



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **The Palestinian music-making experience in the West Bank, 1920s to 1959: Nationalism, colonialism, and identity**

Boulos, I.I.

### **Citation**

Boulos, I. I. (2020, November 11). *The Palestinian music-making experience in the West Bank, 1920s to 1959: Nationalism, colonialism, and identity*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138015>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138015>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/138015> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Boulos, I.I.

**Title:** The Palestinian music-making experience in the West Bank, 1920s to 1959: Nationalism, colonialism, and identity

**Issue date:** 2020-11-11

## Introduction

Establishing a narrative of the music-making scene in Palestine between the 1920s and 1956 presents many research challenges, especially with the loss of materials, governmental censorship, and distorted historiographies. Nonetheless, this dissertation aims to answer some questions about music-making among Palestinians and to re-examine the historical narratives surrounding it based on the material that is available. In order to study music-making among Palestinians, one must take into consideration the ramifications of the conflicts in Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century, and understand the political, geopolitical, historical, cultural, and religious factors that directly affected music-making among Palestinians. Given the complexity of the Palestinian situation and the unsettling conditions that Palestinian populations faced, the attempt here is to capture a small part of the Palestinian music-making experience. My intention is not to formulate a theory that describes how political, geopolitical, and socio-cultural forces shaped society, identity, nationalism, and culture. Instead, I focus on how Palestinian musicians navigated such dynamics in the context of music. I furthermore examine how music provided mechanisms to help musicians form, maintain, or adjust their identity at home and abroad. To achieve this, I focus on two eras, namely from the 1920s to 1948, during the British Mandate of Palestine, and from 1948 to 1959 in the West Bank (under Jordan) and Lebanon. With regard to the era before the Palestine Broadcasting Station (PBS) began broadcasting in 1936, I trace historical narratives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I investigate the role of Christian missionaries and their records and influence. I then investigate the impact and role of PBS and the Near East Broadcasting Station (NEBS) on Palestine's musical culture from 1936 to 1948. Finally, I shift to the era after 1948 and explore the role that Palestinian musicians

played in Lebanon and Jordan during the 1950s. The concluding date of this study is 1959, the year that Jordan Radio (previously PBS) was permanently moved from Ramallah to Amman.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed Resolution 181, which proposed the partitioning of Palestine into two independent states, one Palestinian Arab and the other Jewish. The Resolution proposed for Jerusalem to be internationalized (UNISPAL, A/RES/181[II]). The partition plan recommended dividing the territory into a Jewish state on 54.4% of the land, and an Arab state on 42.8%. The proposal came at a time when Palestinian Arabs owned 93% of the total land area and comprised 66% of the population (Chatty and Hundt 2005). Following the declaration of the plan, armed conflict spread throughout Palestine. By the time Arab armies decided to intervene, most of the major cities and towns in Palestine had already fallen. The Haganah and other Jewish militias were superior to the local Palestinian forces and Arab armies combined. Subsequently, the Jewish population implemented the partition plan unilaterally and declared independence as Israel. Palestine, on the other hand, never came into existence. Dawn Chatty and G. Lewando Hundt argue that the events of

1948 marked two contrasting historical experiences: for the Zionists, it was the culmination of the dream of creating a state for world Jewry, as a means to put an end to European anti-Semitism; for Palestinians, it was the time of expulsion and destruction of their land and society (2005, 15). The Arab-Israeli war in 1948 in Palestine and the series of events leading up to it resulted in hundreds of thousands of Palestinians seeking refuge in neighboring Arab countries.<sup>2</sup> According to David McDowall,

<sup>2</sup> The number of Palestinian refugees varies depending on the source. For 1948 refugees, for example, the Israeli government suggested a number as low as 500,000 as opposed to 1–1.2 million by their Arab counterparts. A report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UK in February 1949 estimated the number to be 810,000, while the

Most refugees were peasants who had not left their area before, and now found themselves dependent on the good-will of strangers. They faced a mixed reception, sympathy tempered by the strain of absorbing such large numbers and had to adjust to the loss of identity and community status. In Lebanon, the refugees constituted one-tenth of the total population and were perceived to threaten the fragile confessional balance and dominant position of the Maronite Christian community on which the political system operated. With the annexation of the West Bank, Jordan became pre-dominantly Palestinian (1998, 10)

As a result of the conflict, over 700,000 of the 900,000 indigenous Palestinian population fled or were expelled by Jewish armed militias to neighboring countries. They sought shelter in the West Bank (280,000) and Gaza (200,000), which had fallen under the control of Jordan and Egypt respectively, Lebanon (110,000), Syria (75,000), and Iraq (4,000) (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA] 2003).

According to Jalal al-Husseini, Arab regimes were discredited and shamed after their military defeat in 1948. Rumors of a collaboration with the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency during the conflict were also spreading (al-Husseini 2007). Al-Husseini argues that the mass arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees in the neighboring countries was feared as a potential cause of socio-economic and political volatility. The United States contributed to those fears by wielding the threat of possible exploitation by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) of the refugee situation (Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS] 1951). To try and contain potential problems, the Arab League issued Resolution 231 on March 17, 1949. The resolution reiterated that the lasting and just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees

UN cited 726,000 people. For further reading, see Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out* (2002, 309–310).

would be their repatriation, and the safeguarding of all their rights to their properties, lives, and liberty. It also stated that the UN should guarantee such rights (Knudsen 2011, 143).

Accordingly, the Arab League instructed its members to deny citizenship or naturalization to Palestinian refugees or their descendants. This decision was, in their view, to avoid the dissolution of Palestinian identity and to protect the refugees' right to return to their homes (Haddad 2004).

Nevertheless, the legal and political status of refugees depended on the politics of the host country as well as the international community (Makdisi and Prashad 2017; Shiblak 1996). Al-Husseini (2007) claims that Arab countries viewed any social or economic development of Palestinian refugees as potentially leading to an uncontrollable situation where refugees could question their legal status. Such scenarios would challenge the host countries' political and social status as well as test the effectiveness of the restrictions which they imposed on refugees (ibid.). In 1949, according to Resolution 302 of the UNGA, the UNRWA was created as a subsidiary and temporary UN body. Its task was to provide basic needs to Palestinian refugees in five countries/territories (FRUS 1951).

The three significant clusters of Palestinians, including refugees, were by then based in the two nation-states of Jordan (including the West Bank), Lebanon, and Gaza, which was then a protectorate under Egypt. In Jordan, the government pursued a two-side policy concerning the political status of refugees, granting them citizenship while maintaining their status as refugees (Plascov 1980). It also advocated for one Jordanian identity to fit both Transjordanians and Palestinians. However, the measures that the Jordanian government took to accomplish the annexation of the West Bank were extreme and designed to keep Palestinians at a disadvantage. In his book *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace*

*Process* (2000), Adnan Abu Odeh describes this period in detail. According to Odeh, the Jordanian historian Sulaymān Mūsa, who wrote extensively about the period, stated that the Transjordanian administration in Palestine between 1948 and 1950 committed unwarranted, painful, and regrettable mistakes against Palestinians (57). Palestinian refugees viewed ‘Abdullah I bin al-Ḥusain, king of Transjordan, as the one responsible for their plight (ibid.). Some Palestinians who did not leave their homes and towns in the West Bank viewed King ‘Abdullah as their protector and savior (ibid.). Nonetheless, despite all the difficulties the refugees in Jordan faced, their residency in Jordan was permanent and somewhat secured. Palestinian refugees in the remaining host Arab states, however, constituted a noncitizen group (Petee 2007).

During the early years of the Palestinian displacement, most Palestinian Christian refugees in Lebanon obtained Lebanese citizenship (Suleiman 2010). Meanwhile, most Muslim refugees retained the status of refugees and had no rights to residency (Haddad 2004). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Lebanese army intelligence agency known as *al-Maktab al-Thānī* (Second Office) subjected Palestinian refugees to tight control (Suleiman 2010). Palestinians were forced to live under restricted legal, political, economic, and social conditions and were deprived of fundamental civil and human rights (ibid.). Such limitations included restrictions on travel and internal movement, as well as on their right to work and own property. Ultimately, these conditions contributed to divisions among Palestinians not only geographically but also socially, economically, politically, and in terms of the discourse concerning their future identity.

## Research Question

Throughout history, Palestinian communities in Bedouin, rural, and urban environments incorporated music, especially songs, in various aspects of their daily lives. Music was present as part of secular and religious rituals, entertainment, spreading news, affirming values, storytelling, and social and political commentary (see Racy 1976, 1983, 2004; Mishqa 1847; Jessup 1910; Jessup and Ford 1885; Dalman 1901). During the first half of the twentieth century, al-Mashriq underwent a revival of its peasant and Bedouin musical traditions primarily through PBS and NEBS. Various types of literature romanticized Bedouin culture and presented it as wise, pure, untouched, and representative of the soul of Arab identity. Some of these renderings took a performative approach to music-making while others followed a pedagogical one. At times, tension between these two approaches was evident, especially between urban and folk genres. After 1948, some of these practices were sustained by Palestinian communities, but to varying degrees due to the displacement of these communities and the rapid transformation of the social fabric of Palestinian society. Various rural and Bedouin musical practices survived in diasporic contexts because music-making was entwined with social practices more generally. Sustaining an urban music scene, however, required infrastructural components such as production companies, facilities, venues, publications, and skilled musicians; most of which were lost after 1948. Therefore, little is known about the urban music scene in Palestine before 1948. The current understanding about the Palestinian music-making experience is dependent on where these musical practices occurred, how they were carried out, and for what purpose.

In September 2016, the National Library of Israel (NLI) launched Jrayed, an online archive that provides free access to approximately 250 newspapers and journals published in Palestine between 1908 and 1948. In addition, many recordings from this period have started to appear in private collections and archives over the last decade. Based on these new materials, an

unknown chapter of Palestinian music-making was unveiled and pointed to a vibrant and complex urban music scene before 1948. The recordings demonstrate an evolved landscape of music-making ventures involving various previously unknown artists. The publications shed light on the ways in which the music scene evolved, and how Palestine became an extension to Egypt's revival movement in music. In addition, such publications highlight the establishment and influences of the Palestine Broadcasting Station (PBS) in 1936 and the Near East Broadcasting Station (NEBS) in 1941. The broadcasting programs of these two stations show how music-making among Palestinians grew exponentially, and how the outcomes reflected not only the emergence of local types of music but also how these developments reflected the various expressions of Palestinian identity. During this period, Palestine became a destination for many Egyptian artists to perform and record their songs as well as a leading force in shaping music-making in the region. However, with such findings, various questions arise:

1. What was music-making among Palestinians like before 1936?
2. As a colonial power, the British established PBS and NEBS to serve their interests in the region. What role did the British play in transforming musical practices in Palestine?
3. How did music-making change after the events of 1948?
4. How did the transformation and evolution of Palestinian culture, society, and identity in the first half of the twentieth-century impact music-making among Palestinians and their neighbors, and vice versa?
5. Did geopolitical forces influence music-making in and outside Palestine after 1948?

6. Christian missionization in the region focused on musical activities since the mid-nineteenth century. What role did missionaries play in transforming musical practices in Palestine?

Since most musicians who worked at the two broadcasting ventures ended up leaving Palestine after 1948, my research travels beyond the geographic limits of the West Bank to assess how these musicians engaged in music. Specific musical examples will be used to examine how music was used to signify modernity, nationalism, religious affiliations, identity, class, political sovereignty, and cultural elitism. I analyze these examples musically and literary to explain the similarities and variations from one geographic area or community to another and shed light on the later developments related to music.

### **The British Mandate (1917 to 1948)**

Various researchers and scholars have explored the role of the British Mandate of Palestine. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2012), which focuses on the context of Bengal, offers a theoretical framework for understanding colonial conditions and their impact on native populations. With regard to the context of Palestine, the question is to what extent colonial attitudes and practices still linger in music-making in the post-colonial period. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue that, to make political questions clearer, we must consider them in relation to the colonialist past. Such an examination may account for the perspectives of nation-states regarding issues of race, class, economics, and politics and how they related to colonial discourses. This approach is necessary because these structures of power, like nation-states, were established by the colonizing process whose influences remain undeniable, but which are often hidden in cultural relations throughout the world (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000). They also argue that

Terms such as ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity,’ for example, have generated extensive discussion and debate in anthropology, but in post-colonial discourse, these terms provide a particular focus for unraveling the complex nature of colonial relations, of the sorts of binaries imperialism itself establishes, and of the ways in which effective resistance may be undertaken by post-colonial societies. (2)

In her book *Orientalism and Musical Mission: Palestine and the West* (2013), Rachel Beckles Willson examines the presence of Western music in Palestine through the lenses of projects aimed at researching music, teaching music, setting up orchestras, and opening conservatories. She explores the role that Palestinian Anglicans played in music-making in Palestine since the 1930s but focuses little on the anti-colonial and post-colonial perspectives of the Palestinian narrative. To address this gap, I utilize Mary Louis Pratt’s ([1992] 2008) “contact zones” to describe the ecosystem where colonial encounters took place. According to Pratt, contact zones occur when different peoples who are geographically and historically separated from one another “come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (8). She argues that the contact zone designation is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjuncture. The interactive trajectories of such subjects sustain dimensions of colonial encounters, despite being easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. Pratt also argues that relations between the colonizers and the colonized include interaction and co-presence, rather than separation. In a similar vein, Peter Childs and Patrick Williams assert that colonial encounters constitute “a site of compromise and resistance, assertion and imitation, hybridity and adaptation” ([1997] 2013, 185).

As a contact zone site, Palestine is vital to the West because of its biblical history and as a continued imagined place that is essentially part of the West (Willson 2013, 8). This

categorization applies to the era before 1948, during the British Mandate of Palestine (1917-1948). After 1948, reciprocal patterns of behavior and conflict characterized the relations between the colonizer and colonized. I argue that during that period various notable families nonetheless continued to act as connoisseurs, especially after the sharp decline in Western music practices in PBS. One of the most important families that played such a role is the Nasir family. I describe some of the activities surrounding this Palestinian Anglican family's commitment to Western music not only as forms of "imitation, hybridity and adaptation" to Western values but also as practices frozen in time and space. Martin Stokes points out that one consequence of modernity is the separation of space from the place, where places are penetrated and shaped by social influences that are distant from them. I employ this approach to argue that the separation of space from the place among various Christian families, especially Anglican ones, created a different system of meaning that captures time and space in a subcultural capsule. This exploration reveals aspects of institutionalized colonialism in post-colonial Palestinian music-making. Most importantly, attention to this era demonstrates how colonial ideology and its accompanying practices, without any military presence, extended well beyond the British Mandate. I support my argument with various forms of evidence from the period, including songs, poetry, nationalist literature, articles, and concert programs. I also examine the use of Western scales, instruments, forms, and instrumental formations.

### **1948 to 1959**

Despite the growth of nationalism and identity among Palestinians, after 1948 they were mostly unable to connect, evolve, or transform as a unit. Palestinian communities in the diaspora and within Palestine reacted to and interacted with their surroundings differently. Stokes argues that music "does not then simply provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are

negotiated and transformed” (1997, 4). He explains that “[m]usic is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries that separate them” (5). In the diaspora, Palestinian populations had to reimagine their identity and rearrange their perception of it. Therefore, they transformed their social interactions into altered versions of their “authentic” identities.

Reflecting on the presence of Palestinians in Jordan, my colleague David McDonald (2013) has advanced an argument supporting the view of Palestinians in Jordan as an ethnic group. He argues, however, that once an ethnic group claims to lead the state or take it over, it is no longer an ethnic group, and instead becomes a national group. McDonald uses Thomas Turino’s (2008) definition of ethnicity as a subnational social group or minority group, which in this case belongs to the broader social unit of Jordan. I argue that most Palestinians in Jordan acted as a transnational diasporic community with tangible and intangible ties to the homeland, which is a preconceived nationalist discourse. However, some Palestinian communities, such as notable families, behaved like an ethnic group.

Elizabeth Mavroudi (2008) argues that Palestinians in the diaspora may be seen as part of a diasporic or transnational community that is engaged in long-distance nationalism. As a nation in exile, they engage in state-building based on the politics of the homeland (Hammer and Schulz 2005). For Turino, a nation is a type of identity unit linked to the idea of political and territorial sovereignty and independence, which is typically constructed through a nationalist discourse. Sheldon Stryker and R. T. Serpe argue that identities are organized into layers of obligations that match the meaning of identity (Stryker 1980; Serpe and Stryker 1987). Peter Burke (1991) and W. B. Swann (1990) argue that connections, collaboration, and shared understanding and sentiment lead to the verification of ideas, values, and identity. All of these characterizations are

applicable to Palestinians, especially given the extreme contrast between the statuses of Palestinian communities and how each has perceived their identity.

My study of Palestinian music-making during the colonial period from 1917 to 1948, and the postcolonial era from 1948 onward, cannot exclude the socio-cultural and political activities of certain notable Palestinian families, nor the status and struggles of those in the middle or at the bottom of the social and political spectrum, especially refugees. To identify associations between historical events and cultural and political practices in private and public contexts, I analyze the gradual shift in the diasporic status of certain Palestinian communities from 1948 to the late 1950s—from a transnational group engaged in nationalism and nation-building to an ethnic group. I examine this transformation in the context of music and broadcasting in order to shed light on how Palestinian musicians navigated their positions in the politics of Jordan and Lebanon and bring attention to the bipolarity of their situation.

In Jordan, some notable Palestinian families acted as loyalists to the Jordanian monarchy before 1948 and sustained the same position after 1948. They became a reliable “ethnic group” rather than bear the status of a diasporic, transnational community like most of the disadvantaged Palestinian populations. I provide a portion of the diasporic narrative for three reasons: 1) to examine the music made by Palestinian musicians in the diaspora; 2) to explore the fate of music-making in the West Bank after 1948, and 3) to assess Palestinian sentiment or identity in these practices.

## **The Two Eras**

Palestinian music-making took various shapes and played different and often contrasting roles from the early twentieth century to the mid-1970s. According to Andrea Stanton (2013), Palestinian music in the context of formal colonial institutions such as PBS and NEBS was not a

reflection of the consciousness of the people, but rather an echo of the colonial perspective “modernization first” (3). Meanwhile, music-making among most Palestinians drew a different picture, one which sought to resist, renounce, and dismantle colonial ideology. In light of these differences, I divide music-making among Palestinian not only into time periods, but also according to how each community practiced music in ways that signified its respective identity, position, and outlook. I treat the pre-1948 period as a colonial contact zone as described by Pratt, and the postcolonial period after 1948 as another contact zone. I focus on the latter contact zone with respect to music-making among the Anglican community.

During the pre-1948 period, Jerusalem became an important representation of colonial societies. In their article “Colonial Cities in Palestine? Jerusalem Under the British Mandate,” Ruth Kark and Michal Oren-Nordheim (1996) characterize the role that colonial cities played during the later phases of colonialism. They conclude that colonial cities led to “the organization or reorganization of the urban hierarchy in colonial societies to form political, administrative and military centers, including colonial capitals” (51). They view colonial cities as examples of diffusion, Westernization, or Europeanization—essentially as a contact zone. They also identify characteristics that distinguish colonial cities from each other. Such features established Jerusalem as a colonial city, and as an embodiment of colonial rule. The city fulfilled the following functions:

1. it reflected geopolitical necessities;
2. offered acceptable working conditions for the public;
3. engaged businesses, associations, and agencies of government to sustain the city;
4. emphasized economic principles for the benefit of notable families;
5. dominated the tertiary sectors, and parasitic exploitation of the local rural section;

6. implemented political dealings towards creating or strengthening a local bureaucratic notable class for colonialists to rule through community leaders indirectly;
7. propagated specific social and cultural standards, which buoyed the superiority of the representative of the governing body and enforced the inferiority of local people;
8. reflected residential differentiation through racial, religious, and class divisions;
9. implemented occupational stratification according to national and religious orientation; and
10. reinforced residential separation between foreign nationals and locals.

After 1948, Jordan annexed the West Bank, and Jerusalem began to lose its status as a primary regional hub for cultural and political transformation. With the British no longer steering the path towards modernization, notable families attempted to take over that role. Notable Muslim families continued to occupy high political positions in Jordan's new government while notable Christians continued to focus on culture, especially music. However, since Palestinian Christians, especially those belonging to Western congregations, lost most of their direct access to governmental institutions such as PBS, this change impacted them the most and gradually confined them to small circles of pro-Western communities. Meanwhile, Palestine became an open field for Palestinian and Jordanian political and cultural rivalry due to the following reasons:

1. the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan annexed the West Bank, a process during which a new contact zone emerged in the shape of a trajectory that aimed to create a new national identity for all Jordan's citizens;

2. Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and the diaspora were not in opposition to each other; instead, they kept strong ties to the ‘homeland’ and were critical of the annexation;
3. encounters between Palestinians and Jordanians were not marred by conflict despite the disparities between the two communities;
4. Palestinian human resources, as well as cultural expressions and practices, were used as building blocks of the new collective identity, which gave Palestinians more power;
5. characteristics of Jordan’s emerging national identity favored Transjordanians; and
6. confrontation defined the relationship between the Jordanian state and Arab nationalists.

## **Methodology**

Historical research has evolved as a method to discover the beginnings of certain events and understand their trajectories. It attempts to reconstruct what occurred during a specific period as thoroughly and accurately as possible. Through systematic collection and evaluation of data, the outcome of historical research describes, explains, and offers insight into how events may have affected subsequent ones. To achieve this with regard to the context of Palestine, I focus on individuals and their works, institutions, events, and social and political movements. I believe that this approach can identify known gaps in history and offer a narrative, rather than a historiography by necessity, which makes the unworking of subaltern histories visible (Chakrabarty 2000).<sup>3</sup> I use “microhistory” as a narrative approach for important events and to

<sup>3</sup> The term subaltern designates the colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hierarchy of power of a colony.

identify specific goals within the narrative as necessary (Lepore 2001). The microhistory process allows for an intensive historical study of relatively well-defined smaller objects, events, communities, families, and individuals (Sigurour and Szijártó 2013). In the words of Gylfi M. Sigurour and István Szijártó: “Focusing on certain cases, persons and circumstances, microhistory allows an intensive historical study of the subject, giving a completely different picture of the past from the [other] investigations about nations, states, or social groupings, stretching over decades, centuries, or whatever *longue durée*” (2013, 5).

Through this type of intensive historical investigation, I examine the lives of various musicians, composers and other key individuals, including Ḥalīm al-Rūmi, Riyāḍ al-Bandak, Ṣabrī al-Sharīf, and Rawḥī al-Khammāsh. I aim to understand how Palestinian music-making and thought transformed under the British, and subsequently influenced the development of Lebanese and Jordanian music scenes. The exploration of the careers and achievements of specific Palestinian composers and influential individuals offers a more in-depth understanding of their unique contributions as well as their impact on nation-states other than their own.

In keeping with the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts’ (ACPA, Leiden University) conception of Ph.D. research, my experience as a Palestinian growing up in the West Bank and participating in Palestinian musical culture is at the center of this dissertation. My research, however, arises not only from “indigenous knowledge” (Semali and Kincheloe 2011; Johnson 2012) but also through extensive musicological fieldwork. As Rainer Diriwächter and Jaan Valsiner (2006) point out, methodology itself is not a “toolbox” of different techniques that researchers select from according to personal or social preferences (1). While indigenous knowledge is not a method, I utilize my expertise as a practitioner of *maqām* music, poet, and researcher. I use this knowledge to carefully observe music from various perspectives, including

theoretical, linguistic, geopolitical, religious, and cultural. I also select my examples and depend on those who have inherited traditional musical practices from their predecessors, such as poet-singers. Most of these practices have traditionally relied on oral communication and observation to accomplish transmission from generation to generation. My early training similarly relied on oral communication and observation. I believe that my ability to identify subtle differences in dialects, musical intonations, rhythms, melodic variations, forms, function and use, language and performance practice is of great benefit to my work as a researcher.

Through the lens of performance, I examine various types of music-making that occurred in Palestine and explore how they interacted, changed, and evolved, including peasant, Bedouin, urban, and contemporary types. I compare modes, intonation schemes, melodic contours, rhythms, instruments, vocabulary, poetic meters, dialects, geographic locations, and context. I base my description of Palestinian music on my research findings, readings, transcriptions, and hands-on knowledge of the types of musical genres that exist or have existed in Palestine. In this way, my musicological work and indigenous knowledge work hand-in-hand, rather than in opposition or competition. This approach is in line with Walter Mignolo's (2011) argument that epistemic defiance and the restoration of links are two sides of the same coin. In other words, my approach is a process in which indigenous knowledge does not necessarily avoid qualitative methods, and which embraces an indigenous perspective within musicological research. Lastly, in chapters 3 and 4, I integrate methods that focus on everyday life as well as the broader issues of power, politics, and economics in society. The reasoning behind this inclusion is the intertwined relations that reflect the complex landscapes and nature of any research about Palestinians. Michael Carter and Celene Fuller argue that:

Central to symbolic interactionist thought is the idea that individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others. Rather than addressing how

common social institutions define and impact individuals, symbolic interactionists shift their attention to the interpretation of subjective viewpoints and how individuals make sense of their world from their unique perspective. Symbolic interactionists are often less concerned with objective structure than with subjective meaning—how repeated, meaningful interactions among individuals come to define the makeup of “society” (2015, 1).

In this process, I utilize an approach that connects such discussions to the concepts of social space, ethnicity, identity, and the nation-state. Such a method has the potential to narrow the gaps of perception between anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology (Charles 2016). This approach furthermore helps ethnomusicologists to think about music-making not only as a marker for identity but also as means for creating a musical sense of where they live.

### **Research Techniques**

Researchers of Near Eastern music depend on recordings, interaction with artists, fieldwork, Western transcription, publications, and records of earlier researchers. In the Palestinian context, lost material from the era before 1948 represents the most significant research challenge towards establishing an evaluative momentum to the study of the music scene in Palestine. As for the period after 1948, lost or unavailable materials present additional research challenges. In this dissertation, I have used data from the following sources:

1. interviews, testimonies, transcriptions, fieldwork, my experience in the field and interaction with musicians, all of which have helped me understand and define the diverse musical types and practices among Palestinians;
2. PBS publications from the Israel National Library, British archives, private collections, newspaper articles, journals and magazines, official documents, and the archive of the Palestinian Institute for Cultural Development (NAWA)

3. publications by other researchers, which include reviews and analyses of various music trends, including those classified as folk, modern, patriotic, religious, educational, as well as other local and regional forms.
4. The materials that I consulted in my research are thus varied, and include photos, recordings, tables, reports, and statistical data.

### **My Personal Experience**

I was born in Jerusalem and grew up a few miles north in the town of Ramallah, in the West Bank. I have been an active musician since childhood and obtained training in both Arab and Western musical traditions. My casual research as an ethnographer started during my teenage years in an attempt to answer various questions about music-making among Palestinians. I was then active in the scene and performing on *'ūd* with local groups and on the keyboard with wedding bands. I established my own group in 1985 to create original music. In 1986, I joined al-Raḥḥalah, an underground group that focused on creating original resistance songs. During this period, I encountered folklorists, songwriters, poets, and a wide variety of musicians.

I attended college for one year from 1988 to 1989 in Chicago and returned to Ramallah to record an album with al-Raḥḥalah. I sustained a high level of activity with local groups during that period and started producing my works in a home studio and releasing them on unlabeled cassettes. I also started working at the Popular Art Center as the principal instructor of various musical instruments as well as singing for five different music groups that were affiliated with the center at the time. Moreover, I acted as director of Birzeit University's band Sanābil until 1994. I eventually went back to college and focused on music composition and graduated in 1998. I earned my Master's degree in music composition in 2000. By then, I was in my second year of directing the Middle East Music Ensemble at the University of Chicago. I met the

ensemble's founder, Professor Martin Stokes, in 1998, upon my first engagement with the ensemble. My interactions with Martin and the rest of the faculty at the University of Chicago heightened my interest in research. I thus began to explore historical narratives, performance practice, and the notions of nationalism and identity.

Working with the Middle East Music Ensemble provided me with firsthand knowledge and understanding of music-making trends in the Arab World, Turkey, Iran, Greece, and Asia Minor. It also exposed me to the various tensions, similarities and differences, and contentious matters such as nationalism, which connected and polarized these communities at the same time. Such encounters prompted me to examine the Palestinian narrative because I noticed that similar tensions and disparities also occur among Palestinians both inside and outside Palestine. From this point forward, I engaged in fieldwork. I interviewed dozens of musicians, documented several testimonies, and transcribed and analyzed hundreds of pieces, poetry, and lyrics. I eventually published a book of songs that is used today in Palestinian schools.

My career as a composer, researcher, lecturer, visiting artist, performer, and educator have presented to me valuable opportunities to:

1. witness a variety of interactions, including a firsthand look at the impact of national discourses and identity formation on various Near East communities;
2. observe how different cultures interact with one another with regard to religion, identity, and politics;
3. navigate issues of performance practice, poetry, theory, lyrics, dialects, interpretation;
4. identify musical characteristics that symbolize identity, culture, and political discourses;

5. gain access to enthusiasts and practitioners, and audio recordings of various non-mainstream music genres, and
6. observe processes that lead musicians to make decisions about specific musical issues based on non-musical criteria.

In my research, I have observed that misunderstandings and ambiguities concerning Palestinian musical practices are common and caused by various factors, including: incomplete research done by Westerners such as Gustaf Dalman; modest local research which focuses on poetry and lyrics but lacks the knowledge or skills necessary to understand how musical practices are connected to songs, such as the writings of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Barghūti’s; and over-theorization of music-making, such as in the book *Palestinian Arab Music: A Maqām Tradition in Practice* by Dalia Cohen and Ruth Katz (2006).

To avoid these tendencies in my own research, I approach the topic here as a practitioner who is informed about local musical traditions. Having been repeatedly asked to discuss Palestinian music in lecture settings and answer some of the questions that surround its evolution, I have had to find ways to clarify several ambiguities. To achieve this, I began to distinguish between two types of practices: a traditional presentation, and a traditional performance. For example, an event carried by a *zajjāl* in a village can be perceived as a social event. Therefore, it may not be useful to interpret such a practice as conscious artistic effort of making music. Ultimately, spontaneous and ceremonial musical activities that convey cultural values tend to comment on current events or play a specific role in highlighting customs, beliefs, and religious affiliations. I thus describe such routines as traditional presentations. I recognize that individuals such as poet/composers, dancers, and singers deliver traditional presentations as a collective social effort, not to “entertain” others. Therefore, I approach an individual,

traditional or not, who showcases his or her work as part of a community-wide social event, such as a wedding ceremony, as a traditional presenter, not a performer. For example, if I, as a professional musician, participate in singing a wedding song during an actual traditional wedding, my performance would be a traditional presentation. If I perform the same song on stage, it becomes a traditional performance. The two types of performances, however, can smoothly transition into each other.

Because such traditions are reflections of belief systems, in my initial forays into research I began to examine musical practices from the perspectives of geography, language, religion, collective aspirations, and politics. I noticed that many methods appear in Palestinian culture to preserve such practices. Such measures may include tribal, nationalistic, regional, political, practical, or even theoretical frameworks. Moreover, musicians who appear in performance contexts rehearse beforehand and perform at designated performance spaces. Such performances may take place at a theatre or concert hall, and often in both rural and urban settings. Various elements of commercial production accompany such performances, including lighting, sound equipment, costumes, staging, written text, and entertainment themes. There is often also some degree of artistic direction and consideration towards the audience involved. Traditional presentations, on the other hand, may take place in the center of town, in the street, or at someone's home or backyard. They lack elements of rehearsal, production, and staging, and tend to depend almost entirely on time-tested practices. Moreover, they depend on commonly accepted texts to fulfill the desired function of the presentation, not on modified modern versions. Nonetheless, there are several common characteristics between the two types: 1) both can occur in both urban and rural areas; 2) during a single musical event, both of them can move

in either direction at any given moment; and 3) both can occur in any physical space, sometimes simultaneously.

While interacting with musicians in the West Bank during the 1980s and 1990s, I noticed that certain Palestinian communities advocated for Western music and detached themselves from local musical practices. In such cases, musical performances took shape in a completely different way, in a manner somewhat distinct from traditional performances or presentations.

### **Significance and Aim**

The purpose of this dissertation is to reexamine the history of Palestinian music and to provide a framework for future research. This study is groundbreaking because it offers an original and in-depth examination of the historical dynamics that transformed music-making among Palestinians. The study is also important because:

1. it reconstructs the past and reexamines the discussion of Palestinian history and the evolution of Palestinian music;
2. it explores how and why Palestinian music-making took different shapes in various local and diasporic contexts;
3. it examines the role of Palestinian musical thought in Lebanon and Jordan;
4. it looks at the role of Palestinian Christians and music among them;
5. it examines the roles of PBS and NEBS in promoting local styles;
6. it provides the basis for recognizing the fluctuations in how Palestinians responded through music to notions of identity, culture, nationalism, political mobilization.

The dissertation consists of a chronological examination of the events that have shaped the identity and the socio-historical, political, and cultural upbringing of Palestinians. It explores music among Palestinians until 1959. In chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4, I explore music-making among

Palestinians in various contexts and geographic locations, including the West Bank, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon.