



# FEATURES

## Performing Palestine

### Resisting the Occupation and Reviving Jerusalem's Social and Cultural Identity through Music and the Arts

David A. McDonald

Ramallah Dance Theater performs  
"Access Denied" on 26 February, 2004.  
Source: [www.birzeit.edu](http://www.birzeit.edu).

Resistance to the Israeli occupation takes many forms. From everyday acts of civil disobedience to outright engagement with occupation forces, Palestinians living under Israeli occupation have sought out myriad ways of negotiating the current socio-political landscape.<sup>1</sup> One particularly fascinating arena for social and cultural resistance lies in the fields of popular culture and the arts. Though music and musical performance have often been ignored as epiphenomenal in the literature on Palestinian identity and nationalism, new studies of the Middle East have begun to refocus attention on the ways in which popular culture and performance are in fact constitutive modalities for the negotiation of power and resistance, social interaction, and identity.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with this approach, this study highlights contemporary cultural associations, non-governmental organizations, and independent projects which seek to revitalize and restore Jerusalem as the cultural capital of the Palestinian people. This new wave of cultural activity (in the form of music, film, and arts festivals, concerts,

and symposiums) in Jerusalem represents an important, yet often overlooked, front in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination and the cultural continuity of the Palestinian community.

The development of cultural organizations over the last 15 years has had a substantial effect on social and cultural life in Palestine, and has served as an important model for civil, non-violent resistance to the occupation. In this endeavour, cultural programs aimed at educating, entertaining, and or enlightening Palestinian audiences convey a sense of national pride and community. What is more, these programs have provided a constructive outlet for dealing with feelings of loss, depression, and dispossession brought about by the occupation. As one professor at the Edward Said National Conservatory for Music said to me, “every hour that I teach a student is an hour that they are not on the street... Through music I can get these kids to drop stones, and instead pick up an instrument.”<sup>3</sup>

The primary goal of this article, however, is not simply to describe current attempts to reinvigorate cultural life in Jerusalem and the West Bank, but rather to expand the ways in which the tools and methods of Palestinian resistance are conceptualized. Compared to the angry scenes broadcast by international media, non-violent social and cultural activism goes largely unnoticed by the foreign press. The daily negotiation of Palestinian life under occupation is constituted by more than stones and demonstrations. It also includes building cultural bridges, inspiring artistic production, and creating moments of hope and achievement in the lives of Palestinian children and their families. Through various cultural and artistic programs, Palestinians are able to subvert the control of the occupation and take a proactive stance against the social and cultural transformation of Jerusalem and its native population.

Specifically, this article will focus on three cultural organizations; the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNMC), the Markez al-Fann al-Sha’bi [Popular Arts Centre], and Yabous Productions. These organizations work to undermine the physical and cultural control imposed by the occupation, as well as to enhance and develop cultural life through music, dance, art, and film. Moreover, each has been instrumental in the development of several music, film, and arts festivals in Jerusalem and the West Bank. These festivals have become extremely popular, and offer valuable insights into how music and popular culture serve to facilitate communal interaction and collective identity formation. However, the examples cited here should be seen as a microcosm of a much larger social project led by various grassroots organizations to preserve and expand indigenous Palestinian cultural practices.

## **Palestinian Music and the Arts of Resistance**

The new directions in cultural activism, with which I am concerned here, should additionally be understood within the larger Palestinian discourse of resistance. For at least the last 70 years, dating back to the first known archival field recordings of

music in Palestine, we find that music and musical performance have represented a central modality for Palestinian collective identity formation and resistance to colonial occupation.<sup>4</sup> Indigenous musical performance has served important social and cultural roles within local, regional, and national formations. For example, the musician/singer/poet, known colloquially as *al-shi'r al-murtajal* or *al-hadi*, was a central figure in community life performing at indigenous weddings, engagements, circumcisions, and other religious and calendrical festivals. The improvised poetry of the *shi'r* largely played upon and within established musical archetypes, such as *al-dal'ouna*, *al-'ataba*, *al-jafra*, that later became the basis for the development of Palestinian Intifada song. Specifically, it was the role of the *shi'r* to entertain and inspire the community by improvising socially salient lyrics and political commentary on a variety of issues. Most common were songs of praise to historical heroes, commemoration of events and the local community, and tributes to the nation, the land, and the people. Within these performance environments (through collective singing and dancing), participants would come together to form and transform relationships, affirm their local identity, and index the historical events and collective experiences that defined them as a community. What it meant to be Palestinian was largely determined by the continued articulation of these musico-cultural rituals and practices, as evidenced by the indigenous line dances *debke*, the *sahjah*, and the *hida*.<sup>5</sup> The communal interaction fostered by musical performance had incredibly powerful effects within and across social and geographic boundaries. Through the physical and symbolic action of the musical environment, individuals would constitute, challenge, and reinforce many of the terms which defined them as a community amidst the formidable pressures of colonial encroachment.

After 1967, there emerged a widespread movement for the preservation of Palestinian folklore, music, art, customs and traditions. This movement was spearheaded primarily by young nationalists seeking to reconstruct the Palestinian “folkloric” past in the service of the desired nation-state. Formal and informal Palestinian political associations throughout the Occupied Territories and the Arab world soon devoted considerable resources to the production of folkloric artifacts (embroidery, music, literature, poetry, handicrafts, etc.). Nationalist historians, poets, and artists produced volumes of texts devoted to historicizing the Palestinian people, their past, and their struggles against foreign domination. As part of the nationalist project, these documents were largely selective in their representation, whereby the Palestinian people were seen as historically homogenous: united in origin, spirit, and action.<sup>6</sup> In this nationalizing process, music and musical performance were central to expressing a kind of Palestinian aesthetic purity defined by traditional village practices. Most powerful of these was the codification of the Palestinian line dance, or *debke*, its melodies, rhythms and appropriate steps refashioned into one solitary cultural object. Though archival evidence suggests that there existed a wide spectrum of *debke* practices throughout Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria), folklorists of this period were quite adamant about the ‘authentic’ ways in which the *debke* ought to be performed. Through their various publications, many Palestinian scholars and folklorists set out to ‘police’ artistic activity in the West Bank and near Diaspora in an attempt to define

and preserve the ‘authentic’ Palestinian folklore.<sup>7</sup> In form, content, and aesthetics, however, what was actually preserved was largely influenced by social formation, political affiliation, geography, and an emphasis on pre-1948 West Bank village practices.

By the early 1980s, Palestinian musicians and poets had reconfigured many of the indigenous participatory song types into nationalist songs for mass production and distribution. The development of the music cassette tape allowed for Palestinian singers and poets to be heard throughout the West Bank and the near diaspora. Over the Intifada years (1987-1993), this catalog of resistance song grew exponentially and even today remains popular among Palestinian youth throughout the region. Currently, 20-year-old cassettes of famous resistance singers like Samih Shqeir, Ahmed Qa’bour, Firqat Al-‘Ashiqeen, and Firqat al-Baladna are readily available in street-side kiosks. While the musicians themselves may have found great difficulty in crossing state borders (Arab or otherwise), their music and voices were heard easily in every area via cheap bootleg recordings. The cultural effects of these cassettes, in nationalizing Palestinian youth as well as historicizing and refashioning the Palestinian struggle, are the subject of forthcoming research.<sup>8</sup> Yet it must be noted that at each phase of Palestinian history, musicians, writers, and other performers have played an essential role in the struggle for self-determination.

In the years following the signing of the Oslo Accords (1994-2000), cultural aesthetics in the West Bank changed considerably. The ubiquity of resistance music was consequently replaced by songs of reconciliation, peace, and collaboration.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the West Bank, Palestinian society opened itself considerably to outside media (music, film, literature) and cultural consumption (internet cafes, movie houses, international restaurants, and shopping malls). Especially in places like Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem, where a growing cosmopolitan middle class sought out Western media, cultural life had shifted. Newly-established cultural institutions under the direct patronage of the Palestinian National Authority or foreign non-governmental organizations blossomed in the promotion of new cultural forms. Ballet classes, Kung Fu movies, and American soap operas became increasingly popular. The proliferation of satellite television and the internet further expanded the cultural commodities available, serving to open previously closed communities to the cosmopolitan world. Western classical music performances began to be held in Jerusalem, and state-of-the-art cultural theatres and art museums have recently been built in Bethlehem and Ramallah.

It is within this newly developing cosmopolitan community that the ESNMC and Yabous productions came about. Highly educated and talented cultural enthusiasts sought ways of bringing Palestine into the international arts scene. The creation of a national music conservatory for young Palestinian children to learn Western and Arab classical music became a logical step in promoting cosmopolitan aesthetics and artistic practices. Likewise, in bringing some of the world’s finest musicians to perform in Jerusalem, Yabous began nourishing the aesthetic dispositions of a

cosmopolitan community more accustomed to international music styles than to the indigenous participatory music of previous generations. What is more, in establishing specifically Palestinian cultural organizations, their directors were providing access to international arts and media beyond the Israeli cultural scene.

Following the collapse of the peace process and the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, Palestinian society quickly reverted to uprising mode. Curfews, closures, violence, and restrictions of movement brought Palestinian society to a screeching halt. Virtually all cinemas, cafes, and other public spaces for social and cultural consumption were closed, and the public was forced indoors to watch the new Intifada unfold on satellite television. This “interiorization of the social” had a lasting and profound effect on Palestinian society.<sup>10</sup> Families became immobilized and were solely dependent upon television, movies, video games, and the internet for access to the outside world. The strangulation of Palestinian society and the interiorization of common sociality, all levied by a matrix of Israeli checkpoints and restrictions on movement, is precisely the aspect of control which the cultural organizations featured in this article say they are fighting against.

## **The Edward Said National Conservatory for Music**

Since its inception in 1990, the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNMC) has provided Western classical and Arab music instruction to Palestinian students living in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Although its inaugural class comprised only 40 students and three instructors, today the ESNMC boasts over 400 students and 22 instructors spread out over three campuses (Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah).<sup>11</sup> Over the course of an academic year the ESNMC organizes hundreds of events: a weekly concert series, master classes, recitals, summer music camps, and other student productions. The conservatory’s ultimate goal is to provide musical training to local school teachers and young Palestinian students who would otherwise not have access or opportunity to study music.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the ESNMC has contributed greatly to the development of the local Palestinian music scene by creating music curricula for area schools, enhancing a general awareness and appreciation for music, and securing grants for talented young Palestinian artists to study abroad.

The most ambitious project of the ESNMC, however, has been the formation of a national symphony orchestra comprised entirely of Palestinian musicians from all over the world. Beginning formal rehearsals in the fall of 2005, this project marks the first international tour of an all-Palestinian orchestra. Violinist Basel Khoury remarked “to be able to look around the stage and to know that everyone in the group is Palestinian is like a dream come true for me... . Wherever we go we are told that we are ‘different’... . On this stage we will all be playing as one.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, orchestra representative Mohammad Fadel sees this project as “an incredible opportunity for Palestinian musicians to perform and perhaps tour internationally, but also for the international community to recognize the talents of Palestinian musicians who have



The Palestine Youth Orchestra in Jerash, Jordan, August 2005. *Photo by Rauf Haj Yahya.*

been scattered all over the world... We hope that by performing together as a national orchestra we bring a new face to the Palestinian struggle.”<sup>14</sup> The logistics of such an endeavour require that musicians from many countries gather to rehearse and perform. Initially, the orchestra is meeting in Amman, Jordan, to ensure fewer problems securing visas and obtaining permission to move.

As such, the Palestinian National Orchestra (PNO) presents an interesting model of resistance. First, in seeking out and contacting Palestinian artists from all over the world, the ESNMC is creating a network of musicians rooted in a shared Palestinian national identity. This is the first such project of its kind to do so, and will serve as a springboard for further collaboration among participants. Second, the PNO represents the first large-scale attempt to engage the international arts community as a purely Palestinian ensemble. The organizers believe that the PNO will act as a symbol of the Palestinian Diaspora and the nationalist struggle. Third, if the PNO is able to tour throughout Europe as planned, it will provide a platform for discussion of the Palestinian cause and the Israeli occupation. More importantly, in the course of this discussion, the PNO will present a ‘new face’ to the international community. This new Palestinian face, one manifested in established national forms such as orchestras, soccer teams, anthems, flags, cuisine, etc., is one that Western cosmopolitan audiences are familiar with, and can easily identify. As the group performs masterpieces from



A scene from *Fawanees*, a children's musical performed in Ramallah, August 2004, in cooperation with the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. *Photo by Steve Sabella.*

the established canon of Western classical music, they are in essence demonstrating that this Palestinian ensemble shares in the so-called 'civilized aesthetics' of the cosmopolitan world - that talented young Palestinian artists are able to perform and compete on an international stage. As orchestra organizer Mohammad Fadel states "we want to show the world that we can fight for our freedom peacefully, and in this case through music."<sup>15</sup> Finally, the formation of the PNO is intended to impact the local Palestinian community. Orchestra leaders are intent on creating an ensemble able to confront and compete with their Israeli counterparts, providing opportunities and a source of pride for both young Palestinian musicians and wider society.

## Popular Arts Center

Less visible, yet equally potent, are the networks of grassroots community organizations devoted to the fostering and preservation of Palestinian art forms and traditional cultural practices. Perhaps the most active of these institutions in the West Bank is the Markez al-Fann al-Sha'bi or Popular Art Center (PAC) located in al-Bireh. Since its inception during the first Intifada of 1987, the PAC has been a substantial resource for the people of Ramallah, Al-Bireh, and its surrounding villages. Besides offering traditional dance and music classes, after-school arts programs, and a movie

theatre, the PAC set out in early 2001 to develop a performing arts curriculum specifically for children in traumatized communities. Art During Siege and the Just For Kids/Our Kids Workshop Series offer hundreds of different artistic exercises in drawing, music, and dance designed to inspire “creativity, communication, co-operation, and continuity” in the lives of Palestinian children.<sup>16</sup>

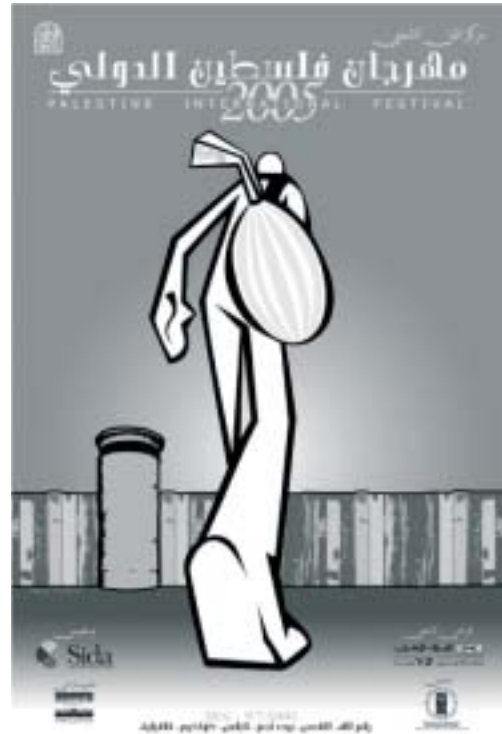
In the program manual, contributor Nicholas Rowe writes:

*The effect of the Intifada was very debilitating. There were day to day choices, go out and protest directly against the Israelis and possibly be killed or wounded, or close the doors and sit inside and watch it all on television. The need for creative activity had never been greater, yet the usual channels for it were closed. Almost all after school programs were cancelled, local television was filled with continuous images of the carnage, every community was suffering losses including children being killed by Israeli soldiers, every family was affected by keeping parents from reaching their workplaces due to roadblocks and checkpoints. Creative growth was paralyzed and another generation of Palestinians were about to lose the optimism of a clear childhood, and a healthy future. Creating relief for children was our most urgent objective.*

Within these prescribed activities, the children are encouraged to express themselves in various ways. Through drawing, painting, music, and dance, participants learn to work collectively and in collaboration to satisfy group goals. In other exercises, participants are encouraged to create artistic projects as a means for personal introspection and catharsis. In each case, exercises are designed to help alleviate feelings of depression and desperation. In addition, the exercises rebuild a sense of community and interdependence among children who have seen first-hand the destructive consequences of the Intifada. The dangers experienced have forced many children indoors for long hours or even weeks at a time. The workshops designed by the PAC directly confront the interiorization of social life, and provide moments of release for children and their families. Within the first ten months of the Intifada, Just For Kids workshops had been taken to over 12,000 Palestinian children in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During more than 800 contact hours, 250 local workshop leaders were trained to continue the activities, and the program today has been published and distributed internationally for use in other traumatized communities throughout the world.

In addition to the Just For Kids program, in the summer of 2005 the PAC brought back the Palestine International Festival. Its theme was “Another Break in the Wall,” paying tribute to the one-year anniversary of the International Court of Justice’s ruling that the Israeli barrier is illegal under international law and must be dismantled. The

Palestine International Festival was first held in 1993 in an attempt to promote internal unity and to alleviate the cultural isolation felt by Palestinian communities suffering from the occupation. Over the next seven years, the festival developed into one of the more prestigious cultural events in Palestine, hosting artists from all over the world. However, with the escalation of the Intifada and a tightening of restrictions of movement, the festival was postponed from 2000 to 2004. A debate emerged over the propriety of such a festival in light of considerable hardship and ongoing suffering. Celebratory music and dance performances had abated during the Intifada out of respect for those mourning loss. In 2005, however, PAC directors decided that the political situation necessitated the revival of the festival in order to “prove [that Palestinians would] continue to enjoy cultural performances, to communicate with the rest of the world, to hold on to our dreams..., and to resist oppression [through] cultural activism.”<sup>17</sup>



In hindsight, the restoration of the festival in 2005 was perhaps premature. Program events scheduled to take place in Nablus and Qalqiliya exacerbated already existing political tensions between festival organizers/supporters, on one hand, and Fateh activists in Nablus and Qalqiliya’s newly elected Hamas leadership, on the other. In Qalqiliya, city leaders objected to the style of music performed and the mixing of men and women in the audience. In an interview with the BBC, a city council spokesperson stated that the outdoor festival was banned in order to “protect the conservative values of the city.”<sup>18</sup> Festival organizers condemned the decision. In Nablus, the opposition came from street activists belonging to Fateh, former President Yasser Arafat’s faction. The main performance ended soon after it began, with the singers departing the stage and the crowd turning unruly: fighting, throwing chairs, and firing rifles into the air. Local politics and a confrontation between varying aesthetic and cultural dispositions proved an obstacle too great for festival organizers to overcome.

## Yabous Productions

Since 1995, Yabous Productions, located in the heart of East Jerusalem, has developed into one of the most active and influential cultural organizations in Palestine. Originating from a group of local artists and cultural enthusiasts, Yabous was founded

for the promotion and revival of cultural life in the city. Its primary goal was to enhance Palestinian cultural life and to restore Jerusalem's position as an historic capital for religious, social, and cultural exchange. The two highlights of Yabous' schedule are the annual Jerusalem Festival and the Arab Film Festival. Of these, the Jerusalem Festival has grown into an internationally-renowned forum for world music performance. Now in its tenth year, the Jerusalem Festival brings together musicians from various countries for a week of performances, symposium, and master classes. These musicians are then presented in a series of events alongside Palestinian artists and students. The resulting collaboration between international and local musicians has had several important effects.

First, it serves to bring leading international musical ensembles to perform for a Jerusalemite audience beleaguered by the occupation and lacking access to socio-cultural events. Second, within this milieu, local Palestinian artists are given essential opportunities to perform and showcase their talents alongside some of the world's famous musicians. The partnership between local Palestinian and international artists often results in continued professional relationships and the potential for further performance opportunities abroad. More importantly, through the juxtaposition of local and international talents, Palestinian musicians are exposed to new ideas and conceptions of music, thereby pushing the envelope of local aesthetics and developing a more sophisticated artistic community. While in residence, many participating artists donate their time by hosting workshops, jam sessions, or lectures with Palestinian students. The 2005 program boasted Argentinean Tango artist Paula Estrella, Tunisian oudist Anouar Brahem, Spanish Flamenco ensemble Herencia, and Korean percussionists Dulsori. The further development of Palestinian music is largely determined by its continued relationship with music and musical styles from around the world. Given the inability of many Palestinian musicians to study abroad, through this festival, Yabous can effectively bring the world's music to Jerusalem.

Third, Palestinian musicians benefit considerably from the international exposure gained from such an event. Many Palestinian musicians who have participated in this festival have used it as a springboard for the advancement of their careers. Palestinian oud performer Ahmed Khatib notes that, "without festivals such this it would be almost impossible for us to hear good quality world music, and to perform for such an enthusiastic local crowd."<sup>19</sup> Here Palestinian artists gain valuable performance experience in front of a large audience. According to Yabous director Rania Elias, "We try very hard to bring well-known artists, but at the same time give a chance for others to come... We provide a stage for young Palestinian artists to perform, and then bring these [international] artists together so that they may learn from each other."<sup>20</sup>

In 2002, the Jerusalem Festival bore the theme "Songs of Freedom" and brought together musicians from around the world who specialize in music of social and political resistance. The long-established tradition of Palestinian resistance song was then given centre stage alongside that of musicians from Europe, Africa, and North America. Their performances reflected a diverse field of styles and aesthetics

presented within a shared discourse of resistance to colonialism and foreign domination. As such, the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, as represented in music, was viewed within the much broader phenomenon of colonialism. Engaging and collaborating with musicians on this backdrop served to engender feelings of camaraderie among the participants.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the most powerful effect of this festival, however, was giving a public voice to Palestinian resistance song. Throughout its history resistance music has been predominantly produced, distributed, and consumed through underground circuits. Musicians, producers, and even those found in possession of Intifada cassettes have been imprisoned and even tortured in the Arab world for what is deemed as politically ‘inciteful’ behaviour. The Jerusalem Festival’s program “Songs of Freedom” took what had historically been an underground art form and presented it on stage in the public sphere. Thus such music could be celebrated as a national art form, rather than shamed as illegal and socially dangerous.

## **New Aesthetics of Performance, New Forms of Resistance**

Following the nuanced approaches set forth by scholars such as Gramsci, Williams, Hall, and Appadurai, we find that popular culture acts as a fundamental domain for hegemonies to naturalize and secure power, and subsequently for that power to be subverted.<sup>22</sup> Departing from more traditional theories that power is held and wielded by the state and its dominant classes, these scholars have developed a line of thinking that sees power as a joint construction articulated through constantly shifting relations between and within various groups. Indeed, in the struggle for position, hegemonies are created and naturalized through various economic, social, political, and cultural forces. It is this constantly shifting exchange of consent articulated through and across various modalities that underlies this premise of power and resistance.

In music, this conjoined construction of hegemony and subversion is negotiated most noticeably through identity politics and the construction of alternative aesthetic realities. As a site of political and social engagement, music and musical performance are instrumental to the formation of collective identities and social formations as well as the relations between them. Ethnomusicologists have long suggested that, through performance, participants formulate and recognize conceptions of self within and across various modalities of class, gender, religion, ethnicity, time, and space. In accordance, performance allows participants to symbolically construct alternative aesthetic realities which subvert or redefine hegemonic structures. For example, within a *debke*, a concert, or a wedding and regardless of time or place, the Palestinian nation can be actualized through the communal singing and dancing of its participants. It is through music that this alternative reality is created, if only momentarily subverting and/or redefining existing hegemonies.

Within the Palestinian resistance movement, music has been instrumental in nationalizing the public in different ways at different times. Prior to 1948, the Palestinian *shi’r* used music and poetry to express sentiments of community within

a participatory musical context. Later, these same folksongs were appropriated by nationalists seeking to strengthen various political affiliations or ideologies. The power of these songs lay in their ability to index a common history and repertory of cultural practice deemed authentic to an asserted Palestinian national identity. Today, Palestinians dispersed throughout the world have made great efforts to preserve these practices through various cultural organizations. This is most easily seen in the number of folkloric *debke* groups currently active throughout the Palestinian Diaspora.<sup>23</sup> In the drive for Palestinians to maintain their collective national identity, music and dance have been essential. Likewise, for Palestinians currently living under occupation, music and musical performance have been substantially potent forms for nation building and resistance to Israeli hegemony. However, in contrast to the long established tradition of Intifada songs and cassettes popularized in the 1980s and early 1990s, Palestinians today have in large part developed new forms of cultural activism more aligned with cosmopolitan aesthetics and dispositions. So, for example, indigenous participatory song types and dances are routinely reconfigured for formal stage performance, once improvised dances are strictly rehearsed, and song texts are pre-composed. More specifically, the development of formal cultural organizations and festivals in and of themselves is a reflection of a particular cosmopolitan aesthetic that values presentational art forms and the preservation of 'traditional culture.' The cultural organizations discussed in this article are a direct extension of this movement.

However, where cosmopolitan aesthetics conflict with local politics, a public debate often ensues. The Palestine International Festival's confrontation with sentiments in Nablus and Qalqilya in the summer of 2005 reveals situations of intra-Palestinian conflict over matters of culture and aesthetics. Indeed, the reach of these cultural institutions to develop and revive Palestinian music and dance reflect boundaries of class and social formation. To this end, such festivals have yet to achieve their desired social impact, and continue to struggle both in relation to Israeli and Palestinian socio-political obstacles.

Nevertheless, the spread of cultural activism as seen in the development of music and arts festivals outlined above offers a fascinating counterpoint to the traditional model of power and resistance in Palestine. Culturally, they open Palestinian society to new ideas and conceptions of music, while at the same time providing vital opportunities for local musicians to engage and interact with the global stage. Economically, they provide essential jobs and opportunities to production staff. In addition, festivals directly infuse the local economy with capital in the form of the costs of production, venue, transportation, accommodation, lighting, sound, and concessions. Local businesses benefit indirectly, as patrons fill restaurants and cafes before and after each performance. Socially, festivals encourage families to go out and enjoy their neighborhood restaurants and cafes. Jerusalem's once vibrant social scene of cinemas, theatres, cafes, and parks has slowly disappeared as a result of the Intifada. Weekly concert series and other cultural events provide a much-needed social space for families outside the home. The fear of going out has crippled much of Palestinian society. Yabous director Rania Elias summarizes the problem thus:

*A place like the Jerusalem Festival, the weekly concert series, or the Arab Film Festival, or whatever we are organizing is a place for the people to socialize... . We fight against letting people stay at home... afraid to leave their houses, sitting at home watching what's happening on television. It is part of our struggle to give hope to the people to continue their lives in Jerusalem. Even our presence in the streets is a form of resistance.*<sup>24</sup>

This model of cultural activism provides a constructive alternative for engaging the Palestinian struggle. For many, music festivals, concerts, and symposium create incredibly powerful “facts on the ground”: that Palestinian cultural life continues to grow and develop in spite of incredible hardship. More importantly, though, these festivals are instrumental in giving cultural spaces for the construction of a shared Palestinian national identity. On stage Palestinians may perform, sing, and say what they cannot on the streets. It is an alternative aesthetic reality where Palestine, as cultural symbol, may be actualized in performance.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg, “Popular Culture, Relational History, and the Question of Power in Palestine and Israel.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, 4 (2004): 5-20 as well as their forthcoming edited volume, *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, (Duke University Press, 2005), and Walter Armbrust, ed., *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, (University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Samer Totah (Instructor at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music), in discussion with the author, 31 May, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The first known field recordings of Palestinian music are dated from the early 1930s and the first written accounts of Palestinian song reveal an interesting array of social and political commentary. See Gustav Dalman, *Palastinischer Diwan: Als Beitrag zur Volkskunde Palastinas* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1901) and Aapeli Saarisalo, “Songs of the Druzes: Transliterations, Translations, and Comments,” *Studia Orientalia* 4/1 (1932): 1-144. The subjects and poetic forms of the music from these archives and documents reflect pressing issues of social structure, political process, foreign encroachment, war, proverbs, and the commemoration of great Arab and Muslim heroes. This tradition of social and political commentary in music extends to the present through the development of popular Intifada song, peace songs, and presentational folkloric dance performances.

<sup>5</sup> For further reading of indigenous Palestinian musical practices including those listed here please see, Dirgham Sbait, “The Improvised-Sung Poetry of the Palestinians” (Ph.D. diss, University of Washington, 1982), Abdellatif Barghouti, “Arab Folk-songs from Jordan” (Ph.D. diss, University of London, 1963), Amnon Shiloah, “A Group of Arabic Wedding Songs From the Village Deyr

Al-Assad," in *Studies in Marriage Customs* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1974) 267-296, Patrick Lama, *La Musique Populaire Palestinienne* (Paris: Editions du Temoignage Chretien, 1982), Amatzia Bar-Yosef, "Traditional Rural Style under a Process of Change: The Singing Style of the Hadday, Palestinian Folk Poet Singers," *Asian Music* 29/2 (1998), and Dalia Cohen and Ruth Katz, *Palestinian Arab Music: A Maqam Tradition in Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Ted Swedenburg, "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier," *Anthropological Quarterly* 63/1 (1990): 304-316; and Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> There exists a substantial body of literature delineating and defining what are considered 'pure' Palestinian practices. In several instances over the last 20 years, musicians and dancers seeking to pursue new artistic directions have found themselves at odds with many of these 'old guard' folklorists. For a concise and authoritative analysis of this process please see, Elke Kaschl, *Dance and Authenticity in Israel and Palestine: Performing the Nation* (Boston: Brill Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> David McDonald, "My Voice is My Weapon: Music and Nationalism in the Palestinian Resistance Movement" (forthcoming Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Nasser al-Tae, "Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East," *Popular Music* 21/1 (2002): 41-62.

<sup>10</sup> Stein and Swedenburg (2004).

<sup>11</sup> The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music Webpage, <http://ncm.birzeit.edu/>

<sup>12</sup> Souheil Khoury (Director of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music), interview with the author, 11 February, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Basel Khoury, in discussion with the author, June 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Fadel (Professor Edward Said National Conservatory of Music), interview with the author, May 30, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Fadel (2005).

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *Art During Siege: Performing Arts Workshops in Traumatized Communities*.

(El-Bireh: Palestine, 2003). For more information on the *Just For Kids* program please visit the website of the Popular Art Centre, Al-Bireh at <http://www.popularartcentre.org/appeal/appeal.html>

<sup>17</sup> Popular Arts Center, "Palestine International Festival 2005: Reviving a Distinguished Tradition of Art for Freedom in Occupied Palestine," *This Week in Palestine* (June 2005): 28.

<sup>18</sup> Khalid Amayreh, "Palestinian Concerts Spark Discord," *Al-Jazeera*, 10 July 2005. BBC, " Hamas Council Bans Music Festival," *BBC* (United Kingdom), 1 July 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed Khatib, interview with the author, 14 June, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Rania Elias (Director of Yabous Productions), interview with the author, 9 June, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Various Palestinian musicians who participated in the 2002 Jerusalem Festival stated their pride in sharing the stage with international musicians who also perform politically inspired resistance music. These statements were obtained in several informal conversations with musicians affiliated with the ESNMC in February, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers, 1971). Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10/2 (1986): 5-27 and "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Modernity an Introduction to Modern Sciences*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (Blackwell, 1996), 184-228. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Ladkani "Dabke Music and Dance and the Palestinian Refugee Experience: On the Outside Looking In," (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Elias (2005).