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2

A Musical Catastrophe: The Direct Impact of the Nakba on Palestinian Musicians and Musical Life

Nader Jalal and Issa Boulos interviewed by Heather Bursheh

Along with having worked at the Palestinian Ministry of Culture and more recently founding and running Nawa, the Palestinian Association for Cultural Development, Nader Jalal has spent most of his adult life interviewing and collecting stories from Palestinian musicians and their families and colleagues, amassing an enormous archive of previously unrecorded information about musicians who were active before and after the *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948. Issa Boulos is a Palestinian musician, composer, and scholar from Ramallah, now head of the Arab Music department at the Qatar Music Academy. Nader Jalal and Issa Boulos were interviewed in April 2012.

The discussion centers on the music scene in Palestine before the *Nakba* and focuses to some extent on two major British-owned radio stations: Idhā'at al-Quds (Jerusalem Radio) and Idhā'at al-Sharq al-'Adná (Near East Radio). The *Nakba*, and its catastrophic effect on the radio stations, musical life in Palestine, and the musicians who created it, is then described.

Heather Bursheh: Let's talk first about the music scene in Palestine before 1948. Can you describe broadly what it comprised?

Nader Jalal: We have little information about the music scene before 1900, and we don't seem to have a lot of information on the period between 1900 and 1936 in all sectors, but there is information about some of the fields related to music, especially in the context of folklore and heritage material. What I want to do is investigate the music scene before 1948 and track

how it was dispersed after 1948, and then try to follow the musicians who were involved in the scene and highlight their productions. In this context we talk about music not only in general terms, classical, folk, or the genres involved; we are in fact talking about a musical life that goes beyond music itself. Folkloric elements in music might not reflect professionalism at the musical level, but it is the musical expressions of the people that make music part of the larger social picture. The broadcasting industry started in Palestine after 1936, and the music practitioners attached to it were described as professional. However, people of course listened to music before 1936, but through different ways and via diverse means, including Radio Cairo or London. There was a musical life in Palestine before 1936, and Palestinians used music to express what they went through, including the national issues that often had priority after World War I, as a result of the Palestinians fearing for the loss of their homeland. And therefore the subjects in the foreground for Palestinian singers, popular or professional, in the city or the countryside, became nationalistic subjects first and foremost.

Issa Boulos: When we talk about music in general, around 1900 there was not much difference between the musical models and forms used in Greater Syria in general. You would find *mayjanā* and *ʿatābā*, and *zajal* [forms of various folk songs] anywhere in the region; music was happening everywhere. If the setting is urban or rural, it did not matter; music happened where there were events such as weddings, deaths, circumcisions, engagements, harvest seasons, planting seasons, festivals, and hunting. It all has repertoire associated with it, and the lyrics change with time. The lyrics were what made people differentiate between one song and another, although the melody might have resembled many other popular melodies. There's something important related to dance and music: what we now call folklore was material not only practiced in the villages. It was also practiced in the cities and urban centers, and we have evidence that people in the cities had models which we would now consider folkloric musical material. At the same time, there were people interested in different types of music—there were families who played organ in churches, or piano at home, especially with the strong presence of different ethnic groups such as the Armenians, particularly in Jerusalem. It must be noted that the first official Armenian presence in Jerusalem was in the third century. So the Armenians did not only appear in Jerusalem after the Armenian genocide [by the Ottomans after World War I], but well before that. And this is only an example: there are plenty of other ethnic groups that passed through or sustained a presence in Palestine that contributed to the music scene enormously, including some that sustained consistent involvement in music. So there was always something new coming from European or other societies to the area here, as the minorities moved around, whether they were Greeks or Armenians, Turks

or Russians. And there was also classical Arab music. Thomson, in one of his books written in the second half of the nineteenth century [Thomson 1859], describes a trip he made to Jerusalem, and a visit to one of the coffee shops, and he describes the instruments of the Arabic *takht* [ensemble], playing what seem to have been the Ottoman and Arab classical forms such as *samāʿī*, *longa* and *muwashshah*, and so on.

NJ: Folklore is the widest pool of material used by the people, and its accessibility allows people to participate in it. Folkloric tunes are often composed in a communal way, and because the melody is simple, it is easy for it to move around, and easy to add to it, so the *dalʿūnā* [a folk song form], for example, becomes hundreds of thousands of verses, not a song in four sections. And this is the case for all the songs we know. And all ages and both genders were participating in them. The songs were living amongst the people. Mothers would sing their babies to sleep: this practice has a song genre attached to it. The children who play in the neighborhood had their own specific songs for catching birds and setting traps; they sang to the bird to entertain themselves and to bring the bird down from its nest. So all the age groups have their own means of expression through song, and they are divided according to the occasion: there are songs for fun, songs for games, songs for work, songs for occasions, songs for festivals, et cetera. Now, in order to understand the scene well, there are issues that we have to conceptualize in the same way they were understood back at that time, not necessarily the way we understand them now. Nowadays, for instance, when we attempt to put on a festival, it serves a certain purpose. Back then a festival would have more of a social purpose, such as the festivities associated with the Nabi Mūsā and the Nabi Šāliḥ seasons [the prophets Moses and Saleh]. Magicians, clowns, musicians, and ordinary people used to take part of the festivities. The *dabke* [folk dance] groups were not rehearsed especially for the event or organized as part of the programming, because the whole town practiced *dabke*, and the idea of having such a practice canonized or staged wasn't in their minds. So you had, for example, the guys from ʿIsawiyah with the guys from al-Ramleh and so on, and they would compete. So maybe the group from Dayr ʿArīf had a great *mijwiz* [single-reed woodwind folk instrument] player, so they would compete without there being prizes. But everyone in the festival would know, for example, “the group from Bayr Dajjan taught us a lesson.” “They taught us a lesson,” or just “got served,” was like taking the first prize in our modern understanding. So “public music,” if we can call it that, or the expression of the people through music and song, was present. I also read about a festival in 1904 which took place in Haifa. It was for folk poetry mainly, for *zajal*, and people came from as far as Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon to participate in it, singers and poets. We also didn't mention that Um Kulthoum sang in Haifa, and the person

that coined the term “*kawkab al-sharq*” [the star of the east] for her was a Palestinian woman from Haifa.

IB: Now, music within urban circles: it’s true that the economy of the country was to an extent dependent on farming. But after the First World War, the British started building roads, building railways, building large service buildings and factories, and a need grew for people to make furniture, and metalworkers, so manufacturers began to appear. These kinds of new activities changed the economic structure that people were used to, and therefore all the signs of a middle class started to emerge. The middle class and aristocracy began to grow, quite differently to the feudal class which was prevalent at that time. All the landowners from the plains, from the most spacious areas for farming, had been feudal landowners, five or six families maybe controlled the plains. Now, in city centers, people started working in, for example, gold manufacturing. People were working in dried foods—Jerusalemites were famous for that—and perfume, this kind of thing. Now, Arab classical music, from its earliest days in this area, always had ties to the aristocratic class. Inasmuch as it was played in the coffee shops, you would also find it in the homes of the rich. [Wasif] Al-Jawhariyyah in his memoirs describes Ottoman Jerusalem and what kind of music was there, what kind of repertoire was being performed [Tamari and Nassar 2003]. During that period the country was not isolated from what was happening in Egypt, or Syria and Iraq and what was happening in other areas, and the area was still open to more influences. So for them, the person who went from Jerusalem to Beirut was just like someone going from Ramallah to Jerusalem today. They were all present in the same area and dealt with it as such. Going to Beirut was just going to another city, where the accent is just a little different.

NJ: As we said, music was living everywhere in Palestine, in the cities and the countryside. I think there is more than one pattern relating to *how* music was living. Prior to 1936 in Palestine, there are limited musical productions that were present at the time and they were primarily carried by amateurs—music lovers and enthusiasts—not by professional musicians. There were *‘ūd* [short-necked lute] players, *qānūn* [zither] players, and *sanjūr* [dulcimer] and violin players, and there is evidence of exchanges of experiences with other visiting musicians that used to come to Palestine for work. There were many musicians working in Palestine; those include Sami al-Shawwa, Ibrahim Abd al-Al, many of the Egyptian musicians, Mohammad Hasanain, Sayyid al-Safti, Um Kulthoum, Mohammad Abd al-Wahab, and that was all before 1936.

IB: I would argue that there were some local experts or professionals as well. We can indeed claim that Wasif Jawhariyyah was an expert as a professional musician, although he made his living otherwise.

NJ: This is what I mean about the definition of professionalism. Professionalism doesn’t mean that it was his main job and he had a studio and an agent—this is a modern concept. Wasif Jawhariyyah was an excellent *‘ūd* player and was, if you like, more like culturally active, musically active. He hosted players; he made sure to bring musicians through his contacts, and they would play in his coffee shop. Or he would market their concerts for somebody else, in the Ma‘ārif coffee shop or in a particular hotel, or in the house of one of the rich. And it’s not necessarily true that because the music was for the elite, the musicians were also from the elite. Yahya al-Saudi, a great musician at the time, was a shoemaker and was poor. So we can say that musicians marketed their music to the elite, who would offer them a place, a stage, maybe dinner. I think Palestine was a musical platform, in some way or another. Because it was economically active, and economic activity contributed to attracting artists from Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Because, for example, there was a theater in Jaffa, there was a cinema, and there were three or four cinemas in Jerusalem and in Haifa—this essentially helped to bring Um Kulthoum, Abd al-Wahab, Mohammad Abd al-Muttalib, Mohammad al-Ashiq, Sayyid al-Safti, Abd al-Hayy Hilmi. Palestine was a showcase for great artists. Some of them would visit for short periods, and would mix with the local musicians like Tawfiq Jawhariyyah, the *nāy* [reed flute] player Wasif Jawhariyyah, and Jalil Rukab. There were short visits: Um Kulthoum visited Palestine in 1927 and again in the ’30s; Mohammad Abd al-Wahab in 1927 and in the ’30s; and there were people that would come here and stay for tens of years. There were singers and musicians: Mohammad Hasanain, for example, came once, then twice, and then stayed in Palestine. He left in 1948. He was singing *tawashih* and then started singing *muwashshahāt* [forms of Arab song] and so on. So there was the appearance and involvement of classical music as well. But Arab music, the classical music, called for certain set of skills and professionalism. Professional in the sense of the study of music, for example, the use of new instruments, different from the folkloric instruments, in addition to the *‘ūd*. For example, one Armenian from Jerusalem, called Artin, was an excellent *sanjūr* player, and he became part of the team in Radio Jerusalem.

IB: The Armenians were very close to Ottoman culture, so many were *‘ūd* players. Several *‘ūd* makers in Jerusalem were Armenians.

NJ: And the person who made instruments might also work as a carpenter, because if he wanted to sell one or two *‘ūds*, he wouldn’t make enough of a living for the whole year.

HB: Tell me more now about the radio stations: Idhā‘at al-Quds (Jerusalem Radio) and Idhā‘at al-Sharq al-‘Adná (Near East Radio). When were they established, why, by whom, and so on?

NJ: Jerusalem Radio was established in 1936. Of course, some of the sources say that the mandate government established it in order to publicize its policies.

IB: The British said that they were doing it as a gesture of good intention. Because after the lack of confidence that ensued in the area after the 1936 strike, which went on for six months, the British tried to say to the Arabs and the locals here, "Let's work together and try to do something good, et cetera, and we are ready to open it for you, and you can do whatever you like."

HB: So this was a British-run radio but broadcasting only in Arabic? Or also in Hebrew and in English?

IB: All three. The daily programming was divided into three periods. There was the Arabic section of the radio, and it had its center and its building and its team. And they were monitored by the British official bodies. The first director was Ibrahim Touqan; he was a poet, one of the most important poets of Palestine at the time. The British were constantly after him, until they finally fired him, because he was single-minded about the question of Palestinian affairs. And this was all before 1948, because all these plots against Palestinians were increasing at that time, from land confiscation to Jewish immigration to the area and so on. There were sometimes skirmishes—people from the Hebrew section would come and protest to the mandate and tell them "those people are using the word 'Palestine' without saying anything else." So one side was calling it Palestine, and the other side was calling it something else. So there was a unique experience where a radio station was broadcasting certain hours in the day, certain hours for the Arabic section, which had its own characteristics and politics, and the next had certain politics, and the other had certain politics, and each one was broadcasting its own politics on the same radio station. When Ibrahim Touqan came, people came and applied from Lebanon, from Syria to join the music ensemble.

HB: Was this an Arab music ensemble?

IB: They had an Arab music ensemble and a Western orchestra. The Arab music ensemble included permanent singers, and players of *ūd*, *qānūn*, *nāy* and *buzuq*, [long-necked lute] and composers. In the memoirs of one of the radio managers, in its final days, Ajjaj Nuwaihīd [1981] wrote that when he first came and saw the musicians, he brought [Yousef] Batroni, who was present from before, to them to teach them how to read music, as some of them did not know how.

HB: Where did Batroni learn?

IB: He studied abroad, in Italy. And there was also Salvador Arnita, and the Lama family, who had several musicians among them. And the Armenians, of course; in the churches there were a lot of players. On both levels Armenians have always been known for playing Western music and East-

ern music. And there were female Armenian singers who used to sing in Turkish—even although the massacres had happened and so on—but they sang in Turkish on the radio nonetheless, because they considered themselves part of that heritage.

NJ: So that was a period which had its particularities, from 1936 to 1948, and then from 1948 onwards has its own particularities, which was the influence of the Nakba on musical life. Now we have arrived approximately at 1936. Jerusalem Radio was established first and foremost in the context of the major strike in Palestine in 1936. Even Ajjaj Nuwaihīd in his memoirs [1981] says that at the opening of the radio, which was in Ramallah, there was not such a big reaction to it, because the mood of the people was going in the direction of the strike and resistance and all of those issues.

IB: When the British Mandate came and proposed the idea of the radio, the Arabs refused it three or four times, until Khalil Sakakini [a prominent educator and public figure] got involved, and they promised him that there would be complete independence for the Arabic section in the radio. They even asked him to be the first manager for it, but he refused. [Nasri] al-Jozi mentions in his memoirs [2010] that in the end, the position went to Ibrahim Touqan. Ibrahim Touqan had guarantees that he would have an independent policy, but they also made problems for him, and in the end they got rid of him.

NJ: I think he left in 1940, and then in his place came Ajjaj Nuwaihīd. Just to complete the picture, the radio had varied programming; there were three sections and broadcasts in three languages, and each section had its own administration. We are talking about 1936 here, and the importance of the strike in 1936 was that it made the Palestinians more confident to stick to their conditions. But there was also a mix of a certain kind. The [Western] orchestra that we talked about, which had seventy players in it, serviced all the sections of the radio, and it had different roles. Yousef Batroni conducted it once a week when it had a concert for the Arab section.

HB: But the orchestra had in it Jews and Arabs?

NJ: Yes.

HB: Now what about the other radio station?

NJ: The other radio station was Near East Radio. Jerusalem Radio was under the auspices of the Department of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone, apart from the news section. The news section was under the auspices of the Department of Publications, so that it could be monitored. In 1940 the mandate administration established Near East Radio, but not through the Department of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone; this time it was the British Foreign Ministry. And just as the justification for the establishment of Radio Jerusalem was what we mentioned earlier [the strike of 1936], the justification for the establishment of Near East Radio was the start of the

Second World War. That's why it was under the Foreign Ministry. In 1940 it opened in Jenin, and a year later it moved to Jaffa. It lasted longer than Radio Jerusalem. Radio Jerusalem closed down in 1948 with the occupation of Palestine. It seems that Near East Radio had a bigger budget, and the evidence is that Near East Radio started producing. For example, Abd al-Wahab composed *kulli dah kân lay* [All of this for what!] with the financial backing of Near East Radio in Jaffa. The radio produced the song and the work and the record.

IB: According to al-Jozi, the Near East Radio salaries were also higher than those of Jerusalem Radio.

NJ: Now, there's something important we have to talk about in relation to the two radio stations. In the shadow of the competition between Jerusalem Radio and Near East Radio, there was a need for more innovation, a need for professional equality for the musicians. This helped the musicians later. Yusef Batroni started to teach music reading to the musicians of Jerusalem Radio. In 1941 an internal rule in the radio was that all the musicians must have studied music reading. Ajaj Nuwaihîd mentions in his memoirs [1982] that everyone was forced to learn to read music, and the rule was that anyone who did not learn to read music would be fired. So Mohammad Abd al-Karim was fired!

IB: But then he went and studied, in France.

NJ: But Nuwaihîd said that he later regretted firing Mohammad Abd al-Karim, because he was of course a unique musician and an amazing buzuq player; he was known as the prince of the buzuq. It turned out that he didn't know how to read and write music, and Nuwaihîd was put in an embarrassing position and felt he had to fire him. Abd al-Karim hadn't told him before that he didn't know how to read and write; Nuwaihîd discovered after employing him. Also Nuwaihîd talks about the period also after 1948; he talks about Radio Beirut and Radio Baghdad and Radio Damascus mainly. He says that the rules which were in place in Near East Radio and the developments that were happening in Palestine in both the radio stations were what revitalized the radio stations in the rest of the Arab world, because the crew that went to them [from Palestine after 1948] were skilled. They had practical experience, they were musically skilled, they were able to read and write music.

IB: One of the examples of this is that Halim al-Rumi moved with Near East Radio to Cyprus, and once he was on a flying visit to Lebanon. The Lebanese ministry called him and said, "We want you to stay longer; we don't want you to go back to your job in the Near East Radio." He told them, "Sorry, I want to go back to my job in Cyprus." So the person from the ministry went and got a Lebanese governmental decree, ordering him to stay in Lebanon. He asked permission from the Near East Radio in Cyprus. His

main job was to redesign the musical structure and all the music departments in Şawt Lubnân (The Voice of Lebanon). So as soon as they brought him, he ordered that all the musicians of the radio should be sacked, and then he gradually reemployed people based on the new administration. Al-Rumi separated the musicians into two ensembles, as some repertoire (folk, traditional, *ṭarab*, *sh'abi*, et cetera) was better suited to the musicians who didn't read music, and the trained musicians, on the other hand, were able to do other things, more contemporary styles that were emerging at the time and more complex material [Al-Rumi 1992]. Al-Rumi was pragmatic enough to keep both in order for the music program to be diverse and appealing to a wide audience. So the culture that [promoted the idea that] reading music was a great asset started at Jerusalem Radio and moved from there to the neighboring countries.

HB: Tell me about how Near East Radio moved to Cyprus and when.

NJ: In 1948 they moved to Cyprus, and then after a short period the studios moved to Beirut and the offices remained in Cyprus.

HB: So when they moved to Cyprus, did all the musicians move with them?

IB: Most of them, yes, according to Michel Mirhij [pers. comm. August 2010].

NJ: The fact that the station continued with a full team until 1956 suggests that the main structure of the musicians was there.

HB: So before we start talking in more detail about 1948 and what happened in 1948, is there anything else or anyone else you would like to talk about? An important musician? Someone whose role you can talk about in more details?

NJ: Oh, yes, there are a lot. When we go into details, there are a number of musicians who excelled and had an influence even after 1948. There is Yahya al-Saudi, Riyad al-Bandak, Yahya al-Lababidi, Mohammad Ghazi, Salam Rifqi, Rawhi al-Khammash. There are many.

IB: Halim al-Rumi, Ramez al-Zaghah. We continued to see them until the 1990s. The main music that made George Wassouf famous is by Riyad al-Bandak. The most beautiful songs written for Wadih el-Safi were by Riyad al-Bandak.

NJ: Like "Yā 'aynī 'al-ṣabr" [Oh Patience].

NJ: There are a number of musicians who had an influence. There is a very clear recognition about the role of Rawhi al-Khammash in the musical scene in Iraq. He was qualified when he went, and worked both in broadcast arts—he established a number of the ensembles in Iraq—and in the music conservatory, where he established the muwashshahāt department. Also, some musicians that we still don't know a lot about who left from Gaza—I mean we usually talk about the central areas of Palestine, because they are

closer to us, but there is a group of musicians like Majdi Sirdan who left from Gaza to Egypt and lived there and contributed hundreds of songs.

HB: Let's move on to 1948 and the consequences of that.

NJ: After 1948, if we want to talk about the Palestinians, they were no longer in their land; therefore, they carried with them their projects, in one way or another. A part of the Palestinian population remained in Palestine, and another part was made refugees within Palestine, and this naturally would have an effect on careers, tools, and interests. Some musicians stopped playing. For example, I've never heard of Milad Farah singing after 1948, and I know that he used to sing before. But after that, what happened to him, I don't know. We can't really choose another title for after 1948, except for the influence of the Nakba on music. There is no other title, as it was a huge event that caused a general instability in the infrastructure, interests, perspectives, membership of political parties, and everything.

IB: The other problem in the research is—keep in mind that live music led directly to having very few recordings. I mean, until now I personally have not received any recording that is confirmed to be from Jerusalem Radio. In general they did not record everything. This was ongoing not only in Palestine but also in other places, even in Egypt. There was an Israeli guy, in the Israeli Radio station after 1948, who used to go to a higher-ground area with good reception, and record music that the Egyptian radio was broadcasting live. This resulted in Israel having copies of particular live performances and Egypt not having any. That is why if you listen to Israeli Radio, after 9:00 PM, some of these recordings are rare recordings that were broadcast at that time, and the Egyptians either didn't record it or the recordings were lost or ruined at some point later. When 1948 happened the first thing the Israelis did was go in the direction of the radio. And at that time just a few individuals, employees at the radio, managed to take a few machines and smuggle them to Ramallah, to Irsāl Street. The rest was all confiscated. It's all at the Hebrew University, as far as I know.

HB: Now, in 1948 Jerusalem Radio shut down?

NJ: Yes, it shut down and Near East Radio moved.

HB: Near East Radio moved to Cyprus. So can we say that for music in Palestine the year 1948 was a major turning point, and it did not happen gradually?

NJ: To be accurate, the broadcast art stopped, but not all the music stopped. This is another issue. Because as we said, some musicians left Palestine, and others stayed. In the memoirs of 'Isam Hammad, after 1948, when Jordan became in charge of the [Jerusalem] radio station, he mentions that he used to always make a mistake and say, "This is Jerusalem," instead of saying, "This is Jordan" [Hammad 1952].

HB: Oh, so Jerusalem radio actually remained but was moved to the authority of Jordan?

NJ: Yes, it was moved to Ramallah, and it was under the authority of Jordan, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's radio station. Music continued there, but in a different way. The musicians from Lebanon, for example, were not a part of the Jordanian radio; they went back to their country. The Syrian musicians, such as Sami al-Shawwa, went back to their country. The Egyptian musicians went back to their country, to Egypt. They did not stay in Jordan's radio station.

IB: Now, as Nader mentioned, the music did not stop after that, but what happened is that the subject matter of the music changed. Those who used to sing patriotic songs, and remained in the country, started singing songs within the political framework of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Although the Palestinian issue was perceived as an Arab issue, the particularity of the Palestinian narrative was moving gradually in the other direction, in the songs that we see. And gradually the Palestinian ceased to talk about himself—he stopped being the one singing about Palestine—and the nationalists, who were supported by Egypt or the political nationalistic movement that was common at the time, were the ones talking about this issue. So regarding the identity, on the eve of 1948 individuals who thought of themselves as existing within Greater Syria understood that they were in the only area in Greater Syria that was targeted by Jewish immigration; therefore, it was politically unique. But on the other hand, this political uniqueness influenced its culture, because it felt that it was under attack and under threats on a daily basis. So when 1948 happened, and *al-hijrah* [the expulsion/emigration] happened, these people moved to other areas. What we saw—for example, in Riyad al-Bandak—was someone who, in the prime of Arab nationalism, was visited by Gamal Abdel Nasser, who told him that "One of your songs, Riyad, is equivalent to all the Arab armies," or something along these lines. So Riyad al-Bandak continued to have this passion to write and talk at that time, but even Riyad al-Bandak wrote about this cause in a Pan-Arab context. After the defeat of 1967, Arab nationalist thought weakened across the Arab world. The ramifications were seen across all levels and layers of the social and political lives of Arabs. We heard very little in the way of nationalist songs from Riyad al-Bandak thereafter.

IB: The people that went to Lebanon and Syria are known. Interestingly enough, those we know the least about are those who went to Jordan, and those who stayed. Because, at the time when Jordan imposed its authority on the West Bank, in the Jericho conference in 1949, the musicians almost instantly became part of this new program which King Hussein supported. So the musicians that, like Jamil al-As, went to work in Jordan—his center became Jordan, since he had become part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan—they had a program to encourage Bedouin music. So you would see Bedouin programs, and Bedouin songs started to appear. So there was a character which was desired to exist in Radio Jordan, which the Palestin-

ians became a part of in the West Bank. So the Palestinians went through a process of “Jordanization” in the period between 1949 and 1967, and that continued to have an impact for years afterwards. Musical pockets of different kinds started to appear after 1967. Mustafa al-Kurd, and Emile Ashrawi, and Balaleen, and George Qirmiz, and those groups which started trying to say something different through songs, they appeared after the Jordanian period. If we look at the material that was present during the Jordanian period, including the Festival of 1965, there were nationalistic things, like “*Barūdaih ‘al-Barūdaih*” [The Rifle]. But they were always written in the Jordanian context of, this land is Arab, and Jordan is its guardian, so therefore it is natural to sing for Palestine.

IB: Post-1948 the regional features of song were clarified—in other words, there were specific musical qualities that a particular geographical area in the Arab world specialized in, like the Gulf songs, Kuwaiti songs, Saudi Arabian songs, Syrian songs, Lebanese songs, Iraqi songs, Egyptian songs. So when the Palestinians left in 1948, they went to countries which had become separate states several years previously. Lebanon started behaving as a sovereign country with a national project. The really good Palestinian musicians who left Palestine after 1948 found themselves in this atmosphere. So, as Nader said, the natural stream of music, if music in Palestine had continued as it had been from 1948 until now, we would have had a kind of music, or a musical atmosphere very different to the one we have now. We would have accumulated particular qualities. This was a situation of interruption, and a complete void opened up in the area. The Jordanians came and put a different kind of music here and said, “Hush, *this* is what you’re going to do.” We went to Lebanon and they said, “Hush, *this* is what you’re going to do. You shouldn’t be doing something else.” And in reality, when Halim al-Rumi came [to Lebanon], he filtered everything, he changed everything around. He started to go along with the situation. Halim al-Rumi stayed until 1978 in this state, and he witnessed the whole development of the Lebanese song as we know it now. So therefore there was a state of interruption in music, and we inside Palestine feel that in 1948 that we lost the connection with its path towards progress. The musical material that a musician uses to express himself, a large part of this was lost. Because the situation of half the people leaving and going to other places, when half the people leave, their songs leave with them. All those songs are gone; all those words are gone. There used to be thousands of verses, and now there are no more thousands of verses.

IB: There is another important point also, which is the fact that art on the radio was broadcast live; they were performing to a live audience, so the accountability was there for making a mistake in front of the audience. Therefore, through these two radios and through having art that was pre-

sented live, it created strong musicians, who, when they went to work in other places, carried this method with them, and there was a clear difference between them and the people who were in that country, especially regarding the ability to read music. This was even to the degree that, one of the directors of the radio station in Lebanon said—and this story is according to what Mansour al-Rahbani had said—that when Assi [al-Rahbani, Mansour’s brother] went to work in Radio Lebanon as a musician who reads notes, as a violinist, and a composer, he was the worst performer among the musicians. And at that time the musicians who were in the station were people like Hanna al-Salfiti, and Farid al-Salfiti, and so on, all of whom had come from Jerusalem Radio.

HB: What about those people who stayed in 1948 Palestine? Not under the Jordanian government. What happened to them? What happened to their music?

IB: After 1948, when Israeli Radio was established—I heard this from Emile Ashrawi, who remembers it from his mother—they made a program with 1948 Arab musicians, and they used to gather and sing traditional songs from throughout Greater Syria. They brought together the musicians in the studios, and they used to do it live. And this heritage continued: I remember that period, Bassam and Farhoud Bishara broadcasting six days per week in the period of the ’70s and ’80s.

NJ: It was called Studio Number One.

IB: Studio Number One. They would go and do *mawawil*, *qaṣāʾid*, and do *bastār* and *ṭaqaṭiq*, and *quḍūd ḥalabiyyah* from Aleppo and *muwashshaḥāt* [various Arab musical forms]. It continued not less than thirty years on Radio Israel.

NJ: Look, 1948 had more than one effect. For example there were very important Jewish musicians that used to work in Radio Baghdad. Now, the response of the Arabs to the occupation of Palestine was to deport the Jews from their countries, and they came to Palestine. There were [Jewish] musicians in Radio Israel, and they formed an Arabic takht. So they had a department in the 1950s; it was as if they took from the experience of Jerusalem Radio—I mean the Arabic section and the Jewish section—so they formed takhts. And some of the Jewish musicians were geniuses of Arabic music. So the Arabs of 1948, where would they go? Many of the Palestinians of 1948 were singing in the Israeli Radio. Yousef Matar, for example, from the 1950s, sang in the [Israeli] radio, I mean, a Palestinian composed for him, and the only platform where he could perform those songs was on Radio Israel.

IB: I know that when the Jewish immigration to Palestine was happening at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, some of them were musicians. One was a singer who came from Iraq,

and he kept working as a singer in the families of Nashashibi and Husseini in Jerusalem, because he was an expert singer. And this kind of thing remained the case. Abraham Salman in 1967, he did a concert in Tel Aviv on the qānūn, and when he was playing and modulating into another *maqām* [mode], the people in the hall were calling out, “*Allāh*, the *maqām bayāt!*” They were pointing out the specific *maqāms*. So it wasn’t strange after 1948 that they attracted a specific portion of the Palestinian residents of 1948 and employed them in the radio stations, because there was a demand for this.

NJ: Personally I have not seen any written documents about music in 1948 Palestine between 1948 and 1967, and I admit that between 1948 and 1967 it is a bit of a foggy area. As a researcher I have found more outside. Maybe I have not looked here enough, or maybe one is complacent; one is always afraid that the diaspora will be lost, so one goes to the diaspora to find what’s there and does not focus on here. But there are fragments. I know, for example, that Abu Saud al-Asadi was very active; someone named al-Rinnawi was very active in the area of popular *zajal* and took the genre closer to song. I remember in the 1970s there were audio cassettes which were not through Israeli Radio. There was someone called Atallah Shoufani; he had a *takht* and sang, and he made cassettes.

HB: If we go back to the folklore, what happened to those festivals you talked about earlier—Nabī Mūsā, Nabī Šālīh, for example?

NJ: They stopped in 1948. Of course, they stopped.

IB: But what we know is that in general, inside 1948 Palestine there remained instrument makers, there remained musical heritage. Simon Shaheen, for example, learned because his father was making music; he had many ensembles. And Bassam Bishara and Farhoud Bishara. Now, I remember in the 1970s when the borders opened—because they were closed between 1948 and 1967—when people wanted to listen to Arabic and Oriental songs and *muwashshaḥs* and so on, they would say, “We will bring an ensemble from 1948 Palestine.” So it seems—and until today it’s still true to a large extent—it seems that the heritage of the Golden Age, of Asmahan, Um Kulthoum, Abd al-Wahab, Karem Mahmoud and Zakariyya Ahmad, was not interrupted in the inside [1948 Palestine]. Kamilya [Jubran], for example, was coming from the heritage of those people; she was brought up listening to Zakariyya Ahmad. On the other hand, we [in the West Bank] in the 1970s, when I talk to Emile Ashrawi, he tells me that there was something like a general directive to the people that Um Kulthoum’s music was like heroin and you shouldn’t be consuming it, because it keeps you lying down for hours and hours without being active or doing anything. It seems that this idea remained until the 1980s, when Radio Israel used to put on the classical Arabic music of the Golden Age from 9:00 PM until 1:00 AM. In my generation we used to say the same thing—Abd al-Wahab and Um

Kulthoum and all those; you can listen to them when you’re relaxed, but you have to be careful, because if you listen to too much of that, you will be passive, and you’ll be on the road to heroin! It keeps you numb, it doesn’t encourage you to be critical.

HB: Who spread this idea?

IB: Every time we go through a particular national period and the question of art for art is raised, the first person to be mentioned is the artist himself. So people start saying, “You as an artist should be making music in order that people will go out on demonstrations”; “You as an artist should be painting so that people can see what you’re saying about the cause.” Some people even take it further. Um Kulthoum used to sing and people would be calling out “*Allāh!*” And by the time they leave her performance, they feel good about themselves and so on, and they’re relaxed—no, no, that wasn’t something that the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] wanted, or even that the advocates of Arab nationalism wanted. The Palestinians of 1948, for whatever reason, retained their connection to the heritage of the Golden Age, from Abd al-Wahab to Um Kulthoum to Asmahan to Layla Murad, much more than we did.

NJ: After 1967 it’s a different story and it needs more research and scrutiny. Nothing comes from a vacuum. The Palestinian musicians from 1948 Palestine are good, they are strong, and therefore they consider their heritage as their point of reference. And this comes cumulatively, not overnight, not without foundations.

Afterword

It is vital to point out that this interview does not provide a comprehensive overview of the music scene in Palestine before and after 1948. In particular the two interviewees freely admitted that they are not experts on what happened inside 1948 Palestine and Gaza. These are large and significant areas to investigate more fully, and we hope they will be studied in future research. The gaps in the knowledge of these two highly experienced people in the field of music in Palestinian society also remind us of the ongoing separation of the Palestinian people from each other. The fact the both of my interviewees carry West Bank identity cards means they cannot visit 1948 Palestine without a special permit from Israel, thus rendering the organic interaction between Palestinian musicians and cultural figures from the whole of historic Palestine that would otherwise occur much diminished and lacking in spontaneity.

Nevertheless, the interview covers many fundamental angles and areas. We discover that Palestine before 1948 was a vibrant center of musical activity on all levels. From folklore to festivals, household gatherings to major stars performing at large venues, Palestine before the Nakba was clearly on par musically and

culturally with its neighbors and perhaps surpassed some of them in terms of its cosmopolitanism. Particularly from 1936 onward, with the advent of Palestinian broadcasting, the music scene was evidently lively and progressive. The events of 1948, the resulting mass exodus of Palestinian refugees to neighboring countries, and the partitioning of Palestine created an immediate chasm in musical life on all levels, whether in the professional music scene, which lost many of its finest musicians, or in the folkloric repertoire, which was quickly depleted or transplanted into refugee camps outside Palestine. However, one of the more intriguing results of the Nakba was the significant influence that Palestinian professional musicians and musical thought went on to have in the host countries after 1948—an influence that changed and enriched the musical landscape of those countries appreciably.

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3

Negotiating the Elements: Palestinian Freedom Songs from 1967 to 1987

Issa Boulos

The study of Palestinian music making during the second half of the twentieth century poses various challenges due to the complex ramifications of *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) of 1948. Aside from the natural changes that occur in any given musical culture over time, abrupt political and social transformations such as this have been a driving force of change in Palestinian musical culture. In this chapter I examine the predominant social and cultural forces that have influenced Palestinian musicians active between 1967 and 1987. In this endeavor I track myriad musical choices and artistic processes and investigate how their musical performances or productions were initiated, approached, and achieved. The collective processes of making music were intrinsically tied to how these artists conceptualized art, themselves, and their role in society. Building from various case studies I speak to how musicians achieved their art while navigating the politics of tradition and innovation, Western classical and popular musical forms, and indigenous Palestinian folk material.¹ I focus this discussion on four highly influential musicians and ensembles active between 1967 and 1987: Mustafa al-Kurd, a songwriter from Jerusalem; al-Baraem and Sabreen, two Jerusalemite musical groups; and Firqat Aghāni al-ʿAshiqeen, or simply Al-ʿAshiqeen, a Palestinian protest ensemble operating from Syria. My analysis focuses on Palestinian musicians who stayed in historic Palestine after al-Nakba of 1948,² including Hussain Nazek of Al-ʿAshiqeen, who left Jerusalem after 1967, and interrogates many of the political, social, and cultural factors that influenced their music-making decisions.

During the first half of the twentieth century a lively debate was well under way among Arab musicians as to the nature of art in contemporary society. This debate