

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.<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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

centered on two conflicting discourses: *al-fann li al-fann* (art for the sake of art) and *al-fann li al-nās* (art for the people). Among Palestinian musicians this debate became a cultural magnet that connected northern urban centers such as Istanbul, Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus with the southern regions of Egypt and northern Africa. However, following 1948 these discussions were marginalized as remaining Palestinian musicians were displaced throughout the Arab world, Israel, and in the refugee camps of Gaza and the West Bank. Due to the traumas of 1948, the entertainment-oriented repertoire associated with Arab classical art music (*ʿAṣr al-Nahḍa*) became of less importance to a community that was struggling to recover from forced displacement. Philosophical discussions of modernization, interpretation, and authenticity, common among Palestinian musicians before 1948, took an entirely different route. In the post-1948 era of pan-Arabism, Palestine became central to the struggle against colonialism and foreign occupation. Many of the region's great musicians and composers, such as Um Kulthoum, Asmahan, Layla Murad, Zakariyya Ahmad, Riyad al-Sunbati, and Mohammad Abd al-Wahab, gladly worked for the promotion of this wider nationalist agenda. Larger political discourses of pan-Arabism directly affected the ways music was composed and performed. In addition, musicians were challenged by the predominant idea that the majority of secular art songs associated with *ʿAṣr al-Nahḍa* seemed irrelevant to the Palestinian struggle. Among Palestinian musicians the vast repertoire of secular art music gradually disappeared due to the dual pressures of pan-Arab nationalism and the traumas of al-Nakba. Within these discussions the Palestinian issue became a powerful rallying point for advocates of pan-Arabism, which directly influenced music-making practices leading to the 1967 war. Music of this period (1948–1967) was interpreted through the political and artistic lenses of pan-Arabism and *al-fann li al-nās*. Later, a Palestinian-specific nationalist agenda emerged during the mid-1960s and was firmly institutionalized by the 1970s and early 1980s. Palestinian music making gradually transformed as a result of these political forces in profound ways, branching out into several aesthetic directions. The repertoire of Palestinian music associated with this period (1967–1987) therefore incorporated indigenous Palestinian folklore, tales, lyrics, tunes, and dances, while simultaneously negotiating the aesthetics of Arab classical *maqām* (modes) and Western musical traditions. Each of these repertoires was then employed within a larger political discourse of popular mobilization and propaganda. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, the issue of *al-fann li al-fann* versus *al-fann li al-nās* took an interesting turn.

During the 1950s and 1960s, towns of the West Bank, particularly Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah, were booming with the sounds of the growing Latin vogue that was generally of interest to the younger urban generation. Introduced into Arab popular music and cinema, jazz and rock became accessible forms of aesthetic innovation. The feel of rumba rhythms and melodies soon appeared in the work of the Rahbani brothers, Abd al-Wahab, and Abd al-Halim, encourag-

ing the younger generation of the 1960s to pick up so-called Western instruments.<sup>3</sup> While the urban lifestyle associated with new musical trends of the time was typically embraced by the elite long before, this time around Western popular music styles came into vogue among the emerging middle class of the 1950s and '60s. After the 1967 war, most of the professional musicians operating in and around the Jerusalem municipality permanently settled in Jordan and essentially never returned. Among those musicians who left for Amman was Hussain Nazek,<sup>4</sup> who played in the Jordanian army's band at the time. It was left to the remaining musicians in Palestine, amateurs and enthusiasts, to figure out what to do next (al-Kurd, interview).

The outcome of the Six-Day War of 1967 damaged the credibility of pan-Arab ideology and weakened Gamal Abdel Nasser's influence. The war also radicalized Palestinians and opened the way for the ascension and expansion of the Jordan-based Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The West Bank was going through yet another wave of migration and displacement following the war, and its laws and educational infrastructure were entirely dependent on Jordan. In addition, it was also subjected to further restrictions by the new Israeli military occupation administration. In contrast to the pre-1967 era, access to 78 rpm records, compact cassettes, books, art material, and related instruments and equipment became entirely controlled by Israel. Arab recording companies and dealers were unable to bring their products into the West Bank while Israel and Jordan became the only available media outlets. The main repertoire broadcast by Jordanian radio and television, for example, was primarily Bedouin-themed folk songs popularized by the Jordanian government (al-Kurd, interview).

The early 1970s witnessed a political-cultural revival in the West Bank, where a growing interest in music making formed among young urban enthusiasts. As a result new types of music began to emerge. Some were influenced by the 1967 war and the expansion of the Israeli occupation, while others were influenced by the 1960s and 1970s era of activism and free expression. In many ways this atmosphere set the foundation for an alternative aesthetic movement dedicated to the creation and performance of meaningful and cause-committed art. This *fann multazim* (cause-committed art) was contrasted with *fann ghayr multazim* (non-cause-committed art) and presented specific political messages. Among the *fann multazim* emerging from Jerusalem during this period, Mustafa al-Kurd is routinely cited as a forebearer of music focused more on personalized narratives of Palestinian history and experience.

### Mustafa al-Kurd

Born in 1945 in the old city of Jerusalem, Mustafa al-Kurd grew up in a diverse musical environment. From an early age, he was exposed to *ʿAṣr al-Nahḍa* classics, Sufi and Byzantine chants, European organ music, Armenian ballads, Turkish and

Greek classics, and Palestinian traditional music. It was shortly after the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967 that he started composing music with lyrics of various renowned Palestinian poets such as Mahmoud Darwish, Rashid Husain, Tawfiq Zayyad, Fadwa Tuqan, and Zakariyya Shaheen. Al-Kurd remembers al-Muṣrārah neighborhood in East Jerusalem days after the 1967 war when he witnessed Israeli-organized bus caravans transferring Palestinians to other neighboring countries through the border with Jordan. “It was happening again!” he said, referring to al-Nakba of 1948. Al-Kurd wasn’t involved in politics per se during that time, but this incident, as he recalls, prompted his interest in speaking out through song. When I asked him about the main force that promoted his involvement in the arts, al-Kurd remembers that his interest in making music has always fallen under his commitment to telling the truth.

During this early phase al-Kurd would mostly accompany himself on the *‘ūd* (lute), and for a short period of time in the early 1970s his appearances took place with other musicians, as he was collaborating with Balaleen,<sup>5</sup> an experimental theater group where Mustafa worked as an actor. This imagery of a songwriter accompanying himself on the *‘ūd* was becoming commonplace in the 1970s and a symbol of the protest-song movement. Despite minimal orchestration and simplicity, al-Kurd’s songs were heard all over the Occupied Territories and were viewed as entirely political in nature. His influence is still seen today in terms of singer/*‘ūd* imagery, simplicity and accessibility of lyrics, and straightforward familiar melodic structures. One of his most iconic songs, “Hāt al-Sikkaih” (Give me the plow), became an instant hit at the time and was transformed into an anthem against the occupation. Although both the melody and rhythm are consistent with what was commonly used in the earlier nationalist and protest genres, most of the early songs that Mustafa wrote were set in a distinct Jerusalemite colloquial dialect. Mustafa said he wanted to establish a more personalized narrative through his songs, one that chronicles life in Jerusalem under occupation from the perspective of someone who is actually going through it. This explains the idiomatic Jerusalemite colloquial dialect as well as his emphasis on personalized messages and experiences. Because of his strong urban dialect, some of his songs did not resonate among Palestinians in rural areas or other urban centers. However, collectively, Mustafa al-Kurd’s performances, charisma, and unique stage presence made him one of the most influential songwriters of his generation, with influences that go beyond the simplicity of his songs.

Throughout his repertoire al-Kurd insisted on simplicity in the way he performed his songs, including their instrumentation, arrangement, and melody. He sang in a direct way, using his own most comfortable native dialect. His convictions were strong on matters of aesthetics and performance practice, as he recalls resisting the incorporation of a simple harmony to the vocal line in “Hāt al-Sikkaih.”<sup>6</sup> He remembers how discussions of instrumentation used to emerge among those involved in music making during his tenure with Balaleen. It was during that time

when elements of Palestinian folk song were incorporated into the newly emerging protest-song genres.

Mustafa al-Kurd’s works fall into a category that is distant from the national liberation themes popular at the time, in many ways establishing his own localized sense of meaning. His local songs addressed issues that were politically and socially relevant, clearly defined by his personal experiences under Israeli occupation with added folkloric elements. His impact and popularity were far-reaching, eliciting the attention of the Israeli military, which arrested him on several occasions throughout the 1970s and essentially placed him under administrative detention and subsequently forcibly deported him in 1976. He spent the following nine years in involuntary exile in Europe.

## Al-Baraem

Many Palestinian musicians of the 1960s and 1970s played Western instruments. Under the Israeli occupation, Western instruments were available to purchase, attainable to learn at the missionary schools, popular, desired, and easily accessible. By contrast, Arab traditional instruments were difficult to find, with only a handful of musicians teaching them. In 1966 a group of young enthusiasts established the group Sec. Cit. Por. & Per, playing only Western pop and rock music. Emile, Samir, and Ibrahim Ashrawi started off with one acoustic guitar and percussion, played pop and rock music, and sang in English. They changed the name of the group to the Tigers Five to reflect the expanding number of members in the group. They followed the basic Western pop/rock setup—an electric lead, rhythm and bass guitars, in addition to a drum set—and soon changed their name to the Blooms as the group continued to expand. The group later incorporated keyboards, a violin, and Arab percussion. As a reaction to the Black September events of 1970, where the Hashemite monarchy forcibly evicted the PLO from Jordan, resulting in the deaths of thousands, the group began singing in Arabic, translating its name into al-Barā’im, or simply al-Baraem. Emile recalls that, in the years following the Six-Day War (1967) and Black September (1970), there was a pervasive sentiment of disappointment in the great Arab singers, including Um Kulthoum. He remembers that the repertoire associated with these icons was viewed as contributing to the defeat of the Arab armies against Israel in 1967, based on its propagandist exaggerations of Arab power (Ashrawi, interview).

Throughout this period, many of al-Baraem’s songs were written by the Rahbani brothers, including “Sanarji’u Yawman, Ba’danā” (We shall return one day, after we leave; originally released in 1972), and “Baldatī Ghābatun Jamilah” (My town is a beautiful forest; originally released in 1957). Despite adapting Rahbani brothers’ songs, al-Baraem maintained its pop/rock set while performing, believing that this was in line with their larger artistic vision. They also believed it was crucial to maintain their artistic integrity as far as lyrics, musical arrangements,

and compositions. This was the main reason for selecting the Rahbani brothers' repertoire, as it was carefully crafted in terms of lyrics, composition, and performance. While also under Balaleen, al-Baraem collaborated with Mustafa al-Kurd on various occasions, including his most famous song, "Hāt al-Sikkaiah." In fact, it was al-Baraem that added important harmony to the vocal line and added guitar to its most popular live recorded performance (Ashrawi, interview). Although al-Baraem embraced the ideals that Mustafa presented, particularly at the level of lyrics, they openly disagreed with him regarding the quality of his musical presentation and believed that, musically, more could be done to enhance the quality of his work. As Emile remembers, they also appreciated the power of Mustafa's performances; often after his performances the audience would demonstrate against the Israeli occupation.

During this period, and immediately after their first debut as a group singing in Arabic, al-Baraem realized that it was not enough to just perform songs written by others, so they began composing their own pieces. They took up a different type of political song, however, critically focused on posing provocative questions rather than falling into the general themes of the day: resistance, endurance, and emigration. I asked Emile about the group's reasons for taking this path. He responded, "To provoke questions and create a community around it." While he remembers how PLO factions were coming down hard on them for what they viewed as Westernization and nonproductive criticism of the PLO, I asked him about whether or not there were any discussions or debates surrounding their choices.

Yes, of course there was, especially after we started singing in Arabic. The discussion got heated up and became a controversy that spread to the newspapers as we injected Palestinian political and social topics in original works delivered in Western rock style.<sup>7</sup> The question was whether resistance songs and music must be played and delivered on traditional instruments or the message is the key regardless of the medium. Our inability as individuals to play traditional instruments caused a dilemma. Should we stop singing in Arabic because of that, or just deliver our message with the medium we best know how to use? The latter argument won.

One of al-Baraem's most popular songs within the community was written in Jerusalemite colloquial and criticized the corruption and self-appointed symbols of authority.

Oh no people,  
Don't call him Master  
It's just an old title  
That lost its power  
Car, a villa and image

*la' yā nās mish bayk  
tnādū hādā yā bayk  
hāy 'anāwīn 'adīmaih  
baṭṭal ilha 'īmaih  
siyyārah w villah w 'āmaih*

A suit, and fat belly  
A thief, his job is  
And steals the poor's money  
Your wish is my command!  
We're slaves in your hands!  
He calls upon us!  
Oh no people  
We have a response  
And it's not like this!  
We're becoming like machines  
He turns us on whenever he pleases  
Your wish is not my command  
We're not under your hand!

*badlaih ma' karsh kbīr  
lakin bishtighil ḥarāmī  
w byusrū' ta'ab il-fa'īr  
shubbaik lubbaik  
'abidak bain idaik  
huwwaih ynādīnā  
la' yā nās  
wiḥna binrud 'alaih  
mish haik  
ṣirna zay il-'alaih  
bidawwirna bain idaiah  
shubbaik lubbaik  
wish sha'b mish rādīd 'alaih*

The group disbanded in 1976, and to my knowledge there is only one surviving recording of its songs. Among the members of al-Baraem were George Qirmiz, a songwriter whose influence is yet to be examined, and William Voskarjian, who later worked as a music teacher and writer. Their influence can be tracked through al-Baraem II, Sabreen, and al-Rahallah. In the same year, Marcel Khalife released his influential album *Wu'ūd min al-Āsīfah*, (Promises of the storm), which consisted of the songwriter accompanying himself on the 'ūd.<sup>8</sup> Marcel's performance and delivery of the vocal line, his accompaniment on the 'ūd, and the compositions were perceived to be of high artistic quality, and it sent a strong message to musicians, singers, lyricists, poets, and songwriters working within the protest-song genre that achieving a balance of political, aesthetic, and traditional terrains is possible. By this, Marcel seems to have offered a subtle and more conceptual view of fann multazim versus fann ghayr multazim, one that favored enhancing the artistic presentation in the service of the message rather than focusing on the possibility of conflicting ingredients. Although Marcel himself is Lebanese, the main impact of his album was that it offered hope to the minority of Palestinian artists who advocated for a more artistic and alternative approach to music making and a substitute to the widespread use of direct rhetoric, mediocre performance quality, and what they viewed as simplistic musical expressions. It encouraged many young artists to focus on becoming better musicians and maintain high artistic standards in their works, and to pursue an alternative route to artistic expression. Among those was Said Murad of Sabreen.

## Al-<sup>c</sup>Ashiqeen

In 1977 the PLO's Media and National Guidance Committee produced a TV soap opera called *Bi Ummī 'Aynī* (With my own eyes) to be broadcast on Syrian TV. The songs of the show spoke directly of the core issues of the struggle and articulated

how Palestinians viewed their path to liberty. The songs seemed to have linked Palestinians to their collective memory of the past, connecting them to their present and future. One of the best examples of this was “Wallah la-ʿAzraʿak bi-al-Dār.” The song was set in colloquial urban Palestinian, performed by a group of female and male vocalists, and became an instant marker of the Palestinian struggle as it articulated core principles, bringing all Palestinians under one flag. The song was based on traditional folk poetry (Arnita 1968), and was reinvented by Palestinian poet Ahmad Dahbour and set to music by Hussain Nazek.

The success of the TV show was noted by Abdullah al-Hourani, the head of the Media and National Guidance Committee. He then facilitated the establishment of the musical group Aghānī al-ʿAshiqīn (Al-ʿAshiqeen), made up of Palestinians living in Syria, with Hussain Nazek as principal composer. The group incorporated a wide selection of Western and traditional instruments as needed and appeared on stage while standing, an act that symbolized commitment, awareness, and resistance. They used primarily Palestinian folk materials and expanded short melodic forms into songs suitable for staging and choreography. The trend initiated a new era of cultural activity that systematically targeted folk materials for the purpose of the public stage. This movement went beyond the mere politicization of lyrics to include the addition of instrumental accompaniment, changes in rhythms, maqāms, and some standardization of diverse folk tunes. There are several interesting examples of how Al-ʿAshiqeen managed to achieve sustainability through rough political climates and emerging modern musical trends. “Wallah la-ʿAzraʿak bi-al-Dār” (I vow to plant almonds in the home) was one of the songs that was based on folk material. It is referenced in Yusra Arnita’s 1968 *Al-funūn al-shaʿbiyyah fi Falasṭīn* (Traditional arts in Palestine), and appears in the book in maqām bayāt, and in 5/4 meter, whereas in Al-ʿAshiqeen’s version it is changed to the more Western-friendly maqām *hijāz* and in 4/4 meter. Both of these changes drastically altered the interpretation of the piece, adopting a more cosmopolitan/urban melodic and rhythmic framework. In my interview with Nazek back in 2007, I asked him about these changes and reinventions. He said that many of the folk melodies that Al-ʿAshiqeen presented were modified for the purpose of becoming viable songs suitable for stage productions and performance. They had to be catchy, and they had to appeal. Their status as short folk melodies just didn’t fulfill the purpose, he said (Nazek, interview).

The PLO gained substantial strength during the 1970s and managed to facilitate its activities through its wide base. It utilized a large body of poets, journalists, lyricists, writers, artists, educators, college graduates, and students in leading the efforts of mobilization and expansion. In the West Bank, activists and PLO affiliates who were in line with PLO ideals started to influence music making. Some active musicians of the period were aware of the ramifications of PLO influence and were critical of its impact and outcome. They often described the rep-

ertoire associated with this movement as artistically limited in scope or politicized (Ashrawi, interview).

By the end of 1970s, musicians were having difficulties navigating the intensely politicized scene in the West Bank. While attempting to achieve a reasonable sense of artistry, identity, and relevance, the near-absence of Palestinian intellectualism in music and the continuous marginalization of many alternative ventures further deepened the authoritarian principles of the PLO’s cultural policy. The pressures increased, and the gap between what was considered *fann multazim* versus *fann ghayr multazim* became wider and more hostile. This was an era where Palestinian cultural ventures in the West Bank were being defined based on new parameters.

## Sabreen

The early 1980s witnessed the development of other contrasting musical ventures where the arts were employed as a vehicle for creativity, free expression, and alternative politics. Propaganda and mass mobilization were not necessarily the main motivations behind the work of some of the most influential artists of the era. Instead, musicians attempted to add a different expressive or symbolic dimension to their work. So instead of engaging in an organized political movement, which was often seen as a restrictive approach to making art, many groups used the politically charged situation as an opportunity for experimentation and learning.

In 1982 singer and musician Kamilya Jubran joined the musical group Sabreen. The group was established earlier in 1980 by a group of young musicians in Jerusalem who released an album using the basic Western pop/rock setup similar to the one used a few years before by al-Baraem, but with the addition of clarinet and ‘ūd.<sup>9</sup> The album was not a commercial success. However, shortly after Kamilya joined the group, they decided to adopt acoustic instruments. Unlike their first album, which followed the generic electric-pop band structure, the second album presented a rich tapestry of Western and Arab instruments. With the release of *Dukhān al-Barākīn* (Smoke of the volcanoes) in 1984, the group quickly transformed itself into the most influential ensemble in Palestine. With Kamilya as lead vocalist and *qānūn* (zither) player, Sabreen had declared itself as a rising star in Palestinian music. This reputation was solidified in their primary connection with the Arab classical music past as well as their experimentation in and development of Western idioms.

Kamilya comes from a family with a sustained musical background, and her initial musical training was given to her by her father and through the classics of ʿAṣr al-Nahḍa. She seems to have convinced the group to adopt acoustic instruments, including the ‘ūd, *buzug* (long-necked lute), and *qānūn*, thus transforming the group musically into something completely different. After *Dukhān al-Barākīn* Sabreen positioned itself at the frontier of the Arab classical revivalist

movement in the West Bank. The group was well received by Palestinians, and an enthusiastic and a dedicated following started to emerge. “We were very conscious of our words, but music always played a role as important as our identity. We tried to combine the two, presenting a modern identity and culture with a new musical point of view,” Kamilya says (Snaije 2004).

There are several terrains that Sabreen successfully navigated. Their lyrics were either based on folk themes or structured in established folk poetic meters. Their use of traditional and Western instruments dovetailed with experimental arrangements and the use of diverse rhythmic and performance styles. One of the most interesting examples of the negotiation of folk, classical, and Western repertoires is a song that they based on a Palestinian folktale of Jbaineh, included on their album *Dukhān al-Barākīn*. The story is about a young woman named Jbaineh who is mistakenly forced into slavery. One day her master hears her singing and realizes that she isn’t a slave after all, essentially setting her free. A version of the original lyrics was borrowed and modified by poet Hussain al-Barghouti, who also added a second section that contained a set of symbolic elements and hidden political messages. The lyrics of the new song were then set by Sabreen to a new melody vaguely based on traditional folk songs. One of most significant modifications to the lyrics comes in the first section, where Hussain al-Barghouti replaced the main character Jbaineh with the city of Jerusalem, thus allowing the city to tell its own story while referencing the original Jbaineh as part of the city’s cultural and historical memory and narrative. In other words, Jerusalem becomes a living character in the song, and Jbaineh is mentioned just to highlight the parallelism between the two. Another interesting play on the words appears in the second section, “Māl al-ṣumūd w mālñā bidñā n’ayyish ‘iyālñā.” *Māl al-ṣumūd*, or the steadfastness fund, is a term describing the fund that was allocated to supporting Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. In this song the lyrics “māl al-ṣumūd w mālñā bidñā n’ayyish ‘iyālñā” may have more than one meaning. First, the line can be translated as “the steadfastness fund is ours; we just need to support our families.” Or, alternatively, the line can be translated as “we don’t buy into steadfastness [possibly referring to PLO’s version of resistance]; we just need to support our families.” In either case the wording offers harsh criticism of the way this fund was handled by the PLO and sheds new light on how the local resistance became dependent on funds regardless of how effective it was at fulfilling its intended purpose. The song brought Jerusalem to the forefront of the struggle against occupation as the narrator and enforced its role as a primary symbol of resistance. It also offered hope and insight into the role of the people as the main source for change rather than those who claim legal representation of the struggle. The song continues, “mālikum w mālha fālha ‘a hālha ṣāmdaiḥ w law ‘āryaiḥ,” (leave her [Jerusalem] alone, she can handle her own destiny and will endure even when naked, or stripped of everything).

ya tyūrin ṭāyiraiḥ ‘ajbāl al-‘āliyaiḥ  
gūli lammi wa buyaiḥ al-Quds rā‘iyaiḥ  
tir‘a waz w timshi ghaz witnam taḥt il-dāliyaiḥ  
māl al-ṣumūd w mālñā bidñā n’ayyish ‘iyālñā  
willi bā‘ hālū w bā‘hā willi jā‘ ma‘hā dhrā‘hā  
mālikum w mālha fālha ‘a hālha ṣāmdaiḥ w law ‘āryaiḥ  
ya tyūrin ṭāyiraiḥ ‘ajbāl al-‘āliyaiḥ  
gūli lammi wa buyaiḥ Jbaineh sāḥiyaiḥ  
tākul lūz w bid’ha jūz kullu sāḥḥah w ‘āfiyaiḥ  
qāymaiḥ nāymaiḥ sāḥyaiḥ ḥāfiyaiḥ  
taḥt al-qamar bayn al-shajar ‘ain al-ḍabi‘ fuq al-nabi‘  
māl al-dabi‘ w mālha fālha ‘a hālha  
ma‘lish shu ṣār al-ḥurra shu‘lit thār  
ma‘lish mish ‘aib ‘adhra janb al-dhib  
mīn baddū ysīb ḥurra janb al-sāqīyaiḥ

English translation:

Oh flying birds over high mountains  
Let my mother and father know  
that Jerusalem is a shepherd.  
She takes care of geese and walks on her toes  
and sleeps under grape trees.

We don’t buy into steadfastness  
we just need to support our families  
Some people sold themselves and the struggle  
And some starved but never gave up  
Leave her (Jerusalem) alone, she prevails, and will endure even when  
stripped of everything.

Oh flying birds over high mountains  
Let my mother and father know  
Jbaineh is awake.  
She eats almonds and is craving walnuts  
all for good health.

She is always attentive although barefooted  
under the moon, around trees and springs she wanders in hyena territory.  
Whatever hyenas seek from her, she’ll prevail.  
Never mind what goes on, the free-spirited lady (Jerusalem) is full of  
revolution

and it's not a shame for the virgin to be near wolves,  
no one will ever be able to touch her free spirit as long as she is a  
waterwheel.

The lyrics were set in a colloquial Palestinian dialect distinct from the urban colloquial used by Mustafa al-Kurd and al-Baraem. This was one of the core cultural elements Sabreen was navigating at the time. As the 1980s brought many political activists and intellectuals from rural areas to the urban political and artistic forefront, most of these activists were also trying to literally invent a new political dialect that captured the politicized rhetoric of the street and employ it in new emerging song genres. The idea was to unify speech in a way that communicated a common ground between all Palestinian dialects, one that could speak to both urban and rural communities and be accepted by all. This trend was promoted by intellectuals, political activists, artists, actors, and others. It is documented through the lyrics of several poets and lyricists of the time, including Hussain al-Barghouti, Wasim al-Kurdi, Yaqub Ismail, and Subhi al-Zubaidi. Although Sabreen members came from urban backgrounds and primarily spoke urban dialects, their colloquial songs featured on *Dukhān al-Barākin* followed closely the dialect patterns of the lyricists. This approach was based on the authority of the poet in Arab culture and the mastery and power of words in a politically charged environment. It wasn't until their 1987 album, *Death of the Prophet*, when lyricist Subhi al-Zubaidi wrote several songs in Palestinian urban colloquial dialect, that the group performed in this linguistic register. In the patriotic songs "Khayyāl al-Muzaghritāt" (Knight of the yodelers) and "Ish Yā Kdish" (Long live the plowing horse), Sabreen's aesthetic navigations came through in subtle ways. With this recording the group utilized Arab classical elements in the use of traditional instruments, maqām structure, and, most importantly, vocal style. Kamilya adopted this vocal style throughout her tenure with the group and ultimately positioned Sabreen in line with the great classics of the past. In these compositions Sabreen embraced the maqām musical traditions and encouraged others to study them.

Despite all of their initial fame, Sabreen maintained a low profile, appearing only a few times live as a group. One of their most memorable performances took place in the West Bank at Birzeit University in 1984. The rest of their performances took place outside of Palestine. Essentially these two albums became iconic in their influence of subsequent generations of lyricists and composers. Traces of these influences are profound and can still be found in the works of the many contemporary groups active in the West Bank and abroad.

The innovation that characterized most of the 1970s and extended up to the late 1980s had a great impact over the music scenes in the West Bank. Although most of these committed musicians avoided formal political recruitment into one of the PLO factions, the majority were considered leftists. With a wider and more flexible

view of culture and politics, many of these Palestinian musicians believed that through their songs they could function as political mediators. Through their work they attempted to align the politics of the PLO and its factions into a consolidated platform whereby the PLO could play the role of beneficiary rather than the stakeholder of the nationalist movement. In other words, these artists were encouraging the PLO factions to play a passive role, where they would potentially benefit from the music without influencing its creation, a compromise that has resulted in benefits to both sides. This relationship brought some of the most powerful and rich examples of Palestinian culture and revealed how the arts often struggled to establish an intellectually independent space in response to the politically charged transformations of the 1970s and 1980s. Collectively, musicians attempted to navigate the contested fields of traditional folk material, contemporary politics, and Western and maqām traditions. They used indigenous language dialects in an attempt to distance themselves from the emerging regional dialects of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, establishing a political voice of their own. While many of these musicians attempted to distinguish their songs through lyrics, some also attempted to achieve balance through mixed instrumentation and arrangements. A common denominator among these groups, however, is that they all made political statements. Some managed to find balance between these elements, but the widespread belief was that the quality of the political or social message was more important than the artistic quality of the song. By the beginning of the first *Intifada* (uprising), in 1987, Palestinian song narrative was driven mostly by politics, and art songs were becoming more of a luxury. Nevertheless, the current generation of performers, lyricists, and composers has been greatly influenced by Mustafa al-Kurd, al-Baraem, Al-'Ashiqeen, and Sabreen.

## Notes

1. Traditional music in this context refers to music of *ʿAṣr al-Nabda*, or the Arab Renaissance or Golden Age, which is the repertoire produced in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria during the period from 1920 to the 1950s. The repertoire consists of various secular vocal and instrumental genres. These traditions are often called *maqām* traditions. See Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World*.
2. By this I mean Palestinians within Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.
3. See *Ghib Ya Qamar* (Oh moon, fade out) by the Rahbani brothers, with Fairuz and Hanan as a duet.
4. Of al-'Ashiqeen group.
5. Balaleen was established by François Abu Salem in 1970 as an experimental theater group.
6. The available recording of "Hār al-Sikkaih" goes back to one of the live performances of 1972–1973; the harmony appears in the recording. You can also hear his *dabke* (dance) group stomping on stage, the same group that he carried along to Balaleen.
7. Some of these discussions took place in newspapers, primarily between Adil Samara and Salim Tamari (Ashrawi, interview).

8. Marcel Khalife is a Lebanese singer and songwriter who worked closely with the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.

9. Electric guitar, drum set, electric bass, and keyboards.

## Interviews

Mustafa Al-Kurd, April 8, 2012. Jerusalem, Palestine

Emile Ashrawi, April 11, 2012. Ramallah, Palestine

Hussain Nazek, February 18, 2008. Telephone interview Chicago/Damascus

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Racy, Ali Jihad. 2003. *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Snaije, Olivia. 2004. "Finishing a Musical Odyssey Alone." *Daily Star*, June 23, 2004.

## Part 2

### *Identity*