

Raks Sharki, Toronto, Yasmina Ramzy, Community

Judith Hamera in *Dancing Communities* (2007) maintains that “the production and consumption of art are communicative currency developed by and circulating between artists, audiences and critics, binding them together in interpretive communities.” Correspondingly, SanSan Kwan in *Kinesthetic City* (2013) suggests that bodily movement in urban space provides the kinesthetic basis for bodies choreographed as community. This presentation borrows from Hamera and Kwan’s theorization of the evolution of community in a global city to examine the history of raks sharki in Toronto. This includes Toronto’s location on a wide plateau cut by numerous river valleys that ultimately divide the city into discursive areas united by an expansive subway system. Toronto’s multiethnic identity is celebrated by artistic institutions such as Harbourfront Center that sponsors a series of events that highlight discrete ethnic groups. In the mid-1990s Yasmina Ramzy produced a festival that brought together dance and music groups that represented the diversity of Toronto. Following the festival’s success, Harbourfront approached her about the process she had used to organize it. This was her first foray into an expanded relationship with the dance community across the greater Toronto area, which has since 1997 included her involvement as a member of the Board of Directors for Dance Ontario. Ramzy has used this position to initiate a conversation across the cultural spheres of musicians, choreographers, dancers, that bridge the river valleys of Toronto to integrate raks shari into what Hamera refers to as interpretive communities.