LIBERATING SONGS: PALESTINE PUT TO MUSIC

JOSEPH MASSAD

This article surveys the history of songs about Palestine from 1948 to the present, examining how the changes in musical style and lyrics correspond to the changes in the exigencies of the Palestinian struggle itself. Tracing the primacy of revolutionary Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s, the central role of Fayruz and the Rahbani brothers in the wake of the 1967 war, and the emergence of Palestinian groups and singers as of the late 1960s, the article provides historical and political analyses of these songs as central features of how Arab popular culture has dealt, and continues to deal, with the Palestine tragedy.

FROM THE "MARSEILLAISE" and the "Internationale" to revolutionary Soviet songs and "Nueva Canción" in Latin America, and from national anthems to nationalist songs in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe to songs of the anticolonial struggles for national liberation in Asia and Africa, songs have played an important role in mobilizing the masses. The mobilizing role of song was equally vital for Palestinians and Arabs in the struggle against Zionism's colonization of Palestine. This role was augmented by the mass availability of transistor radios in the 1950s and the mass availability of television sets beginning in the 1960s and of cassette players in the 1970s.

The history of songs dealing with the Palestinian struggle parallels in many ways the history of the Palestinian struggle itself. While songs supporting Palestinian liberation in the late 1950s and the early 1960s expressed the confidence of the Nasirist revolution, post-1967 songs expressed, on the one hand, the despair of defeat and, on the other, hope in the Palestinian guerrilla movement then emerging. The Lebanese civil war and the ensuing Israeli invasions of Lebanon produced another crop of songs about the

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struggle, including the then-still recent loss of Jerusalem. Until the 1970s, non-Palestinian Arab singers took the lead, with Palestinian singers moving to the forefront thereafter. More recently, and especially since 1998, a new spate of enthusiasm has expressed itself in songs for Palestine by both Palestinians and other Arabs. The more recent songs are reminiscent of those of the 1950s, at least in performance style, though not necessarily in lyrics and music.

What has the role of song been in the struggle for Palestine? What is the nature of the relationship between popular sentiment and song? Are these songs part of a culture industry that defines popular sentiment and generates political commitments, or are the images and metaphors they deploy expressions of such sentiment? By exploring these and other questions, this paper aims to chart the history of song in the Palestine tragedy and its impact on Palestinian and Arab popular memory and political agency. The aim is not to present an exhaustive survey, but rather to examine the effects of the most popular songs and those with the greatest impact. This is especially important in view of the lack of substantial scholarship on this question. While most books dealing with individual singers discuss these singers' patriotic songs, there has been no major academic engagement with the overall history and role of patriotic, nationalist, and revolutionary songs in the modern Arab world, nor with their role in the Palestine tragedy specifically. This paper aims to fill the gap with regard to the history of song in the Palestine struggle.

While Palestinians and other Arabs expressed their sense of loss in a number of literary and artistic genres (including poetry, novels, painting, film, and plays), song, by its very nature the most popular of forms, probably reached the largest number of people. Songs responding to the 1948 Palestinian catastrophe (*nakba*) urged the Palestinians and other Arabs to liberate the stolen homeland and were sung by the leading singers of the day, including the Lebanese Najah Salam,[1] the Syrian Farid al-Atrash, and the Egyptian composer and singer Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab. The latter's song "Filastin" (released in 1949, lyrics written in 1948 by 'Ali Mahmud Taha) stood out most sharply. 'Abd al-Wahhab, however, was to achieve his greatest influence celebrating the 1952 Egyptian Revolution and its hopes of liberating Palestine and Algeria—and this notwithstanding his earlier songs for the monarchy brought down by the Revolution and his subsequent songs for Anwar al-Sadat's regime that supplanted the Revolution. Indeed, many singers and artists (including Umm Kulthum, who also sang for the monarchy and for Nasser but *not* for Sadat) proved to be more politically mobile than the constituencies their songs mobilized.

REVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

Ever since the turn of the twentieth century, Cairo was the undisputed cultural center of the Arab East. By 1952, when the Free Officers ousted King

Faruq and unleashed their youthful revolution, the Egyptian entertainment industry (theater, cinema, dance, and song) had no rival in the Arab world and reached even to non-Arab Iran. The role of the state in revolutionary Egypt was instrumental in the funding and support of song, especially through the new medium of state-owned television.[2] ʻAbd al-Wahhab was the preeminent composer of the time, writing songs that became instant classics celebrating Arab unity, Egyptian socialism, and the short-lived political union with Syria (1958–1961)[3] and calling for the liberation of Palestine. These songs were performed with full orchestras and sung by the most important artists of the day, including Fayza Ahmad (Syrian-Egyptian), ʻAbd al-Halim Hafiz (Egyptian), Warda al-Jaza'iriyah (Algerian), Fayda Kamil (Egyptian), Sabah (Lebanese), Najat al-Saghira (Syro-Egyptian), and Shadia (Egyptian), as well as himself. Beginning with "Watani Habibi" (My beloved homeland, lyrics by Ahmad Shafiq Kamil, 1958), they went on to include "al-Jil al-Saʻed" (The rising generation, lyrics by Husayn al-Sayyid, 1961) and "Sawt al-Jamahir" (The voice of the masses, lyrics by Husayn al-Sayyid, 1963), which were also televised with corresponding footage showing people from all walks of life.[4]

While the music of the 1949 song "Filastin" (also known as "Akhi jawaza al-zalimun al-mada") used both Arab and Western instruments (oud, *nay, qanun, riqq,* violins) and featured quarter tones mixed up in segments with Western scales, the music of the grand nationalist songs of the post-1958 period had almost exclusively Western instrumentation, scales, and style and resembled Western martial music (though the syncopation and rhythmic arrangements, as well as parts of the orchestration, bore ʻAbd al-Wahhab's modernist Arab stamp). And while "Filastin" utilized a slow-moving melody to assert that the youth would protect the land of Palestine or die trying, the later "Watani Habibi" and "Sawt al-Jamahir" roused the masses through Western martial music which ʻAbd al-Wahhab punctuated with several bars of emotive melodies in his distinctive style. The lyrics of "Watani Habibi" address the Arab homeland with the words "The voice is your voice, Arab and free, and not an echo of West or East," but the orchestra lacked a single Arab or Eastern instrument.

This is an important aspect of the persistence of the colonial legacy in postrevolutionary times. Although Arab music in Egypt was Westernized during the years of British colonialism under pioneers like Sayyid Darwish and ʻAbd al-Wahhab, the Revolution, which coupled its anticolonialism with a commitment to a Western modernization project, did not object to the colonial pedigree of this music. Indeed, an antiessentialism characterized this aspect of Arab nationalism and its ambivalence toward the West and its own musical tradition. While "Watani Habibi" asserts pride in a pure Arab identity uncontaminated by East or West, it does so unhampered by essentialist arguments of what constitutes nationalist music. Nationalist music, then, is seen more through lyrics that express the sentiments of the nation, while the musical genre is appropriated as global culture that has been Arabized. ʻAbd al-

Wahhab himself had performed "Watani Habibi" in rehearsal accompanied only by his oud, but that recording was not released until the late 1990s, several years after his death and almost four decades after the original song came out. The two recordings are presented, however, more as different styles of the same song than in terms of "authenticity" or "Westernization."

Both songs, "Watani Habibi" and "Sawt al-Jamahir," include in addition to their multisinger cast a chorus that sounds more like a choir. While both songs celebrate the anticolonial and revolutionary achievement in Egypt, they also address parts of the Arab nation yet to be liberated, most prominently Palestine and Algeria (but also Bahrain, Oman, and Yemen, likewise still under European colonial rule). The rhyming refrain of "Sawt al-Jamahir" states that:

> The voice of the masses is that which awakens the generations,
> It is the uprising of the strength and will of heroes,
> It is the one that speaks,
> The one that rules,
> It is the hero behind every struggle

"Sawt al-Jamahir" is very explicit with regard to the Palestinian *nakba*:

> In the name of our union,
> Rise O struggle,
> And tell the aggressor Zionists,
> That the banner of Arabism
> Found its stars
> Ever since the year 1948
> . . . the masses say that the hour
> Of revolutionary action has struck
> In Palestine, in the name of the masses

The song's optimistic tone reflects the triumphalism that engulfed the Arab world after Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in 1956 and the withdrawal of the invading British, French, and Israeli forces following the Suez War. Indeed, the belief was that the liberation of Palestine was at hand.

The popularity of Nasir (which means "Victor") had multiplied during those years, with 'Abd al-Wahhab, who recently had celebrated the monarchy, in the forefront of those who lionized the young Egyptian president. ('Abd al-Wahhab's chameleonic politics as a "court artist" for hire were manifested in his later celebration of Sadat, especially on the occasion of the latter's return from the infamous 1977 trip to West Jerusalem when, at Sadat's request, he sang "Biladi Biladi," written by the early-century Egyptian composer Sayyid Darwish.[5]) 'Abd al-Wahhab's mid-1950s martial song "Nasir" (written by Husayn al-Sayyid in colloquial Egyptian Arabic) was performed publicly in Cairo, with an audience of tens of thousands acting as chorus and repeating the refrain "Nasir, beloved of all."[6] Indeed, Nasir himself was seen as the leader of the march on Palestine alongside the Palestinian people. In this vein, the song's lyrics state:

> Your people, your people, O Palestine,
> Will never let go of their revenge
> For the liberation army is at the gates
> Waiting to return home,
> Your sun O Palestine shall rise,
> And the rights of the refugees shall be restored,
> All the Arab people are your weapon, [O Palestine],
> And their weapons are unity and nationalism
>
> Nasir, your banner is Arab,
> And the next step,
> O Nasir [Victor], is against Zionism,
> Nasir, beloved of all, Nasir

The public performance of "Nasir" and the popular participation in such events exemplified the general mobilizational capabilities of the revolutionary regime. At the affective level, if not at the political level, such mobilization produced a sense of unity among the masses, especially as they formed a chorus chanting *in unison* their love for Nasir and for the Revolution. The songs of this period reflected a conscious state strategy of mobilization for a revolution whose aims included the liberation of Palestine. The pedagogical role that song played was Freiresque in its approach and aimed to create a new type of *engagê* revolutionary culture.

THE 1967 WAR AND THE RAHBANI BROTHERS

While these songs stirred the masses to support the Revolution and the Palestinian struggle, the 1967 defeat brought this mobilization to a temporary halt. Post-1967 songs showed more of a melange of sadness and despair combined with the hope vested in the fida'iyyin. At the same time, Egypt's near monopoly in song production and distribution declined measurably after its defeat. New foci of song production in other Arab countries were becoming more prominent. A major example were the Lebanese Fayruz and the Rahbani brothers ('Asi, to whom she was married, and Mansur) who composed for her, producing the most popular of such songs in this period.

The Fayruz-Rahbani team had released their militant martial song "Sayfun fal-yushhar" (A sword must be brandished, lyrics by Sa'id 'Aql) in early 1967, before the outbreak of the June War, but it is their paean to Jerusalem, "Zahrat al-Mada'in" (The flower of cities), which stands out as the most popular song of the period. The music is quintessentially Rahbani, with Western scales and instruments and a melody that vacillates between martial music, Byzantine Arab church hymns, and somber sentimentality. The song opens with a genuflecting gesture: "It is for you that I pray, O city of prayers, for you I pray, O Jerusalem." In contrast to the exclusivist Israeli nationalist songs popular in Israel before and after the Jewish conquest of the city (such as "Yerushalayim shel Zehav," "Jerusalem of Gold," sung by Naomi Shemer), the lyrics include reference to Jerusalem's synagogues as well as to its churches and mosques. Nonetheless, the emphasis is on Christianity and Islam and their history in the city, which the Jewish conquest was threatening. While Jerusalem's plight, according to the song, is so sad that even "the child in the manger[7] and his mother Mary are two crying faces, crying for those who have been dispersed," the tone is one of resistance. Thus Fayruz declares:

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> The gate of our city shall not be locked,
> For I shall go to pray.
> I shall knock at the gates,
> And I shall open up the gates
> O River Jordan, you shall wash
> My face with your holy water
> And you shall erase, O River Jordan,
> The remaining footprints of the barbarians

Indeed, this will be accomplished, as far as the song is concerned, through resisting and fighting back:

> For Jerusalem is ours, and the house is ours
> With our own hands we shall restore the glory of Jerusalem
> With our own hands, we shall bring peace to Jerusalem
> Peace shall come to Jerusalem

The lyrics—written, like the music, by the Rahbanis—have immortalized this song, which was released after an Australian Jewish terrorist burned parts of al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969. Indeed the song's importance continues to this day, to the extent that the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Culture and Information in 1998 awarded its first Jerusalem Prize for Culture to Fayruz.

Other songs by the Rahbanis tell the story of individual Palestinian cities, including "Jaffa" (sung by Joseph 'Azar) and "Bisan" (sung by Fayruz). The sad theme of "Bisan" recounts the peaceful life of this wintry village ("where April slept") being overtaken by the violence of Zionism. In her most moving song, "Sanarji'u Yawman" (We shall return one day), the nostalgia is such that the returning masses (perhaps in an ironic parallel to Moses) are terrified of dying before reaching Palestine:

> O Heart, slow down,
> Do not throw yourself
> In exhaustion on the road of return,
> For it pains us to see that tomorrow,
> The flocks of birds will return
> While we still remain here

Other songs of the period that insist on Palestinian return include "Raji'un" (We are returning). The jealousy felt by exiled Palestinians for migrating birds, who return to Palestine while they, the refugees, cannot, is ubiquitous in literary and artistic forms of the period.

The Rahbanis, however, did not limit themselves to songs, but also produced a famous Broadway-style musical *Jibal al-Suwwan* (Mounts of flint) in 1969 to analogize the Palestinian tragedy under Israeli occupation. In a mythical Palestine renamed "Jibal al-Suwwan," the people struggle against the foreign usurpers, who arrest the resistors and use psychological warfare to weaken the population. Fayruz plays the heroine, Ghurbah (which means "exile"), the exiled daughter of the leader of the first antioccupation rebellion who had been killed by the enemy. Returning to her homeland to lead the new rebellion, Ghurbah reassures the fearful yet steadfast population:

> Fear not, for there are not enough prisons to detain everyone
> They will arrest many, but many will remain
> And with those who remain, we will continue [the struggle].[8]

The themes that these lyrics deployed were not unique; they were the same as those deployed in other cultural productions since 1948, including novels, poems, and films, whose production (except for film) was not necessarily subject to state funding. In this sense, the popular was indeed being defined by a class of artists and literary producers who were not necessarily state functionaries or subject to a capitalized culture industry. Still, these figures were central to the articulation of what came to be known as popular sentiment.

The importance of the Rahbanis is such that renowned Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish declared on the occasion of the death of 'Asi al-Rahbani in 1986 that:

> It may not be clear that the Palestinian people were not as creative in producing their national song as was the Rahbani phenomenon, which mastered it for the Palestini-

> ans and for all Arabs. The Palestinians showed off their aesthetic identity through the Arab songs of the Rahbanis . . . so much so that [these songs] became the reference point for our hearts; they became the restored homeland, and the motivation for us to march forward on the long caravan road.[9]

Up until 1967, the songs dealt with exiled Palestinians living in refugee camps in the areas surrounding their former country. With the occupation of what was left of Palestine in 1967, however, the songs began to deal as well with the Palestinian population that now fell under Israeli rule; Palestinian Israelis were still largely ignored. Like "Jibal al-Suwwan," Fayruz's song "Shawari' al-Quds al-'Atiqah" (The streets of old Jerusalem) addresses the people of the occupied land, sending them greetings ("salami lakum, ya ahl al-ard al-muhtallah").

Still, it is diaspora Palestinians who remained the object of most songs, as the vision of the return continued to predominate. In "Ya Jisran Khashabiyyan" (O wooden bridge) and "Jisr al-'Awda" (Bridge of return), Fayruz immortalized the bridges across the River Jordan across which Palestinians were driven by Israeli soldiers in 1967. It is in such songs that the role of the recently emergent Palestinian guerrillas is celebrated. In "Jisr al-'Awda," for example, Fayruz sings of a Palestinian boy, still in exile, who received for his twentieth birthday a machine gun to liberate the land of his forefathers. Umm Kulthum, in her sole song to Palestine (although she sang numerous songs for the revolution), proclaims her desire to join the revolutionaries in 1969 with "Asbaha al-Ana 'indi Bunduqiyyah" (I have now got me a rifle), a poem by the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani set to music by 'Abd al-Wahhab:

> I have now got me a rifle, to Palestine, take me with you
> To hills that are sad, like the face of the Magdalene
> To the green domes and the prophetic stones . . .
>
> I am with the revolutionaries,
> I am of the revolutionaries
> Ever since the day I carried my rifle,
> Palestine became only meters away
> O revolutionaries, in Jerusalem, in Hebron,
> In Bisan, in the Jordan Valley, in Bethlehem,
> Wherever you may be O free men
> Advance, advance, advance to Palestine,
> For there is only one path to Palestine,
> And it passes through the barrel of a gun

Indeed, the revolution was also a masculinizing ritual, wherein Arab women could transform themselves into men through participating in the liberation of Palestine. Umm Kulthum herself, whose status was beyond sex, as Hazim Saghiyyah argues,[10] declared in "Asbaha al-Ana 'indi Bunduqiyyah" that "I want to live and die as men do."[11]

Echoing Mao's "barrel of a gun" aside, other images called upon the recently occupied Palestinians to remain steadfast on the land. While analogies to returning flocks of birds saddened the Palestinians and stirred their envy, other analogies were deployed for Palestinians to emulate. For example, the image of trees as symbols of steadfastness became a commonplace. In "Jisr al-'Awda," Palestinians are enjoined to "remain like rooted trees that do not depart . . . like olive trees you shall reside, like the branches of time you shall remain present forever." In Fayruz's "Ahtarifu al-Huzna wa al-Intizar," the themes of waiting and of return continue to haunt the exiled Palestinians:

I grew up on the outside
I built another family
Like trees, I planted them so they stood tall before me
They even acquired a shadow on the ground
But then anew, we were hit by the wave of hatred
Here I am, inhabiting the void again,
For I was dispersed from my people twice
And I inhabited absence twice
My land remains on my mind
While I take up sadness and waiting as my profession

Christian motifs, as we saw earlier, were also common in many of these songs, as they have been in Palestinian poetry and painting as well. The Egyptian singer 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz's 1967 song "al-Masih" (The Messiah, lyrics by 'Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi and music by Baligh Hamdi) used Christ's Via Dolorosa as the main allegorical theme of Palestinian suffering. While other songs used Christian parallels, to my knowledge, "al-Masih" is one of only two songs in the entire archive of Arab nationalist songs that deployed Christian anti-Semitic motifs, with the lyrics asserting that the son of Jerusalem, like the Messiah, has now been "crucified, by the same Jews." (The other song is Fayruz's 1968 "Jisr al-'Awda," which declares that "those who had crucified every prophet have crucified my people tonight.") "Al-Masih" has an operatic style chorus and music composition interspersed with hymnlike melodic sections sung by Hafiz himself accompanied by Western instruments. Hafiz performed the song only once, in London at the Royal Albert Hall. He never recorded it in a studio and indeed never sang it again, although the live performance was replayed on Arab radio and television stations for years to come. The song was finally released on compact disc in 1999 on the twenty-second anniversary of Hafiz's death. It was rumored that Mossad threatened to assassinate Hafiz if he sang it again although close friends deny the rumor.[12]

THE PALESTINIAN GUERRILLAS AND SONGS OF THE UNDERGROUND

With the rise of the Palestinian guerrillas in the 1960s, and especially the hopes vested in them following the 1967 defeat of the Arab armies and the guerrillas' credible performance at the Battle of Karamah in 1968, a new crop of songs emerged celebrating the resistance and looking forward to Palestine's liberation. Songs by established singers as well as by underground dissident singers cheered the guerrillas on and became an important weapon in the struggle for Palestine. Among the more important of these is "Ya Falastiniyyeh" (O Palestinians), sung by famed Egyptian dissident singer Shaykh Imam 'Isa in 1968. This underground song became popular in Palestinian refugee camps, among the Palestinian guerrillas, as well as in dissident circles in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. The blind Shaykh Imam accompanied himself on the oud. In line with his quintessentially Arab compositions in the different *maqams*,[13] Shaykh Imam wrote the music for "Ya Falastiniyyeh" in the *Saba al-Shadi maqam* and to the Sufi Ayyubite *iqa'* (rhythm). The lyrics, written by his associate, the Egyptian dissident colloquial poet Ahmad Fu'ad Najm, were evocative of the condition of the Palestinians:

> O Palestinians, the fusilier has shot you
> With Zionism which kills the doves that live under your protection
>
> O Palestinians, I want to come and be with you, weapons in hand
> And I want my hands to go down with yours to smash the snake's head
> And then Hulagu's law[14] will die
>
> O Palestinians, exile has lasted so long
> That the desert is moaning from the refugees and the victims
> And the land remains nostalgic for its peasants who watered it
> Revolution is the goal, and victory shall be your first step[15]

The song became so popular that when the young Yasir Arafat visited Cairo in August 1968, he insisted on meeting the shaykh, who sang it for him.[16] Arafat's interest in Shaykh Imam is emblematic of the relationship between song and politics, wherein political songs were to become part and parcel of the very struggle they were representing and expressing.

Songs produced within the contexts of established states were broadcast on national radio and television stations and released on records in demonstration of the particular regime's commitment to the liberation of Palestine; Egypt and Lebanon stand out in this regard. As a rule, however, only songs found to be nonthreatening were broadcast throughout the Arab world—these included especially the songs of Fayruz and the Rahbanis. Many of 'Abd al-Wahhab's songs, however, were banned because they mixed the socialist goals and rhetoric of the Egyptian Revolution (to which not all Arab regimes subscribed) with the safer messages of Arab nationalism and the liberation of Palestine. Even in Egypt, the songs of Shaykh Imam were banned, and both he and his lyricist, the poet Najm, were jailed both by Nasir and Sadat for songs that questioned the government's commitment to the Egyptian people's welfare as well as to the Palestinian cause.

Meanwhile, a new genre of songs for Palestine produced by Palestinian diaspora singers linked to the newly autonomous PLO began to emerge. These, too, were underground, thereby escaping the censorship of the Arab regimes, whatever their ideology. Al-Firqah al-Markaziyyah (the Central Band), associated with Fatah, produced tens of revolutionary songs as of its establishment in 1969. These songs made use of folk Palestinian tunes sometimes combined with Western martial rhythms and tempos, but their lyrics were invariably in Palestinian Arabic sung in rural accents. Examples of these songs, which addressed both diaspora Palestinians and those living under occupation with militant revolutionism seemingly confident of victory, included "Ya Jamahir al-Ard al-Muhtallah" (O masses of the occupied land), "La Tahzanu" (Do not be sad), "Ana Samid" (I remain steadfast), "Kalashnikov," "Fida'iyyeh," and "'Ahd Allah Ma Nirhal" (By God we shall not depart).

In contrast to other song productions, generally sung by famous soloists, the songs of al-Firqah al-Markaziyyah were sung by a chorus of unknown and nameless male and female singers. The songs, which echoed the struggles of the Palestinian people and of the guerrillas who were fighting for them, were popularized through guerrilla radio transmitters in vans that drove around Amman and other areas of Jordan, broadcasting guerrilla news and nationalist songs, as well as from the Cairo-based radio station "Sawt al-Asifah Sawt Fath." After the expulsion of the fida'iyyin from Jordan in 1971, the PLO established the Radio of the Revolution ("Sawt Filastin Sawt al-Thawrah al-Filastiniyyah") in Lebanon. The station, along with others in Iraq and Syria where guerrilla groups were also allowed to broadcast, continued to give prominence to these songs, which became so popular in the region's refugee camps that most people knew them by heart.[17] By the mid to late 1970s, when cassette tapes became affordable and available on a mass scale, these songs could be heard in most camp households in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. A rising star of this genre of songs in the 1970s was Abu 'Arab, a Beirut-based Palestinian singer associated with the guerrillas who produced tens of songs about the struggle. His music also used folk Palestinian tunes, including popular *mawwals* and *mijana* sung to revolutionary lyrics accompanied by oud, *qanun,* violin, and *riqq.* Abu

'Arab's music, like that of al-Firqah al-Markaziyyah, always had a specifically Palestinian flavor. Unlike al-Firqah, however, Abu 'Arab sang in both urban and rural Palestinian accents.

Many of these songs also saw their role as recording a geography irrevocably changed with the razing of Palestinian villages and the appropriation of Palestinian towns by the conquering Israelis. Towns like Acre, Jaffa, Lydda, Majdel, Ramleh, Safad, and Tiberius, not to mention numerous villages, were invoked in songs dedicated to them individually or together, not as abstract names but as concrete references to the homes to which people could not return. By naming these lost places, such songs not only expressed nostalgia but also asserted the continuing presence of this geography in Arab and Palestinian memory.

The songs of this period concerned the exiled Palestinians and those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. After 1976, however, when the Palestinian Israelis rose up against Israel's policy of Judaizing the Galilee by confiscating yet more Palestinian land, songs began to embrace them as well. It was following the 1976 events, for example, that the Palestinian Tawfiq Zayyad's poem "Unadikum" ("I call upon you") was put to music and sung by the Lebanese Ahmad Qa'bur.[18] This song, which became very popular in the early 1980s, implores the diaspora and West Bank/Gaza Palestinians not to forget their brothers who had suffered the longest under Israeli colonialism. Works by other Palestinian poets, especially Darwish, were now being used widely as lyrics. These ranged from his famed "Bitaqat Hawiyyah" (Identification papers), better known as "Sajjil Ana 'Arabi" (Record, I am an Arab), which chronicles what Palestinian Israelis underwent under racist Israeli Jewish pass laws, to songs combining struggle and romantic love, such as "Rita wa al-Bunduqiyyah" (Rita and the rifle). Portions of "Sajjil Ana 'Arabi," which depicts an Israeli Palestinian at an Israeli Jewish checkpoint, were sung by George Qirmiz:

> Record,
> I am an Arab
> My identification number is 50,000
> I have eight children
> And the ninth arrives after one summer . . .
>
> Does this anger you? . . .
>
> My Distinguishing Marks are:
> On my head I wear a *'iqal* atop a *kuffiya*[19]
> And my palm is as hard as rock
> It scratches whoever touches it . . .
>
> Record . . . at the top of the first page;
> I do not hate people
> And I aggress against no one
> However, were I ever to get hungry

I would eat the flesh of my occupier
Beware, then, beware . . . of my hunger
And of my anger!![20]

The accompanying music, played by Western instruments, is part sentimental Western pop, part martial; the latter accompanies the imperative opening line: "Record, I am an Arab." The poem was also sung to a different tune by Ahmad Qa'bur in the early 1980s.

Among the many singers and musicians who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, Lebanese singer and composer Marcel Khalifah achieved immense popularity around the Arab world for his singing of Darwish poems and his songs of resistance to Israel's occupation of south Lebanon. His innovative musical style differed markedly from both the Rahbanis and 'Abd al-Wahhab in its use of Arab instruments and its merging of Arab and Western melodic structures and scales. But Khalifah, too, is ambivalent about the Arab and Western musical traditions, at times cultivating a musical form more in tune with recognizable forms of the Arab musical heritage and at others using highly Westernized forms (albeit on occasion with oud and *qanun* instrumentation).

Khalifah's singing of early Darwish poems (mostly from the mid to late 1960s) popularized these poems even beyond the fame of Darwish himself, whose own fame parallels that of a Western rock star with tens of thousands attending his public poetry readings across the Arab world. Along with "Rita wa al-Bunduqiyyah," Darwish's poem "Ila Ummi" (To my mother) became one of Khalifah's most popular songs, its lyrics and sad imploring music exemplifying, as few other poems had, Palestinian nostalgia and loss as well as the folk Palestinian deification of motherhood. The poem's opening lines assert:

I yearn for my mother's bread
And my mother's coffee
And my mother's touch
As [my] childhood grows up within me
Day upon the bosom of day
And I love my life,
For if I died
I would feel shame for my mother's tears

Take me, if I ever return,
As a veil for your lashes
And cover my bones with grass
Baptized in the purity of your heel
Tie me to you
With a lock of your hair
With a thread that trails

In the train of your dress
Perhaps, I would then become a god
A god, I would become
If I touched the depths of your heart[21]

By the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s, and in the shadow of the first intifada, a number of Palestinian groups emerged in the diaspora as well as in Israel proper. Those years also saw the arrival of some local groups and singers in the West Bank and Gaza, though their fame, except for *Firqat al-Funun al-Sha'biyyah*, never went beyond their local surroundings. Sabrin, a band comprising a lead woman singer, the Palestinian Israeli Camelia Jubran (who also plays the *qanun*), and four Palestinian male musicians (from Israel and the West Bank), combined Palestinian folk songs and tunes with innovative musical techniques. Though virtually unknown outside Israel and the occupied territories except among *cognoscenti*, Sabrin is probably the most talented musical group to appear in recent years. The most notable song of their first (untitled) album was "Hubb 'ala al-Tariqah al-Filastiniyyah" (Love, Palestinian-style); subsequent albums included such songs as "Mawt al-Nabi" (The death of the Prophet), "Jay al-Hamam" (The doves are coming), and, more recently, "Ala Fayn" (Where to?). The group's music is composed by Sa'id Murad, and their instruments include oud, *riqq, qanun,* and *buzuq,* as well as violin, cello, and saxophone. The lyrics, poems written by Palestinian poets Darwish, Husayn al-Barghuthi, and Samih al-Qasim, seem to be chosen for a fragmentary non-narrative structure that veers away from the ideological songs of 'Abd al-Wahhab, the sometimes lachrymose mood of the Rahbanis, or the militancy of al-Firqah al-Markaziyyah. They sing in both classical Arabic and colloquial Palestinian, and, just like their resistance to facile lyrics, their complex compositions resist the hegemony of melody so pervasive in contemporary Arab song. Their song "Thalathin Nijmah" (Thirty stars, poem and lyrics by Barghuthi) is illustrative:

Thirty stars twinkling over the Cypress valley
Thirty stars twinkling
My heart is an open cavern
If only the pretty one
Would understand
That the moon is wounded
But hope is strength[22]

Other diaspora groups include Baladna and al-'Ashiqin, to name the most popular. Their songs deal mostly with the Palestinians in the occupied territories fighting occupation as well as the return of the refugees and the restoration of the land to its owners. These groups, emerging in the mid-1980s, became very popular during the first intifada (1987–1993). Another up and coming singer is Rim al-Banna, a Palestinian Israeli popular among Palestinians in Israel and increasingly in the occupied territories, where she sings at rallies and other political events. A new group emerging in the occupied territories more recently is Nawa, which sings lyrics of modern Palestinian poets as well as of the medieval Sufi poet al-Hallaj, performing at concerts in besieged Ramallah in the summer of 2002 to rave reviews.[23]

As of the late 1980s, Palestinian singers continued to be joined by other Arab musicians singing solidarity songs for Palestine. One of the most popular songs of the first intifada, "Wayn al-Malayin" (Where are the millions?), by Lebanese resistance singer Julia Butrus, was a desperate cry for the Arab masses to rise in support of the resisting Palestinians. Another popular singer, the Syrian Samih Shuqayr, has a large repertoire of songs for Palestine, not to mention the Golan Heights. Popular in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and elsewhere, he was invited, in the context of the al-Aqsa intifada, to perform at Jordan's Jerash festival of culture in the summer of 2002.

THE ARAB DREAM (OR NIGHTMARE)

The 1990s witnessed a major retreat, if not outright defeat, of the dream of Arab unity that had continued to hold the Arab masses throughout much of the century. Not only was all of Palestine, the Golan Heights, and southern Lebanon still in the hands of the Israeli occupiers, but the resistance of the Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese, continuing against all odds, found little actual support in the Arab corridors of power. Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the American-led invasion of the region in 1991 dealt a final blow to any notion of Arab unity, as Arabs now were divided and allied against one another with foreign powers, long seen throughout the Arab world as imperial sponsors. If that were not enough to destroy the Arab dream of unity, Arafat's signing of the Oslo accords divided the Palestinian people and almost destroyed their national movement. Followed by the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, Oslo turned the Arab dream of unity into a nightmare of disunity and division.

In this dismal context, a new televised song, which included upwards of twenty singers and scores of musicians, aired on Arab television stations in 1998 to become, quite unexpectedly, an instant hit continuously aired on Arab satellite channels. The song, "Al-Hulm al-'Arabi" (The Arab dream), was an attempt to replicate the form of 'Abd al-Wahhab's nationalist songs of the late 1950s and early 1960s. "Al-Hulm al-'Arabi" featured Arab singers from almost every Arab country (except Iraq, whose inclusion was reportedly vetoed by the Kuwaiti participants) and was funded by the Arab nationalist Saudi prince Walid bin Talal. The director of the production was the Palestinian Muhammad al-'Aryan. The tear-jerker documentary footage accompanying the music, which showed the succession of Arab defeats since 1948 (and the few "victories," such as the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and the crossing of the Suez Canal and the Golan Heights' demilitarized zone during the 1973 war), evoked feelings of despair and loss at the end of a dream in the face of yet more defeats, death, and division. One novelty of the production was the presence of eight singers from the Gulf, a presence nowhere to be found in the songs of the preceding four decades. The emergence and growing popularity of Gulf singers since the 1980s and increasingly in the 1990s, coupled with increased Gulf funding for numerous art and music productions in other parts of the Arab world, account for this increased visibility.

The lyrics of "al-Hulm al-'Arabi" were lame compared to the 1950s predecessors, expressing the lowest common denominator among the Arab regimes needed to avoid the song's possible banning. The music video was more in the style of a Westernized Arab *taqtuqa* played by Western instruments than the "operetta" it had been billed as by the producers and the press alike. The refrain (reproduced below) as well as the segments sung by each singer were repetitions of the same few sentimental bars, rendered evocative (and approaching melodrama) by the synchronic images of real suffering. When the singers performed the piece live in downtown Beirut in the summer of 1998, anywhere between a half million and a million people reportedly showed up to sing along. Each singer sang in her or his own national Arabic dialect, or an approximation of it, with subtitles on the screen so that all Arabs could follow and sing along. The song begins with the following lines:

> Generation after generation will live in the hope of realizing our dream
> As what we say today we will be called to account for throughout our lifetime

The song then proceeds to the refrain, sung in Egyptian Arabic (known to most Arabs through movies and television):

> It is possible that the darkness of night
> May render us far from one another, but
> The beam of light can
> Reach the farthest of skies
> This has been our dream
> All of our lives:
> An embrace that will contain us all together

The footage of Palestinians being expelled from their lands, killed by Israeli soldiers, bombed alongside the Lebanese by Israeli planes, resisting Israeli occupation, and similar images dominated the song.

Since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada, more such songs have emerged from around the Arab world. One of the more notable is the equally melodramatic "al-Quds Hatirga' lina" (Jerusalem will return to us) sung by yet another group of Egyptian pop singers and featuring a couplet referring to the Palestinian child Muhammad al-Durra, whose televised murder by Israeli soldiers in the first days of the new uprising seemed to exemplify Israel's continuing brutality against all Palestinians. What is especially interesting during this period is the re-airing on Arab satellite stations of 1950s and 1960s songs which, along with the daily televised images of resisting Palestinians, moved millions to demonstrate across the Arab world in solidarity. Indeed, Fayruz herself, whose political songs since the 1970s had focused on Lebanon's own tragic wars, has begun in the last few years to include her late-1960s songs for Palestine and the Palestinians in the repertoire of her concerts, most recently in Paris in June 2002.[24]

Palestine and the Palestinians have obviously not been liberated by these songs. Nonetheless, the songs both express and register the changing dynamics of the Palestinian struggle, reflecting which segment of the Palestinian people is most salient at the moment and which form of struggle is imagined as most effective. The songs have shifted from songs of a united Arab front fighting for liberation and the return of refugees in the context of Arab unity, to songs celebrating the Palestinian guerrillas' fight for their people's independence, to songs that describe the oppression under which all Palestinians, whether under Israeli rule or in exile, languish, to songs again of a rejuvenated Arab solidarity with resisting civilians being murdered on television screens nightly. These songs serve to record the feelings and aspirations of a dispossessed people without access to official state channels and forms of writing official histories. While the public has been mostly the receiving party of these cultural productions offered by a cadre of literary and artistic figures, along with state-sponsored radio stations, ordinary Palestinians did participate actively in producing songs through the guerrilla movement and groups like al-Firqah al-Markaziyyah and the many that followed in its footsteps. The reception of these songs, demonstrated by their adoption as national anthems sung everywhere, by sales of records, and the astronomical number of ticket sales for the concerts of singers such as Khalifah, gesture toward their adoption as, and transformation into, popular culture.

NOTES

1. All translations by author. Salam sang *"Ya za'ir Mahda 'Isa"* (O visitor of the cradle of Jesus) in 1948. The lyrics were those of Bulus Salamah. Her song is said to be the first such song for Palestine. See "Najah Salam: al-Dimuqratiyyah fi al-Ghina' Haddamah," *al-Hayat*, 29 May 2000, p. 15.

2. For an overview of the importance of Egyptian nationalism and the revolution in song and music production and the role of the revolutionary state in it, see Samhah al-Khuli, *Al-Qawmiyyah fi Musiqa al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Kuwait: 'Alam al-Ma'rifah, 1992), pp. 296–97.

3. For example, songs like Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab's 1959 *"Ya Ilahi"* (lyrics by Husayn al-Sayyid).

4. For a list of all of 'Abd al-Wahhab's nationalist songs, see Idward Halim Mikha'il, *Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, Sab'un 'Aman min al-Ibda' fi al-Ta'lif al-Musiqi wa al-Talhin wa al-Ghina'* (Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, Seventy years of creativity in musical composition and singing) (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2002).

5. Mikha'il, *Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab*, p. 118.

6. Lutfi Radwan, *Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, Sirah Dhatiyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1991), p. 231.

7. The actual word is *"maghara"* or "cave," which was the stable that in Arab Christian tradition and lore designates the place where Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

8. For an interesting discussion of *"Jibal al-Suwwan,"* see Fawwaz Tarabulsi, "Jibal al-Suwwan: Filastin fi Fann Fayruz wa al-Rahabinah," (Jibal al-Suwwan: Palestine in the art of Fayruz and the Rahbanis), *Al-Karmil* (Ramallah), no. 57 (Autumn 1998), pp. 203–13.

9. Mahmud Darwish, "Tilka al-Ughniyah Hadhihi al-Ughniyah," *Al-Yawm al-Sabi'*, no. 126, 6 October 1986, p. 13.

10. For an intelligent overview of Umm Kulthum's career, albeit one punctuated throughout with rightwing quasi-Orientalist polemics, see Hazim Saghiyyah, *al-Hawa Duna Ahlihi, Umm Kulthum, Siratan wa Nassan* (Love without/less than its folks, Umm Kulthum as biography and as text) (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1991), pp. 43–61.

11. For an exploration of the masculine as model for nationalist women in the context of Palestinian nationalism, see Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995).

12. See 'Ali 'Abd al-Amir, "Ughniyat 'al-Masih' li-Awwal Marrah 'ala Istiwanah li-'Abd al-Halim Hafiz," *al-Ra'y* (Jordan), 30 March 1999.

13. A *maqam* is a melodic mode based on a theoretical scale, notes of emphasis, and a typical pattern of movement. The octave is divided into smaller microtones to the interval resolution of one-ninth of a step, called comma. See Ali Jihad Racy, "Arab Music," available online at www.turath.org/ProfilesMenu.htm.

14. In reference to the Mongol leader and grandson of Çengiz Khan who destroyed Baghdad in A.D. 1258 and who is seen in standard Arab accounts as a barbarian.

15. The lyrics of this song can be found in Ahmad Fu'ad Najm, *Al-Amal al-Kamilah* (Cairo: Dar al-ahmadi lil-nashr, 2002), pp. 109–111.

16. See Shakir al-Nabulsi, *al-Aghani fi al-Maghani, al-Shaykh Imam 'Isa, Sirah Faniyyah wa Musiqiyyah, vol. 1, 1918–1969* (Beirut: al-Mu'assassah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1998), p. 361.

17. On the popularity of these songs and an examination of their lyrics, see Nimr Sirhan, "al-Muqawamah fi al-Fulklur al-Filastini," (Resistance in Palestinian Folk Culture), *Shu'un Filastiniyyah*, no. 43 (March 1975), pp. 114–36. See also Sirhan's "al-Ughniyyah al-Sha'biyyah al-Filastiniyyah: min al-Huzn ila al-Shawq ila al-Qital," (Palestinian Popular Songs: From Sadness to Yearning to Fighting), *Shu'un Filastiniyyah*, no. 19 (March 1973), pp. 159–69.

18. Tawfiq Zayyad, "Ashuddu 'ala Aydikum," part of the collection of poems by the same title, *Ashuddu 'ala Aydikum*, written in 1966; see *Tawfiq Zayyad, Diwan Tawfiq Zayyad* (Beirut: Dar al-'Awdah, n.d.), pp. 122–24. *"Unadikum"* is the first word of the poem and not its title. At the time he sang *"Unadikum,"* Qa'bur was a member of the Lebanese Communist Action Organization. He worked recently for the *Mustaqbal* ("Future") television station owned by Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri. Hariri ran clips of Qa'bur as part of his recent election advertising campaign. I would like to thank Elias Khuri for this piece of information.

19. The *'iqal* is the two-ringed black rope that is placed on top of the *kuffiya* to hold it in place.

20. The poem was part of Darwish's first collection, titled *Awraq al-Zaytun* (The olive tree leaves) and published in 1964. See Darwish, *Diwan Mahmud Darwish*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-'Awda, 1994), pp. 71–74.

21. In Darwish, *'Ashiq min Filastin* (A lover from Palestine) (first published in 1966), in Ibid., pp. 93–94.

22. *"Thalathin Nijmah,"* written by Husayn Barghuthi in 1987 and included in Sabrin's album *Jay al-Hamam*, released in 1994.

23. Yusuf al-Shayib, "Firqat *Nawa* al-Filastiniyyah Turahin 'ala al-Mustaqbal," *al-Hayat*, 24 June 2002, p. 20.

24. Arlit Khuri, "Fayruz Ghannat Filastin wa Lubnan fi Baris" (Fayruz sang Palestine and Lebanon in Paris), *al-Hayat*, 29 June 2002, p. 20.