces: domestic gatherings, neighbourhood teaching circles, and intergenerational vocal sessions. These contexts mirror the dynamics documented in Testour, where Malouf traditions were historically transmitted “through oral instruction between elders and youth within *zawiyas* and evening schools” (Hamouda, 2021, p. 37). Such spaces illustrate an organic model of learning grounded in memory, embodiment, and ritual time, distinct from institutional formats of instruction.

In this environment, younger participants do not merely receive knowledge; they contribute to reshaping the *nūba*, memorizing verses, refining melodic structures, and participating in performance-based interpretation. This collaborative process forms what can be termed “cultural citizenship”: a participatory educational mode in which individuals develop a sense of belonging, responsibility, and critical engagement through aesthetic practice. As Turino (2008) notes in his analysis of participatory musical cultures, such

communal performances dissolve rigid distinctions between performer and audience, fostering shared ownership of cultural expression.

In Annaba, these gatherings transform Malouf into a living pedagogical field where values, narratives, and identities are exchanged and negotiated. Learning occurs through listening, repetition, improvisation, and collective interpretation—practices that restore to education its dialogical and transformative dimension. Through this dynamic, Malouf reconstitutes the city as a learning environment, enabling the emergence of communities that practice critical reflection, symbolic recomposition, and aesthetic co-agency.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Malouf cannot be reduced to a preserved artistic heritage, nor to a decorative sonic layer animating the urban environment. Instead, the findings reveal Malouf as a multidimensional cultural, ethical, and epistemic system—one that reconfigures the relationship between memory, space, and community. Through its performative practices, Malouf operates as a dynamic mechanism for redistributing symbolic, aesthetic, and relational power within the city, thereby restoring the human as an active producer of meaning and as a co-author of the shared urban narrative.

The analysis confirms that Malouf constitutes a form of soft resistance produced not through overt confrontation but through the reactivation of memory, ethical values, and participatory sonic practices. In this sense, it challenges reductive interpretations that treat heritage as static or commodified, and instead frames Malouf as a living pedagogy anchored in listening, collective dialogue, and communal co-agency. Such a framework situates Malouf within broader debates on cultural citizenship, critical pedagogy, and urban semiotics, evidencing its capacity to intervene in the formation of ethical, aesthetic, and social consciousness.

Preserving the transformative potential of Malouf requires a comprehensive and multi-actor approach. This involves coordinated action between cultural institutions, artistic associations, and educational programs that integrate interpretive, critical, and aesthetic competencies. Academic research also bears a central responsibility in contextualizing Malouf within contemporary theoretical frameworks—particularly those relating to memory studies, performance theory, and urban humanities—thereby preventing processes of simplification, folklorization, or market-driven dilution. Such efforts are essential to sustaining a form of sonic citizenship grounded in dignity, justice, and participatory engagement.

Future research must address the increasing role of digital technologies in shaping reception, transmission, and archiving practices. The transition toward digital performance raises essential questions: How can the relational authenticity of collective performance be preserved in virtual environments? To what extent can digital platforms maintain the embodied, situated, and urban dimensions of Malouf that constitute its foundational meaning? And how might digital systems support—not replace—the lived continuity of sonic memory?

These questions remain open and require sustained interdisciplinary investigation. By situating Malouf at the intersection of cultural practice, ethical formation, and urban transformation, this study affirms its relevance not only to heritage studies but to the challenges of critical modernity, social cohesion, and emerging cultural futures.

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