

Nationalism, Belonging, and the Performativity of Resistance

The Activist: Performing the Nation in Exile

“Just watch. If I sing loud enough and strong enough, we can create Palestine in the music” (*idhā ṣawtī qawī, raḥ maḥamal filastīn bi-1 -mūsīqā*), Kamal Khalil tells me before a performance commemorating Palestinian Land Day in the summer of 2004. Within minutes hundreds of *shabāb* (youth) have abandoned their chairs to join one of six different *dabke* lines (Palestinian indigenous line dance) circling the stage. Some of the more adventurous young women form their own *dabke* line, stage left, distanced from the gaze of the young men. Older refined businessmen, lawyers, and other notables, seated conspicuously in the front row’s VIP section, relinquish their formal public station and openly sing along, waving their arms wildly over their heads. Young families parade their small children through the crowd atop their shoulders waving signs of victory, wearing the Palestinian flag or *kūfiya* (white-and-black checkered headscarf) around their necks. Noticing the crowd’s reaction to his first set of resistance songs, Kamal looks over at me standing backstage, dutifully videotaping the performance, and smiles. His dark eyes suddenly soften. Wrinkles stretch across his tanned cheeks. With pride his glance reads, “See? I told you so . . .”

I acknowledge his gesture, shaking my head back and forth in disbelief at the incredible transformation taking place before my very eyes. The once subdued, even lethargic, audience had awoken within a matter of moments into a participatory expression of Palestinian nationalism. Where once strangers sat, politely listening to speeches given by various

community leaders, in song and dance, a community of national intimates has emerged. Before long I am pulled from my ethnographer's perch to join one of several dabke lines weaving through the crowd. While dancing, several businessmen wrap their kūfiyāt around my neck in a sign of friendship and indoctrination into the performance environment. Later, I politely and diplomatically excuse myself from the dabke to nervously check my recording equipment backstage. Making sure that the sound levels, microphones, and batteries are all working properly, I notice a group of boisterous shabāb approaching. I brace myself for the usual barrage of questions and accusations customarily levied at foreigners circulating within politically charged venues such as this, but before I am able to speak, one of the teens grabs me by the shoulders and quickly bends forward to kiss the pin of a Palestinian flag on my lapel. *Sharrafnā, yā ḥabībī* (honored to meet you), he screams in my ear over the raucous music and merriment.

*The Archivist: "Palestine will
always remain under our stamping feet"*

Sitting in the office of the eighty-three-year-old librarian, scholar, and folklorist 'Abd al-Aziz Abu Hadba (Abu Hani) at the In'ash al-Usra Society in the West Bank village of al-Bireh, I am initially asked to fill out a questionnaire describing myself and the nature of my research. As I leaf through Abu Hani's large binder of similar questionnaires filled out by streams of foreign researchers who have passed through his office over the last thirty years, I come to realize the long legacy of ethnographic research that has been carried out in the West Bank. Abu Hani sits behind his desk, carefully, silently watching my expression as I read through the various entries. The silence is unsettling. Some of the names are easily recognizable, scholars whose work has formed the foundation of my understanding of Palestinian culture and practice. Most, however, are not. Page after page flashes before me, fascinating research projects, each seeking the same answers as myself. Looking over the stacks of entries, it pains me to realize that my research is not as groundbreaking or as innovative as I once imagined. I am but one of a long list of (perhaps idealistic and naïve) researchers who has sought out Abu Hani's advice, believing their work might in some way contribute to the end of the occupation. After what seemed an eternity, Abu Hani realizes his exercise in humility has achieved its intended

goal, and his distant exterior suddenly thaws. The uncomfortable silence that has gripped the room is then broken. His gleaming blue eyes sparkle against the backdrop of his thinning white hair and wrinkled cheeks. A youthful enthusiasm quickly emerges from his voice as he smiles and begins telling me the story of his birth village (depopulated and destroyed in 1948) and of his ensuing quest to preserve its memory.

Among researchers of Palestinian culture, folklore, and history, Abu Hani is a national treasure. Over the years his many books, articles, and service to the In'ash al-Usra Society have provided the foundation for Palestinian cultural and folkloric studies. Waiting weeks to sit and talk with him about my research, I anxiously anticipated his thoughts and ideas. Despite his eighty-three years, Abu Hani's face lights up when I explain my interest in studying Palestinian history, nationalism, and resistance from the perspective of music. With the dexterity of a man half his age he quickly rises from his chair and begins pulling books from the surrounding shelves. After a modest stack has accumulated on the front corner of his desk, he returns to his chair and begins talking about the cultural significance of Palestinian music and dance. The discussion soon turns to stories of our favorite poets, singers, and songs. We sing bits and pieces of Palestinian folklore. It is obvious Abu Hani takes great pleasure in testing my abilities to decipher lyric, mode, and rhythm in the great canon of Palestinian indigenous music (*'alā da'ūna*, *al-'atābā*, *al-jafrā*, *yā zarīf al-tūl*, and so on).

About an hour into our discussion Abu Hani becomes quite serious. "You know, Da'ud [David], I have been asking every researcher who comes through this office the same question for years. And I am curious if you can tell me what the answer is." Abu Hani then stands up behind his desk and begins to stomp his feet on the ground repeatedly. "Do you know what this means when we [Palestinians] stamp our feet in the dabke?" he asks, cautiously balancing on one foot. "Do you know what the dabke means? Why we do it? Why we love it so much?"

Initially I am caught off guard by such a question, and even more worried that I will have to catch Abu Hani if he should fall. So I quickly answer, "No, I am not sure what the dabke means." In my research I had read widely on the dabke and had spoken with and learned from many dancers about the history, steps, and contexts of dabke performances. But I was a bit taken aback by Abu Hani's direct query, unsure of what exactly he was looking for, and unwilling to risk offering a wrong answer.

We stomp our feet in the dabke to show the world that this is *our land* [*Baladna*] [stomping loudly on the floor], that people and villages can be killed and erased [stomping again] . . . , but *our heritage* [*turāthnā*] is something that they can't reach because it is here [motioning to his heart]. They have stolen our land [stomp], forced us out of our homes [stomp], but our culture is something they cannot steal. When we stamp our feet we are saying that no matter how far we have been scattered, *Palestine will always remain under our stamping feet* [*filastīn rāḥ bizāl taḥt aqdāmnā*]. (emphasis added)

The Artist: "Tupac is a martyr for Palestine"

"You see . . . people don't understand that Tupac should be considered [a] *shahīd* [a martyr for Palestinian liberation]," Tamer Nafar explains to me backstage before a rap concert in Ramallah in the summer of 2005. "His experiences are our experiences. His struggles with the police are our struggles with the police. His ghetto is my ghetto. If you listen all he talks about is the ghetto, revolution, politics. And he died because he was willing to speak out for his beliefs. . . . That makes him [a] *shahīd*, and that makes him Palestinian."

As Tamer carefully explains his point, crowds of exuberant teens crowd into Ramallah's Kassaba Theatre. With a low rumble the sound of the sold-out crowd reverberates through the green room walls, giving the cramped space an energy of anticipation. Backstage local media beg the group to pose for their cameras. The young rappers are only too happy to oblige, posturing with one another, pointing into the cameras with rehearsed hand gestures and facial expressions. Their oversized athletic shorts, T-shirts, and designer high-top sneakers add to the novelty. One reporter asks, *'alā fikrā, shū hadhā al-rāb?* (by the way, what is this rap music?). Although many in the crowd were unfamiliar with hip-hop—its sounds, rhythms, dances, and practices—DAM's much-awaited performance in Ramallah spoke volumes about the potential impact of rap on Palestinian youth culture and politics. In a city overwrought with violence, besieged by occupation, and entrenched in a pervasive culture of steadfastness, hip-hop opens the door to new sounds and new ways of conceptualizing contemporary struggles. Tupac's subaltern posture of empowered resistance against racism and dispossession resonates with these young Pales-

tinian rappers to the extent that Tupac might assume the politicized identity of a Palestinian shahīd: a martyr for the cause of self-determination. Tupac, according to such criteria, is Palestinian. His angry yet poignant counterhegemonic rhetoric indexes a common struggle of ethnic engagement and minority rights. This young cadre of Palestinian Israeli rappers, making a name for themselves as Palestine's first rap group, freely draws from the identity construct of the empowered subaltern (as manifested in the legacy of Tupac Shakur) in fashioning their own repertory of hip-hop against the occupation and the ethnic marginalization of Palestinian citizens of Israel.



EACH OF THE ABOVE vignettes narrates strikingly different conceptions of time, space, nation, and resistance articulated through performative processes of music and dance. Moreover each presents the aesthetic and ideational dispositions of three very different Palestinian communities. The intifada singer and political activist Kamal Khalil has spent a lifetime struggling for the right to return to his ancestral village in the West Bank. Growing up on the socially dispossessed periphery of the Jordanian nationscape, Kamal developed a profound sense of exilic nationalism realized in his performances of Palestinian protest songs. Such songs brought forth in the minds of his audience alternative aesthetic realities in which the Palestinian nation could be celebrated, mourned, or otherwise performed from within foreign state regimes. Through such performances participants were able to performatively sing and dance the nation into existence, to assert agency over their collective experiences, and to maintain the ideational links which constitute the nation in exile. More importantly for Kamal such songs offered opportunities to experience and articulate the Palestinian resistance from afar: to feel Palestinian. His performances opened spaces for feeling as if he were experiencing, perhaps even participating in, the struggle for self-determination, creating a vital connection, a belonging, to the nation in exile.

The elder Abu Hani, by contrast, took a slightly different approach. For him Palestine was defined and circumscribed by a shared cultural history of indigenous practices and dispositions. Manifest in the line dance, al-dabke, Palestinian lifeways constituted the ideational and performative links between the self and the nation. Throughout Abu Hani's prolific career he has sought to study and preserve the authentic Palestinian

folklore against forced exile and cultural erasure. In collecting the stories, poems, proverbs, folk songs, and dances of his pre-1948 generation, Abu Hani has attempted to safeguard and revive *al-waṭan al-aṣīl* (the pure nation), an image of Palestine uncontaminated by time, colonialism, and foreign influence. The idyllic Palestine articulated here is encapsulated in the expressive practices (steps, gestures, poetry, food, dress, and melodies) of a lost generation of ancestors. To preserve the dabke is to preserve the nation. Indeed, to dance the dabke is to dance the nation in its purest form. In the face of Israeli encroachment and the erasure of Palestinian space, time, and presence, the preservation of indigenous practices such as the dabke forcefully resists dispossession. Folklore is resistance. Detached from its “precious soil,” Palestinian identity, history, and nation must be kept alive, carried, preserved, and performed. It must endure, made manifest in the cultural practices and dispositions of its people, “in our hearts” and in “the ground beneath our stamping feet.”

For rapper Tamer Nafar and his DAM cohorts, Palestinian identity pivots on an axis of shared experiences of racism and political dispossession. To be Palestinian, in this sense, means to be engaged in the struggle for racial and ethnic equality. The perceived iconicity between Tupac Shakur’s repertory of politically charged rap and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination positions the American rapper within the national imaginary. For this reason Tupac may be considered a shahīd, memorialized as a fallen hero for Palestinian liberation. In contrast to Kamal Khalil and Abu Hani, Tamer Nafar does not conceptualize Palestine based solely on shared indigenous practices or exilic nationalism. Rather he defines Palestine by the terrain of subaltern resistance to racialized oppression and state injustice. A Palestinian is one who resists such oppression, regardless of geography, history, or culture.

To be sure, each of these three artist-activist-archivists recognized the importance of performance in the articulation of Palestinian identity. They understood that performance inscribes within the minds of participants powerful indices of national identity through shared experience and history. And while each believed music and musical performance to be powerful modes of communicating nationalist sentiment, they each, in effect, defined the nation in radically different terms. In activism Kamal Khalil defined the nation in shared experiences of forced exile and the struggle for return. In folklore Abu Hani defined the nation through the preservation of seemingly authentic Palestinian lifeways and practices.

And in hip-hop Tamer Nafar explored the Palestinian condition via transnational discourses of youth culture and racial injustice.

Each of the examples further points toward three very different Palestinian communities: in exile (Jordan), under occupation (West Bank), and in '48 (Israel). Moving fluidly between these three sociocultural and geographic frames, this book examines the dynamics of history, nationalism, and resistance as realized through music performance. Central to this endeavor is the assertion that each of the above processes is best understood through the prism of context and social action, as performances of aesthetics and ideation. In this book I explore how Palestinians, through music performance, have fashioned and disseminated markers of a distinct Palestinian identity and then trace how this identity has been historically articulated through various local, national, and transnational contexts. In so doing, my analysis engages discourses of power, hegemony, and resistance and argues for the utility of music performance in resolving central questions of individual subjectivity, agency, and collective identity formation.

BELONGING

At the very heart of these vignettes, these performances, is a profound desire for belonging. Indeed belonging remains a foundational concern to ethnomusicology given its centrality to issues of social differentiation and reproduction. In this project I am principally concerned with the various ways discourses, technologies, and other power/knowledge networks serve to produce the relationships within which people and objects interact. Further I am interested in exploring the ways power discourses produce bodies, subjectivities, and identities. But beyond Foucauldian concerns with what makes us who we are amidst conflicting and competing power relations, there remains an essential discussion to be had at the level of affect. It is a primary concern of this book to investigate both the lines of allegiance and fracture that determine the order of things as well as the affective moves individuals make to satisfy the longing for social solidarity and synchrony. The perpetual drive to be, and to belong, is a primary concern of identity politics, exilic nationalism, political resistance, and humanist advocacy. Put another way, all these performances have at their core the insatiable drive to belong, to be at peace with oneself among others, to transcend the well-documented Palestinian condition of liminality and dispossession, and to escape perpetual movement, fear, and loss.

The issue is not one of identity, merely, but one of identification. In all of the above vignettes the artists are grappling with fundamental issues of what it means to be Palestinian, and what it means to resist. They each carefully locate a sense of Palestinian identity, or belonging, within ephemeral moments of performative identification. Here the conceptual move from identity to identification seems appropriate in that it allows for the transience of belonging to emerge in more nuanced ways. One does not simply “belong” to the nation. Rather, belonging is a performative achievement accomplished through the ritualized citation of the “national” in performance. Contemporary ethnomusicological understandings of identity have long since destabilized any reified notions of the term. Yet in moving toward an understanding of belonging based in specific identification processes and performances, I seek to call attention to the very active means by which individuals participate in their own subjectivation and the contexts within which this is achieved. It is in the coordinated act of identification, illuminated most clearly in ritualized moments of social performance, that belonging as performative affect may be more critically located in time and space. By repositioning our focal awareness toward these ephemeral moments of social performance, moments of active identification, we begin to understand the performativity of belonging.

Performativity, a term arising from within linguistics yet applied so beautifully in the gender theory of Judith Butler, is of central concern to this discussion, for it problematizes conventional understandings of belonging and identity, by focusing on the very production of selves as material effects of these identification processes. Propelling a theoretical discussion first introduced by Austin, Searle, Derrida, and Foucault, Judith Butler employs performativity as a means to understand the myriad ways identities, bodies in fact, are passionately produced and performed amidst fields of social and political consequence. It is with the performativity of belonging that the above artists are most concerned. For them Palestine exists, comes to exist, and continues to exist as performative: a reiterative citation of power that produces the very phenomena it is intended to regulate.¹ Through these performances my interlocutors are marked as nationals, fashioned as Palestinians, yet in the act of marking, the performance regulates, constrains and otherwise mediates fundamental aspects of what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to “resist.”² All these performances, of political activism, of racial equality, and of cul-

tural preservation, are themselves citational practices that in their repetition give materiality to the belongings they purport to describe. In a manner of speaking, they constitute “Palestine” and “Palestinians” amidst ever-shifting fields of consequence, power, and agency.

Music, Power, and Resistance

Drawing from recent work in feminist scholarship examining diffuse operations of human agency amidst fields of subordination, researchers in the humanities have long sought to better understand the ways hegemonic discourses may be subverted and redeployed for myriad interests and agendas. Ethnomusicologists and folklorists have questioned the dialectics of consolidating and subverting power structures, exploring the many possibilities for musicians to fluidly redirect and resignify dominant signs and meanings in accord with their own interests. This literature reveals the ways power articulates through virtually “every process of cultural creation and interpretation” but is divided along the nature of music and political movements more generally.³ On the one hand, music has often been romanticized as reflecting an authentic, counterhegemonic voice of the masses struggling against foreign domination, an effectual means of empowerment and transcending structures of domination. On the other hand, the very idioms of performance artists use to enter into these fields are often based in propagandized discourses, class structures, and state regimes that serve only to secure their subordination to normative political ideology. It seems that the aesthetic tools of empowerment are created, made meaningful, by the very power structures struggled against. Simply put, submitting to cliché nationalist tropes and essentialized claims of national identity appear to be routine machinations of nationalist music and the emancipatory politics of self-determination. However, a central component of this book involves understanding the power dynamics within which such clichéd nationalist tropes are articulated and imagined as a means of locating and interrogating diffuse sites of agency. What are the questions or anxieties for which an assertion of essentialized, primordial notions of national identity are an appropriate answer? Who benefits from the circulation of these tropes? And how does this enable or inhibit larger discussions of power and agency?

Contemporary ethnomusicological accounts of power have largely stalled in their attempts to provide a theoretical framework for under-

standing both the social structures that create and sustain formations of domination and the potentialities for subverting those formations. The problem, as I see it, is a reluctance to step outside the faulty premise that all social action may be mapped onto an axis of domination (by the powerful) and empowerment (for the powerless). Lila Abu-Lughod, for example, has effectively criticized many of the assumptions underlying empowerment and domination-centered literatures. Reflecting on her own work among the Bedouin tribe Awlād ‘Ali, Abu-Lughod challenges the literature for being too enamored with “explaining resistance and finding resisters,” rather than attending to the larger workings of power.⁴ In this assertion, Abu-Lughod draws attention to the inability of feminist scholarship to fully theorize power outside of the binary of domination and empowerment. “There is perhaps a tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated. By reading resistance in this way, we collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the workings of power.”⁵

Instead Abu-Lughod recommends that resistance be employed as “a diagnostic of power,” as a means to map social relations and better understand the “complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power.”⁶ Rather than interpreting acts of resistance purely in terms of opposition to, or liberation from, dominant forms of power, they should be understood as reinscribing practices embedded within systems of meaning, values, and aesthetics from which the idea of resistance is even a possible form of action. In this sense, “attention to the forms of resistance in particular societies can help us become critical of partial and reductionist theories of power.”⁷

To conceptualize resistance as a diagnostic of historically changing structures of power moves the discussion beyond the simple binary of powerful and powerless and serves to interrogate acts of resistance within the shifting relations from which they emerge. As the artists introduced above navigate deep-seated experiences of exile and occupation, they do so by employing a poetics made meaningful from within the power relations from which they operate. If we are to fully move beyond the tendency to romanticize these expressive practices as resistance, it is essential to understand each performative act, each song, poem, dance, gesture, as a tool for understanding the dynamics of power from which it arose. In

their myriad and diverse articulations of “Palestine,” each of the above artists attempts to satisfy specific needs and values born of multiple and diffuse experiences of dispossession. A central focus of this book involves operationalizing music as a means to better understand these fields of power and agency, these experiences, within which the discourse of Palestinian nationalism comes to take on meaning.

While Abu-Lughod moves the discussion of power and agency in new directions, she nevertheless stops short of problematizing the very idea of resistance as a useful category of analysis. She does not challenge the utility of the term “resistance” itself as a means to describe and understand the entire range of activity which might prove wholly indifferent and/or unresponsive to challenging hegemonic norms. For Abu-Lughod, resistance seems to be a relatively easy form of political activity to locate and identify. Rather it would seem appropriate, as Saba Mahmood suggests, to further investigate the consequences of employing a universal category of acts, deemed resistance, without further interrogating the conditions within which these acts acquired their particular meanings.⁸ Perhaps the very notion of resistance itself forecloses potentially important discoveries on the dynamics of power given that it often imposes a discursive legacy of progressive and emancipatory politics difficult to see around. Couched within the emancipatory politics of the powerless, conventional understandings of resistance are perhaps ill-equipped to account for the myriad ways that acts of subversion may in fact serve to consolidate, rather than destabilize, entrenched power discourses.

In both the emancipatory and progressive politics of academia as well as the streets of Palestinian refugee camps the concept of “resistance” (*maqawma*) is often carelessly wielded as a blunt instrument, imposing itself on various modes of contestation regardless of context and local meaning. It is assumed rather than determined, asserted rather than demonstrated. What is more, the term brings with it a discursive legacy of Orientalist inquiry, applied by academics as a means of accommodating and naturalizing difference, and adopted by Palestinian musicians and activists in an effort to build superficial notions of solidarity. In effect, the overdetermination of resistance in both of these contexts serves to stabilize meaning in ways that problematize representation. My approach throughout this text has been to consider how locally situated poetics influence the meanings of resistance as practice and mode of being, and to further explore the political consequences brought to bear when musi-

cians freely assert this term. Much like “identity,” “race,” or “nation,” I have approached resistance as a performative construct. As such, resistance must be carefully scrutinized as an object of analysis, rather than as a lens through which to interpret political action.

Thinking critically about this issue, it seems important to interrogate the discursive tactics that imbue acts of resistance with their particular meanings. Despite a near ubiquitous use of the term, among the many artists discussed in this book there is a large spectrum of what exactly resistance is, how it might be defined, and in what ways it articulates with dominant power structures. To resist the occupation takes on drastically different connotations as one moves through time and space between various Palestinian communities. What becomes apparent in thinking through these questions is the importance of expressive culture (music, dance, poetry, graphic design, and so on) in fashioning diverse conceptualizations of what exactly resistance means, and under what circumstances it might be pursued.

Ethnomusicology and Palestinian Nationalism

In the field of ethnomusicology performative domains such as music, art, poetry, and dance have been shown to be constitutive modalities for the construction of national identity formations.⁹ Nationalist movements throughout the world have revived, invented, or preserved various cultural arts in the assertion of a strategically engineered national identity. Music, given its shared indexical associations of time and space, participatory dynamics, and group formative capacities, is a particularly powerful means of fostering national sentiment in the service of a political agenda. My goal in this book is to examine musical performance in relation to its contributions to the interpretive processes by which the Palestinian nation comes into focus across various sociocultural and historical terrains.

Nevertheless, any discussion of Palestinian nationalism and identity runs the risk of perpetuating a vast literature of essentialist and primordial approaches, studies governed by the premise of legitimating and validating Palestinian claims of history and presence against threats of cultural erasure and appropriation. Such studies use historical and cultural evidence to authenticate a distinct national identity in an effort to advance Palestinian claims for self-determination. Here essentialist renderings of Palestinian identity, rooted in timeless history, are reinforced without

properly interrogating the various ways the nation is actively imagined, represented, constructed, and governed under myriad circumstances. Zachary Lockman has written persuasively on this issue in his research on the historical connections between the Yishuv (Jewish communities of Palestine prior to 1948) and the indigenous Palestinian population in the period leading up to 1948. Working through archival collections and historical documents, he identifies a “dual society” model in which scholars working within either Israeli Zionist or Arab nationalist narratives have failed to critically question many of the categories of historical and cultural analysis they deploy. In such studies both Palestinian and Jewish communities are presented as primordial, self-contained, and homogeneous entities, developing and maturing along separate historical trajectories within fields of meaning unique to each group. In each case Israeli and Palestinian national identity formations are theorized as natural, if not pre-given modes of consciousness, rather than seen as constructs derived from historical, social, and political fields of relations and reactions.

Given that each nationalist narrative is employed primarily within a discursive frame of survival against potential destruction and exile (to be driven into the sea, or to be transferred across the river), to challenge the dominant nationalist paradigm is to potentially endanger the community and provide ideological ammunition for competing claims to territory, presence, and history. However, the implications for submitting to the pressures of this type of research are perhaps even more damaging, for as Lockman writes, “The result has been a historiography which has hardly questioned the representation of the communities [Israeli and Palestinian] as self-evidently coherent entities largely or entirely uninfluenced by one another. This approach has rendered their mutually constitutive impact virtually invisible, tended to downplay both intracommunal divisions and intercommunal linkages, and focused attention on episodes of violent conflict, implicitly assumed to be the only normal, significant, or even possible form of interaction.”¹⁰

To confront the deficiencies of Israeli/Palestinian historiography, Lockman seeks to develop a “relational history” and historiography cognizant of moments of interdependence and interaction that call into question the Arab/Jew binary. Drawing on Perry Anderson’s plea for a “‘relational’ history that studies the incidence—reciprocal or asymmetrical—of different national or territorial units and cultures on each other,” Lockman seeks to develop a “relational paradigm” that challenges the narratives

and categories of the “dual society model.”¹¹ In this relational paradigm the histories of Arabs and Jews are understood as being shaped within a larger field of social, political, economic, and cultural interactions. In pursuing research from within the discourse of the nation-state, national formations are rarely questioned. Rather they become reified entities operating in relation only to other nations. Violent conflict and political dialogue overshadow mutually constitutive histories and intercommunal linkages between and within national communities. What is more, the dual society paradigm diverts attention away from the very processes through which these national identities are constructed and performed across various social spaces. In what ways are the boundaries between communities drawn and maintained, and how are the practices of exclusion and conflict negotiated?

This notion of relationality is an important step toward releasing the hold of the persistent primordial nation-state, as well as highlighting forms of cultural interaction that are largely ignored as aberrations in both Palestinian and Israeli scholarship. However, this construct of relationality must also be applied within each national narrative. Although only a portion of this text explicitly examines Israeli and Palestinian interaction (chapters 8 and 9), throughout this text I have attempted to employ a relational history to the variously imagined and often contradictory and competing claims to Palestinian identity. While it is extremely important to bring out the mutually constitutive interactions between Palestinians and Israelis, it is equally important to reveal fractures and discontinuities from within each national formation, or to be more specific, to reveal myriad ways competing and conflicting segments of society (refracted through class, gender, religion, and so on) struggle for influence in defining and actualizing the nation. Among Palestinians this approach presents several challenges. To imply that there are differences between Palestinians in Israel, under occupation, and the near diaspora (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon) is to tread on the unspoken nationalist myth that Palestinians are united in their struggles against Zionism and share equally in the traumas of occupation and exile. Moreover to bring out the processes by which gender, religion, and class crosscut and destabilize the rigidity of the nation is to open up a discursive space for talking about shared communities of practice and interaction beyond and across the Palestinian-Israeli divide. In revealing the many different ways dispossession has been experienced by Palestinians in exile, under occupation,

and in '48 (Israel), it is my explicit goal to interrogate the many ways Palestinian identity, nation, and resistance are constructed and reproduced, performed amidst differentially situated fields of meaning and consequence. Nations are necessarily founded on a matrix of myth and meaning filtered predominantly through the discourses of collective history and experience. For scholars to transcend the mythologized pasts and to criticize the filters through which the nation is reified as natural and timeless, they must confront many of the components of their own identities as citizens and nationals.

In seeking to explore the relational histories and identities of Palestinians in exile, under occupation, and in '48 (Israel), a critical understanding of the processes of popular culture is especially important.¹² Although in the literature of Palestinian studies cultural practices are largely included only inasmuch as they reflect “greater” political and economic forces, it is the intention of this book to reveal how popular culture (specifically musical texts, sounds, images, and practices) is in fact a constitutive modality of collective identity formation within which broader social forces emerge. Heretofore, the literature on Palestinian folklore and nationalism has by and large constructed music, poetry, and dance as epiphenomenal tools for the mobilization of oppositional politics and ideology. Scholars have shown how expressive media often reflects larger, more pertinent issues of politics.¹³ So, for example, graffiti, poetry, and music are all symptoms, manifestations, or expressions of forced exile and the brutality of foreign occupation. They are texts—things to be read and interpreted within various frames of class, ethnicity, religion, and so forth. As such the appearance of expressive art forms and media are illustrative of the “voice of the masses” and are the results of various political discourses. In contrast, such expressive media should be seen as constitutive fields where the political and ideational effects of the occupation are not only expressed, but given materiality. The so-called texts of popular culture (songs, poems, paintings, dances) are not merely things in and of themselves, but rather they demarcate the boundaries of a discursive field in which ideas of self and the world may be engaged and naturalized within or against the dominant order.¹⁴

Specifically in the Palestinian diaspora music, dance, poetry, and literature have been instrumental in generating and maintaining national sentiment. Forms of performative action such as these have been shown not only to alleviate patterns of political dispossession and provide a counter

ideology to social inequality, but also to guide participants through a network of shared meanings that foster a distinct Palestinian national consciousness in exile. In this book I explore the aesthetic and ideational components of this particular national consciousness and trace how resultant feelings of solidarity, engendered by such performances, are then put into service by various politico-nationalist groups and organizations. In the process, performative spaces, and the various arts and practices that fill them, are examined in detail as sites of subversion, resignification, and nation building amidst fields of violence, occupation, and state terror. My analysis reveals the various ways Palestinians have been able to assert counterhegemonic and/or subversive nationalist identities against often-violent countermeasures of state control, that within performative spaces Palestinians may, in essence, declare what they dare not say and do on the streets. They may dance the dabke wearing the kūfiya and raise the flag of their ancestral homeland amidst fields of potentially violent consequence.

The idea that music, nationalism, and resistance function as performative, as mutually constitutive modalities for individual subjectivity and collective identity formation, is a recurrent theme of this book. Drawing from folklore studies, sociolinguistics, and cognitive psychology, ethnomusicologists have shown that music, as social process, is best understood within its various frames of articulation. In so doing, these researchers have pursued a new direction of ethnographic inquiry, placing emphasis on the processual, the ephemeral, and the performative. In this book I propose that a similar analytic may be applied to the study of nations and nationalism. As music is made manifest in the articulation and interaction of participants within a socially constituted performance environment, so, too, are nations themselves products, or effects, of a performativity of ideation framed within discourses of power and agency. The analytic of studying nations and nationalism, as one might study music and musical performance, opens up the discursive, interactive, and performative aspects of Palestinian sociality and further reorients nations as organic sets of ephemeral relations, performative effects, rather than reified social constructs.

In the absence of political, economic, and other material means with which to articulate national sentiment, Palestinians in exile and under occupation are often left only expressive media through which to assert national belonging. Protests, demonstrations, concerts, lectures, weddings, and funerals are important sites within which such performances

take place. Each involves a transaction of cultural norms, national signs, engineered to elicit powerful feelings of belonging and community.¹⁵ In performances of the nation, participants enact prescribed roles, follow detailed scripts of engagement, and act out within defined spaces national feelings and identities. Through their citationality to dominant cultural norms, participants define and redefine the established lexicon, or poetics, of the Palestinian nation. Throughout this study I attempt to transcribe and analyze the ideational transcripts of these performances, exploring the historical, cultural, and material connections between Palestinian music, the nation, and its myriad understandings of resistance. Whether it be a call to arms in the refugee camps of Amman, the stomping feet of a folkloric dance troupe in Jerusalem, or the acrobatic twists and turns of break-dancing teenagers in Ramallah, music performance constitutes a primary process for understanding what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to fight for its self-determination.