My Voice Is My Weapon

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Intifada Culture and the Jīl al-Ḥijāra
(Generation of stones): 1987–1993

On December 8, 1987, as several hundred Palestinian laborers waited patiently to cross the Erez military checkpoint at the northern entrance to the Gaza Strip, an Israeli transporter careened off of the road into the line of waiting cars, crushing to death four and seriously injuring several others. Bystanders rushed to aid the victims but were unable to save those trapped underneath the rig. Within the hour Israeli radio broadcast news of the event in passing, another regrettable yet unavoidable traffic accident endemic to life in the territories. At first the news of the accident made little impact. Traffic deaths in Gaza are, unfortunately, nearly an everyday occurrence. However, in this particular instance, gossip began to swirl that this was in fact not an accident at all, but rather a premeditated act of vengeance carried out by a relative of an Israeli who had been stabbed two days earlier.¹ The driver of the Israeli truck, it was rumored, swerved purposefully into the car, attempting to inflict harm on the unsuspecting passengers. Quickly the crash came to be seen not as an unfortunate occurrence but as a malicious attack, and by nightfall leaflets were being circulated in Gaza calling for all residents of Jabaliya refugee camp, home to three of the victims, to assemble en masse at the cemetery to protest the “malicious killings.”²

Funeral processions for three of the Jabaliyan victims assembled that night in front of the adjoining Israeli military base, with mourners throwing stones into the compound. The next morning demonstrators con-
structed barricades and set tires ablaze in Jabaliya and in several other Gazan refugee camps in defiance of the sweeping curfew orders doled out the night before. Israeli patrols were sent out to quell the disturbances and to remove the hundreds of ad hoc roadblocks set up throughout the camps. Stones and hand-held incendiary devices (Molotov cocktails) pelted the armored jeeps as they attempted to make their way through the streets. Undeterred by tear gas, the Israeli patrols fired live ammunition directly into the crowds of protestors, killing fifteen-year-old Hatem al-Sissi. Soon after, a young expectant mother went into premature labor due to tear gas inhalation, causing the death of her prematurely born daughter, Fatmah al-Qidri.3

With these tragic deaths began the first Palestinian intifada (uprising). All told, this spontaneous grassroots rebellion against Israeli occupation continued for nearly six years, officially ending with the signing of the Declaration of Principles provisioned in the Oslo Accords. By that time Israeli occupation forces had killed 1,124 Palestinians, including 250 children. In contrast, forty-seven Israeli civilians and forty-three Israeli soldiers were reported killed during the six-year period.4 In hindsight it is difficult to fully capture the tremendous groundswell of popular sentiment manifest in this uprising. Within the first year alone 5,385 demonstrations, labor strikes, and various protests were documented throughout the territories, an average of 103 demonstrations per week.5 During just the first initial months 4,148 casualties were reported, including 390 Palestinian deaths.6 Yet beyond the shocking numbers of mass arrests, curfews, injuries, and house demolitions, this incredible outpouring of public outrage against the occupation solidified a new direction in Palestinian history, politics, and culture. As a moment of intense national sentiment and reflection, generational change, and cultural revival, the intifada had an enormous impact on the ways many Palestinians conceptualized community, self, and other. While hundreds of thousands took to the streets, under the constant threat of injury and death, long-sedimented ideas of nation, resistance, violence, and politics became fields open to redress and possibility. New national intimacies were shaped, and new cultural identities formed. In popular civil disobedience, a new Palestinian national movement emerged, if only temporarily, founded on a renewed emphasis on the people, their shared experiences of dispossession, and the pervasive desire for self-determination.

In the many Israeli and Palestinian historical accounts that have since
emerged on the intifada, the role of performative media (music, dance, poetry, drama, graffiti, and so on) has largely been characterized as epiphenomenal, a mere artistic reflection of larger determinate economic, political, and social forces. In this respect many have argued, perhaps unintentionally, that the expressive media that emerged during this time, while a powerful means of giving voice to experiences of dispossession, did little more than capture in artistic expression an especially powerful historical moment of resistance to a brutal occupation. Yet it is striking how many of the Palestinians who participated in the demonstrations, walked the streets, and threw the stones, cited music, poetry, song, and dance as predominant means of social and political mobilization. Such media did more than simply reflect popular sentiment, comment on prevailing power imbalances, or describe national identities and affiliations. Rather, songs, dances, poetry, leaflets, graffiti, and the like in fact generated such sentiment, shaped national and political identities and affiliations, and provided performative spaces for subverting and resignifying entrenched power structures. Performative media provided an essential integrating tool for the masses walking the streets in public demonstrations, allowing for new cultural and political identities to emerge. Collective singing and dancing opened up spaces for the integration of new communities and ideologies. Such media did more than simply give voice to the subaltern experience of dispossession but in the act of performance offered an essential means of enduring that experience. Through performance and performative gesture new ways of imagining Palestinian resistance and nationalism emerged, opening spaces for contemplating new directions and new possibilities.

As thousands of demonstrators took to the streets across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, an underground grassroots consortium calling itself the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) formed, representing each of the four major political factions. Marwan Kafarna (PFLP), Tawfiq al-Mabhuh (PCP), Ihab al-‘Ashqar (Fatah), and Jamal Zaquat (DFLP) established the UNLU for the purpose of orchestrating the demonstrations, scheduling labor strikes, and defining collective goals and demands. Their leadership, revealed in a series of mass-produced communiqués (bayanāt), proved instrumental in maintaining the collective spirit of the protests, facilitating the means by which the intifada was to be enacted, and determining the appropriate methods of popular resistance. The ultimate success of the UNLU in directing the intifada, however, arose not so much
in their tactical efforts to tie down occupation forces in thousands of protests and demonstrations, nor in their expertise at controlling the media, but in their ability to facilitate a widespread cultural transformation of Palestinian society from within. This transformation was based largely on a movement away from the divisive system of political notables and personalities (a top-down approach) toward a revival of the “shaʿb” (folk), the masses suffering under occupation (a bottom-up approach). In its anonymously signed underground communiqués, grassroots humanitarian efforts, and persistent calls for national solidarity, the unlu became a powerful voice for a new direction in Palestinian politics: a new direction that promised an end to the occupation not by protracted military engagement with Israeli forces, but through concerted grassroots civil disobedience. Based on this model, the path to self-determination would be forged by the masses coming together in nonlethal collective protest.

This dramatic political transformation was in part instigated by a profound crisis in Palestinian culture and identity. In his ethnographic study of Palestinian folklore during the intifada, Nimr Sirhan identifies two determinate factors in generating the uprising: the subjugation and repression of everyday life (material anxieties), and the attack on indigenous Palestinian culture and practices (cultural anxieties). In addition to resisting their deplorable living conditions and social, economic, and political oppression, Palestinians were expressing widespread fears of losing their “indigenous selves,” their “Palestinian roots,” to foreign occupation and encroachment. Based on his research the intifada was as much a cultural uprising as a political one. By taking to the streets Palestinians were making both a political and a cultural statement: that the occupation must end and that “Palestine” must live.

The unlu strategically articulated both of these anxieties in its many directives. The desired political transformation to grassroots activism was indexically linked to a revival of an imagined “authentic,” “pure” Palestine of pre-1948. In folding together the political project of ending the occupation with an ongoing cultural renaissance of Palestinian folklore and practice, the unlu fostered the development of a new political consciousness among segments of the population that had previously been neglected in nationalist discourse. Rural Palestinians, refugee and youth communities, groups typically alienated from cosmopolitan politic-nationalist debate, were, by their proximity to “authentic” Palestinian folk practices and experiences, reimagined at the center of nationalist
discourse. Seeking to mobilize these communities in the service of the uprising, local leadership groups became adept at inserting references to popular folklore in their communications. Explicit political demands and instructions were layered between poetic references to Palestinian history, nationalist leadership, and the importance of solidarity in confronting the enemy. It should be noted, however, that such articulations of the pure, uncontaminated, authentic Palestine were themselves byproducts of a larger politico-nationalist project of recruitment and conscription, a form of strategic essentialism whereby political leaders sought access to larger segments of the population.

This profound transformation of Palestinian resistance pivoted on a strategic resignification of cultural signs and practices. In an effort to better articulate both the political and cultural anxieties brought forth in the occupation, political leaders, artists, and intellectuals very strategically sought to reconceptualize the resistance movement away from the once-ubiquitous image of the uniformed freedom fighter (fidāʾī) to the more sympathetic image of adolescents demonstrating in the streets. These atfāl al-ḥijāra (children of the stones) quickly superseded the uniformed fidāʾiyīn as the primary sign of the nation and the nationalist movement. In song, imagery, and rhetorical device the klāshin and RPG were replaced by the ḥijāra (stone), the maqlāʿ (sling), and the maṭīṭa (slingshot) as tools of resistance. This demonstrative transition from rifle to stone—from terrorist to activist—was a powerful means of resignifying resistance from military engagement to grassroots civil disobedience while at the same time addressing cultural anxieties and enlisting the rural, poor, and youth communities into the struggle. The stone and sling were powerful signs of indigenous Palestinian lifeways and youth culture because of their associations with rural shepherding and folklore. Moreover this resignification successfully indexed the enormous power imbalance between Palestinian demonstrators and the Israeli army before an international audience of observers.

Cultural enthusiasts, folklorists, and musicians were quick to characterize the intifada in terms of a peasant/folk rebellion against a foreign colonial force not unlike the Palestinian rebellions of 1834 and 1936. In his study of folklore during the intifada, Nimr Sirhan says that the intifada brought Palestinians back to their “authentic” selves. It was an expression of resistance, “founded upon the practices of the people rooted in the heritage and emotions of Palestinians everywhere.” These “prac-
tices of the people... heritage and emotions” could be found in the many cultural and artistic manifestations of the resistance movement. Poets, singers, and songs narrated the events of the uprising and called for the collective struggle to endure despite overwhelming opposition. Folk artists emerged to compose new works focusing specifically on the shaʿbī character of children in the streets. Centers for the preservation of folk heritage, founded across the West Bank following al-naksa (1967), began sponsoring festivals for the performance and exhibition of indigenous performative and material folklore. All of these myriad efforts to preserve and revive Palestinian folk practices were articulated within the discourses of popular resistance and nationalism, where the gross disparity in power between stone-throwing youth and the Israeli army solidified the resistance as a noble and just cause against imperialism.

While Sirhan’s notion that the intifada brought people back to their “authentic” selves may have been quite popular, to the point of cliché, it nevertheless reveals an important strategic essentialism operative at the time. As is certainly true in earlier periods of Palestinian history popular folklore became a tool for uniting people for political ends by reducing complex subjectivities to a core set of few attributes projected as fundamental, primordial, and immutable to Palestinian identity. From the post-1948 jīl al-sumūd (generation of steadfastness) to the post-1967 jīl al-thawra (generation of revolution), this new jīl al-ḥijāra (generation of stones) was operationalized in popular folklore as a strategically imagined Palestinian identity, a construction. The so-called return to the authentic Palestine was yet another example of the way politico-nationalist groups strategically used different facets of identity in the service of their agendas, often shifting dramatically depending on context.

Nevertheless such reimaginings of Palestinian resistance were quite powerful in shaping collective notions of self and nation. In taking up the stone and slingshot against heavily armored Israeli tanks Palestinians were developing a new resistance performative intended to articulate with political and cultural discourses. Essentially such a tactic expressed the political need for an end to the occupation and the cultural need to preserve indigenous Palestinian history, lifeways, and practice. As the technologies of modern warfare (RPGs, Kalashnikov rifles, uniforms, and so on) had proven ineffective at stopping Israeli attacks in the refugee camps of Lebanon, Palestinians interpreted the adoption of nonlethal resistance, epitomized in the stone, slingshot, and Molotov cocktail, as a re-
turn to their Palestinian roots. To lay down the klāshin, take off the green army fatigues, and instead walk the streets wearing the kūfiya around one’s head and neck, chanting indigenous songs and poetry, signified a strategic return to the folk, the embodied “pure” Palestine. Moreover this strategic revival of folk practices reinforced the notion that Palestinians were justifiably defending themselves from the aggressions of the Israeli military.

Such a dramatic transformation in the poetics of resistance rested on and was driven by an equally immense transformation in how Palestinian identity was articulated across various fields. In demanding self-determination, it was imperative to confront occupation forces armed with implements of Palestinian history and indigeneity, signs that reinforced and legitimized their defensive struggle against colonial encroachment. Songs, poetry, posters, graffiti, scarves, and stones were framed as powerful weapons of resistance, signs of history and presence in the land. Such implements were also important in framing the resistance as an engagement between a heavily trained and equipped colonial army and an indigenous population. Yet in the early phases of the uprising there was immense pressure to resort back to small-arms warfare and acts of terrorism. Demonstrators were reluctant, perhaps fearful of taking on the enormous resources of the Israeli military with such limited weaponry. However, confronted with ubiquitous signs of national sentiment, sacrifice, and the sacredness of the stone, land, and history, across multiple fields of sociality, demonstrators became more and more convinced. Verses of folk poetry sung in the streets and painted on the city walls hammered home this ideational shift through their redundancy and affective power. The following protest chant reflects this sentiment, and it was a common theme in protest songs and graffiti at the time.

There is no fear, There is no fear
For the stone has become the Kalashnikov

Oh world take a look, and people come see
Our stones are stronger than the Kalashnikov
Now is the time of defiance and not of fear
Whoever opposes us will become crazy

On the significance of the stone in intifada folklore, Nimr Sirhan goes so far as to say that among Palestinians under occupation it had become
increasingly apparent that “there ultimately was no cure for the contamination of the land, but for the stone.”¹⁷ The binary of pure/impure, sacred/profane, alluded to in Sirhan’s prose is found throughout the expressive culture and media of this time. To cleanse the nation of its contamination required the resurgence of the “pure” Palestine, embodied in the sacred relationship between the people and the land.

To throw a stone, a piece of the homeland, at a foreign occupying soldier was a powerful resistance performative strategically engineered to reinforce the sacred relationship between the nation and the land. This relationship was further solidified in the act of transforming pieces of the land into implements of national resistance. The conflation of people and land is further exemplified in the act of throwing. In throwing a stone, Palestinians were performatively throwing pieces of the nation, pieces of their bodies, and pieces of the body politic at their enemies. The following murabaʿ poem commonly sung at political demonstrations further explains the performative relationship between stone and man.¹⁸

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Oh stones, oh stones
Do not leave our cramped quarters
You and I were raised together
Like the sea and the sailor
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The slingshot (al-maqlāʿ or al-maqlīʿa) was an equally powerful sign of peasant/folk resistance in its associations with the indigenous practice of shepherding. Young boys watching their family’s flocks would routinely use a slingshot in defense against predators and to prevent strays from wandering off. Similar to the shepherd’s flute (shabāba), the slingshot was a sign of rural folk practice, youth culture, and linkages to the “idyllic” Palestinian past. As Abu Faris, a musician and activist during the first intifada, would remind me, “many of the great heroes of Palestinian history were shepherds, al-Qassam in particular.” Interestingly it is common knowledge that al-Qassam was not a shepherd but a well-educated sheikh. The appropriation of the memory of al-Qassam as a shepherd was essential to a particular framing of the intifada as an extension of the Great Arab Revolt of 1936. As the slingshot became the preferred weapon in the streets of Gaza, protesting youth, so it was thought, reclaimed their indigenous folk heritage. Urban youth taking aim at an Israeli tank with only a stone and a sling consecrated a performative gesture of self-defense, courage, resistance, history, and a righteous and noble cause. In
local dialect the words *al-*maqlāʿ and *al-*maqlīʿa are both derived from the same root (q-1-ʿ), meaning to throw or cast out, to expel, oust, or evict. As young boys took to the streets with their slingshots, they were in essence giving a performative display of expelling and evicting, casting out, occupation forces from Palestinian lands, utilizing implements of Palestinian history.

In music, the revival of indigenous folk practice and imagery (slingshot, stone, youth) was aided by the ongoing folk revival taking place in the territories since the early 1970s. In the West Bank and Gaza the *thawrī* songs of the *plo* were never as popular as politicized shaʿbi folk songs (ʿatābā, ʿalā dalʿūna, and ẓarif al-ṭūl) performed by local musicians at political rallies, demonstrations, festivals, and other social events. Since the early 1970s popular heritage festivals in the West Bank featured folk-poets (zajjālī, ḥādī, shāʿrī) as representatives of national culture and practice. Inside the territories activists recorded and produced cassettes in makeshift “underground” studios, distributing their work at rallies and demonstrations (see figure 4.1). Many of these artists assumed pseudonyms to avoid prosecution. For example, Sabaye al-Intifada (Youth of the Intifada), Ibna al-Bilad (Son of the Nation), and al-ʿAmal al-Shaʿbi (The
People’s Work) were the underground names of important artists and ensembles working inside the resistance movement. A remarkable photo, taken by Neal Cassady in 1988, captures one of the thousands of demonstrations taking place during the first few months of the intifada. A processional crowd of young men, heads wrapped in kūfīyāt, march carrying makeshift flags mounted to pieces of lumber. At the center of the procession two demonstrators assume a leadership position. One carries a boom box, the other a bullhorn. No doubt, the bullhorn leads the procession in directing call and response chants, while the boom box provides musical accompaniment (see figure 4.1).

For musicians inside the territories several obstacles prevented local protest song from fully taking shape. Without basic recording studios or a commercial infrastructure to accommodate locally produced cassettes, the development of Palestinian protest song “inside” the territories was slow and often dependent on imports from Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. In addition, during the early intifada years singers were harshly prosecuted by the Israeli government for incitement. Concert halls were shut down, their doors chained, only hours before a performance was scheduled to begin. Likewise musicians were commonly arrested or detained the night before a scheduled concert. Activists found in possession of political media (leaflets, recordings, books, and so on) also faced steep consequences, arrest, and physical abuse.

Suhail Khoury, a young musician and activist from Nablus, became a central figure in the West Bank music scene during the early months of the intifada. As a classically trained clarinetist and composer active in the resistance movement, Khoury focused his talents on producing music in support of the intifada. His first project, Sharrar (Spark), was a collection of reconstituted folk songs designed to spread news of the intifada throughout the territories. The recording was intended to serve as an immediate response to the events of the previous days—the defeat of Israeli forces in Nablus, the numbers of dead and wounded, the scheduled boycotts and demonstrations, and so on. Speaking of this first intifada cassette-recorded and produced inside the territories, Khoury envisioned Sharrar as a type of “musical newspaper” designed to encourage support for and spread news of the uprising across disparate Palestinian communities. Through the immediacy of the music audiences from distant camps and villages could learn about what others were doing in the struggle. Khoury hoped to counteract the policy of “divide and rule” im-
plemented by the Israeli occupation forces by giving a communicative voice to demonstrators reaching across different corners of the territories.

With the completed cassettes sitting in a box in the backseat of his car, Khoury was stopped at a military checkpoint. The finished tapes were immediately confiscated, and Khoury was taken into custody. After a highly publicized trial, Khoury was convicted of incitement based on a colonial ordinance left on the books since the early British mandate. Seeking to deter other musicians from producing and distributing similar recordings, Israeli authorities sought to make an example of Khoury, sentencing him to fifteen months in prison. Of the mandated fifteen months, Khoury served only six. However, while incarcerated he was subjected to various forms of physical and psychological abuse, torture, and mistreatment. Upon his release, Khoury rejoined the uprising as a celebrated political prisoner and activist.

Khoury’s highly publicized trial generated a great deal of interest in Sharrar. Palestinians throughout the territories clamored to find a copy of the cassette that caused such a severe response from Israeli authorities. Unbeknownst to Khoury, one copy of the original cassette managed to find its way into the local community and was copied well over a hundred thousand times. Sharrar emerged as the first locally produced intifada cassette inside the territories and signaled the beginning of a new repertory of protest song recorded, produced, and performed entirely under occupation. In one of our interviews Khoury recollected:

People wanted to hear for themselves the songs that caused the Israeli government to react so severely. It was one of the first tapes directly about Israel, made here in Palestine, based on common folk songs with new political lyrics. There were other singers in Lebanon, Syria, or Jordan, but this was about the intifada from the inside. It was about events that happened only days before, and then people could listen to it and immediately hear what was going on in Nablus or Gaza or Jerusalem. . . . We needed the music to feel united with one another. People couldn’t see the demonstrations taking place in other towns and villages, didn’t know if anyone had been killed. They didn’t know what was going on. With these cassettes we were trying to spread news, like a newspaper, to people, letting them know what was going on, helping people to see the big picture. So that they wouldn’t feel like they were alone.
What is ironic is that the Israelis threatened to sentence me to ten years in prison. So everyone wanted to know what kind of tape would cause such a huge reaction. People were clamoring to get a copy of it, wondering what was on it that would cause such a reaction. . . . Soon it was everywhere. I still to this day do not know how one [of the tapes] got out.

THE RISE OF HAMAS AND ANASHĪD AL-ISLĀMĪ

As the demonstrations continued throughout 1988 several other socio-political organizations formed in opposition to the unlu. The most significant of these was al-Harakat al-Maqawma al-Islāmiya (Islamic Resistance Movement), known colloquially by its Arabic acronym, Hamas. Established as a Gazan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas was formed in 1988 by a group of highly educated Palestinian university students and activists representative of a new generation that rejected the entrenched system of family and ḥamūla patronage and loyalty. In contrast to the plo, Hamas framed its activities in specifically Islamic terms. This is revealed by its continued insistence on preserving the land as a sacred waqf, an inalienable gift endowed by God. As such, no part of Palestine could be relinquished to foreign (that is, non-Muslim) occupation. Although Fatah often claimed a sense of legitimacy, using religious rhetoric, Hamas distanced itself from the plo because of its strict religious interpretation of the nationalist movement. Among poor disenfranchised refugees in Gaza and the West Bank, Hamas provided an unwavering hard-line stance against the occupation and hence emerged over time as a formidable political counterbalance to the plo. Their social and political activities were most visible through a diverse network of local community organizations, charitable funds, educational institutions, mosques, and other religious societies.

In direct contrast to the various secular nationalists and socialists of the plo, Hamas proclaimed a certain degree of religious legitimacy to lead the resistance. What is more, given their commitment to social welfare programs and charitable organizations, Hamas gained a reputation for honesty and philanthropy in the camps and crowded urban spaces. Arafat and his political cohorts were notoriously suspected of widespread corruption, nepotism, and political maneuvering to secure their leadership. Hamas, as envisioned in the persona of its spiritual leader, Sheikh
Ahmad Yassin, presented itself as honest, pious, and committed to Palestinian liberation through social enrichment and a return to Islamic jurisprudence.

Coupled with the rise of Hamas, a second stream of religiously oriented protest “song” (anashīd) emerged alongside the shaʿbī nationalist folk songs of Fatah and the PLO. Between the two repertories there were significant differences in poetics, text, instrumentation, and melodic and rhythmic device. While secular nationalists of both the shaʿbī and thawrī catalogues drew from an established lexicon of Marxist third-world guerrilla warfare against imperialism and the preservation of a specific folk ethos, anashīd was derived largely from the language of the Qur’an. References to Qur’anic scripture and the sunna (the recorded deeds of the Prophet) formed the core vocabulary for imagining Palestinian liberation. The nation itself was envisioned as a pious community of believers, or umma. To this end, anashīd presented a reconceptualized vision of the nation framed within the discourses of religion and faith. Land provided a powerful connection to the greater Islamic world and the history of Islamic development. Palestinian liberation was promulgated not specifically for the restoration of indigenous culture and heritage, but rather for the redemption of the holy land from foreign occupation. Essentially the nation was detached from its direct associations with the land and instead reinscribed into the greater Islamic history and community. In text these songs often glorified the lives and deeds of famous Muslim heroes: the Prophet Mohammad, Saladin, Sheikh ʿIzz al-Din al-Qassam, and others. References to famous battles between Muslim forces and the enemies of Islam were also common.

In musical device the differences between shaʿbī and anashīd repertories were at times strident. Many pious Muslims believed that the dance-inspired dabke songs of secular nationalists were at best problematic in terms of religious jurisprudence and modesty. Public dancing was not considered an appropriate activity in mixed (male/female) contexts. By and large, anashid did not contain many of the core components of shaʿbī nationalist song. Indigenous folk instruments such as the shabāba and yarghūl were omitted as well as classical instruments such as the nai, īʿūd, and qanūn. Vocalists predominantly sang solo melodic extemporizations on Islamic texts without accompaniment or, in rare cases, accompanied by a chorus of unison male voices. In song style, accent, and declamation these songs emulated Qur’anic recitation (tajwīd) and the more
classically derived religious song forms. The majority of these texts were sung in an unmetered free rhythm. However, it was not uncommon for vocalists to be accompanied by modest percussion, perhaps one or two daffāt (frame drums).22

The absence of melodic accompaniment placed considerable emphasis on the voice itself and the meanings inherent in the politico-religious texts. Vocalists were celebrated for their ability to engage the minds of their audience and inspire a sense of religious purpose and dedication. The aesthetic of religious determination and piety carried through into the performance environment. In contrast to the participatory dabke songs of groups like al-‘Ashiqin, anashīd was predominantly presentation. In these performance spaces a single vocalist would perform before a seated audience with little direct interaction. The absence of physical interaction (dancing, collective gestures, singing, and so on) between performers and audience was said to preserve the purity of the texts and the sincerity, dignity, and piety of the performance.

The absence of melodic instrumentation and dance rhythms in Islamic anashīd can be further explained more practically in terms of political strategy. According to the musician and activist ‘Issa Boulos, many of the anashīd performers were not well trained and therefore couldn’t include instruments in their performances. Moreover, at a time when Hamas was strategically attempting to present itself as a moral/ethical counterbalance to the PLO, it was important for Hamas to reinforce, if not campaign, its overt religiosity. In terms of music, this meant creating stark distinctions between anashīd and contemporary shaʾbī protest song. To emphasize the idea that melodic instruments (and dancing) were forbidden then becomes a strategic means of reinforcing the idea that Hamas, whose music has no melodic instruments (or dancing), is somehow more aligned with God. The alignment of anashīd with the aesthetics of Qurʾanic recitation carves out a performative space between Hamas and the PLO and further indexes a sense of religiosity and piety.

Sabreen and the “New Palestinian Sound”

A third stream of resistance song emerged during the intifada by way of the Palestinian ensemble Sabreen. Although Sabreen had been founded in 1980, it wasn’t until four years later, on the release of their second album, Dukhan al-Barakin (Smoke of the volcanoes) (1984), that they began to influence Palestinian music in Israel and the West Bank.23 Unlike the
musicians and ensembles traveling throughout the region performing in refugee camps and political rallies, Sabreen was one of the first ensembles to have had a significant impact among middle- and upper-class, university-educated Palestinians. Formed of a mixture of Palestinian and Palestinian Israeli musicians, Sabreen developed into one of the better known and internationally recognized nationalist groups. Their fame derived in large part from their incorporation of cosmopolitan musical device, and the blending of Western and Arab musical forms, instruments, and aesthetics with the poetry of well-known writers such as Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qassam, and Hussein Barghouthi.

Ironically, when the group began performing in support of the uprising they simultaneously incorporated several Arab instruments so as to reach a broader Palestinian audience. Prior to this time, Sabreen used only Western instruments in their compositions (keyboards, drums, guitar, and so on). With the rise of an indigenized Palestinian nationalism following the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, the group leader and composer Said Murad began writing music using specifically Arab instruments. In an early interview Murad states, “The Lebanese experience affected us deeply . . . we had been using organ and drums for a long time. We wanted to reach ‘the street’—simpler songs, more down to earth. We faced a very serious question. Should we put the western instruments aside and use theʿud and the qanūn instead? Or both? . . . The question was how to make music that was personally convincing and how to discuss the Palestinian crisis in an appealing way.”

The result was Dukhan al-Barakin (Smoke of the volcanoes) (1984), a compilation of newly composed songs set to texts by Mahmoud Darwish, Hussein Barghouthi, Abd al-Latif Aql, Abd al-Aziz al-Maqalah, and Samih al-Qassam. Though many of these poems were over twenty years old by the time of release, Sabreen found their commentary of arrest, torture, and sacrifice to be extremely relevant to the sociopolitical situation facing Palestinians in the mid- to late 1980s. The initial success of Dukhan al-Barakin, however, was felt only among small pockets of cosmopolitan nationalists, students, and urban audiences in Jerusalem and Ramallah, remaining largely unknown in the greater Palestinian diaspora. Nevertheless these small successes encouraged the group to continue recording in this style, but with more emphasis on reaching out to the mainstream.

Sabreen’s second major project, Mawt al-Nabi (Death of the Prophet), was recorded as the uprising first began in 1987. On this album the group
focused on the work of the West Bank poet Hussein Barghouthi. In both of these two major albums Sabreen distinguished itself from its nationalist contemporaries by emphasizing the blending of indigenous and cosmopolitan musical aesthetics. Similar to the programmatic works of Marcel Khalife, the political ballads of Mustapha al-Kurd, and the guitar-infused power anthems of Ahmad Qa‘bour, Sabreen attempted to forge new ground by folding in Western pop forms, harmonies, and instruments. The influences of jazz, blues, and reggae are noticeable in the many syncopated bass lines, back-beat rhythms, and guitar accompaniment. The use of cosmopolitan musical devices, however, did not necessarily translate into mass popularity among local audiences. In fact among youth outside urban areas and university campuses, Sabreen was marginal, if not completely unknown. Their “new Palestinian sound” conflicted with the many sha‘bī nationalist musicians performing at the time. Instead Sabreen found its audience among university students in urban centers.

The mixing of Arab and Western elements in Sabreen’s music speaks to an important aesthetic discourse pervasive throughout Palestinian music. Working from within both Israeli and Palestinian musical frames, Sabreen was highly versed in Western music theory and performance practice. Their exposure to Western popular music provided a diverse experience from which to draw. Early performances in the Jerusalem music scene formed the foundation for hybridity and innovation in their work. However, on another level, the fact that Sabreen arose from within a cosmopolitan artistic community meant that they were less encumbered by exilic nationalism, folk preservation, politics, and aesthetics. In her research on patterns of adaptation, preservation, and innovation in Arab musical life, Anne Rasmussen offers an interesting theory to describe this process. Based on the notion of “marginal preservation,” Rasmussen theorizes the ways pressures to preserve “authentic” musical practices are differentially allocated between communities in the homeland and those in diaspora. Whereas Palestinian artists in diaspora were often compelled to remain within the nationalist constructs of indigenous music and dance in order to preserve and promote their “authentic” Palestinian identity, Sabreen had little need to convince anyone that they were “real” Palestinians. Operating inside the territories they were less constrained to innovate, augment, and/or develop music and dance in ways that were perhaps unavailable or inconceivable to Palestinian artists in diaspora.
Throughout the intifada internationally televised images of well-equipped Israeli troops firing at unarmed teenagers caused widespread criticism of the Israeli government both in the Arab world and beyond. Despite diverse attempts to crush the uprising, support for the boycotts and demonstrations strengthened. With each passing month it became clear that Israel had to reassess its policies in Gaza and the West Bank. In the face of staggering numbers of casualties, the intifada produced a poetics of resistance in the territories immune to conventional modes of state repression. As the severity of state terror increased, demonstrators and activists found greater support among the mainstream Palestinian population and effectively contributed to a widespread political move left toward the Labor Party, led by Yitzhak Rabin.

Under these circumstances, negotiations were in Prime Minister Rabin’s best interests for ending the uprising. On his election Rabin promised to freeze settlement construction and stated a willingness to negotiate with the PLO. In doing so he quickly restored strained diplomatic relations with a United States administration determined to see an end to the impasse. A cautious optimism emerged among some Palestinians toward the new Israeli government. And when it was revealed in the summer of 1993 that a secret agreement had been reached between Israel and the PLO, shockwaves reverberated throughout the world. The agreement provided for a mutual recognition between the two parties and further established a framework for the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian entity in the Occupied Territories. The sudden disclosure that Israeli and PLO officials had been meeting secretly outside Oslo, Norway, for several months, and that the two parties had reached a momentous agreement, ushered in a new period of hope, reconciliation, and negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Following the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) on September 13, 1993, a tremendous social and cultural transformation occurred throughout Palestinian communities in Israel, the Occupied Territories, and the near diaspora. Though the DOP was intentionally ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, many believed it to be the foundation from which an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue would soon emerge. Palestinian leadership inside the territories was strongly divided on the DOP.
along political lines. Islamist factions were quick to criticize the recognition of Israel and the renouncement of armed resistance. Socialist and other nationalist parties were equally troubled by the document’s obvious ambiguity as well as its many concessions. Yet by all accounts discussion and support for the accords hinged on the assumption that final status parameters (final borders, Jerusalem, and refugee rights) would be negotiated directly between the PLO and the Israeli state. Arafat, in signing the DOIP, had finally received Israeli recognition and had transformed himself in diplomatic circles from a “terrorist” to a “statesman.” In so doing, Arafat was given the promise of future negotiations on final status issues, and permission to officially return to the territories from exile. Israel, for that matter, was lauded for making a historic compromise and a genuine commitment to negotiate a resolution to a nearly hundred-year colonial conflict. Both parties soon garnered international accolades from the United States and the European community for their efforts. Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Yasser Arafat were all awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and photos of the “historic handshake” on the lawn of the White House circulated throughout the world as a sign of the end to the conflict.

The ramifications of this historic handshake were felt throughout the Middle East. Watching Arafat and Rabin stand together in Washington, D.C., Jordan’s King Hussein was now free to pursue his own formal peace treaty with Israel. In fact the day after the DOIP was signed, Jordan and Israel had already agreed to a working agenda for peace negotiations. By July 1994 Jordan and Israel had issued a joint declaration ending hostilities and on October 26, 1994, signed a formal treaty at Wadi Araba. Within three years of the DOIP Israel had formally established diplomatic ties with fifteen Arab states, investment and trade had suddenly become possible, and the Arab boycott was virtually lifted.

The sudden optimism and hope brought about by a year of secret negotiations between the PLO and Israel had tremendous social and cultural effects. The culture of mourning, sacrifice, and revolution had been seemingly lifted, and families were no longer deterred from openly and publicly celebrating life-cycle events such as weddings, births, and circumcisions. Concerts were held in the streets, and musicians were called on to perform music for the Palestinian nation and its new era of peace and reconciliation. The largest such celebration heralded the triumphant return of Yasser Arafat and his “Tunisian” cadre of aides and comrades to Gaza on July 1, 1994. Standing in the sunroof of his limousine Arafat waved to the
assembled crowds wearing his characteristic kūfiya and flashing the victory sign with both hands. Ironically, despite all the ceremony of Arafat’s triumphant return, in these early months few had actually seen the agreement he had signed. The concessions Arafat had made in exchange for his return to Gaza were largely unknown to the general Palestinian public, who were under the impression that a genuine peace process was under way, and that within a few short years an independent Palestinian state would be established.32 Celebrations emerged in the streets of Gaza, Ramallah, Amman, Beirut, and other Palestinian cities and villages. As a meaningful gesture, Palestinian men in the camps began kissing their rifles and handguns as a sign of both victory and farewell to the violence of the last five years. Working for National Geographic, journalist Alexandra Avakian photographed a Palestinian man holding his young daughter in his arms while they both kiss the barrel of his pistol, a group of elder women standing in the background singing zaghrūd in celebration of the end of violence (see figure 4.2).33 Gestures such as these were an incredibly poignant means of interpreting the moment, as many believed they were witnessing the end of the occupation and the birth of the independent Palestinian nation-state.

Figure 4.2. A kiss good-bye to the fighting. Photograph by Alexandra Avakian (1996).
For any musician who had made a career singing in support of the intifada, the dop presented two career choices: either follow the tides of hope and peace and sing in support of the peace process, or reject the accords and continue the protests of the intifada. Soon after the historic handshake there was a quiet in the streets. Rallies, demonstrations, protests, and other politically charged social spaces were quickly replaced by political debates, peace rallies, and victory celebrations. In effect intifada singers were out of business. With the struggle seemingly over, or at least on hold for the time being, nationalist musicians were left with no audience for their work. Intifada media seemed no longer necessary in a time of negotiation and hope for a just and equitable peace.

For many intifada musicians across the near diaspora the post-Oslo period meant a return to the already saturated workforce. In Jordan, Baladna founder Kamal Khalil, unable to find audiences for his political songs, returned to working as a carpenter and brick mason. In Syria and Lebanon, several founding members of al-ʿAshiqin turned their efforts to establishing children’s dabke troupes and other cultural heritage organizations. And in Jerusalem, Mustapha al-Kurd focused his attention on establishing an Arab music academy. Other once-famous musicians went back to day labor, driving cabs, and/or seeking odd jobs outside of the refugee camps, performing music at weddings and family celebrations wherever opportunities arose. The more fortunate were able to obtain work permits and visas in the larger Arab world, the Gulf States, America, Brazil, or Canada.

There were, however, many substantial opportunities within the developing Palestinian National Authority (PA) for those musicians and artists close to the PLO and its dominant political party, Fatah. These artists were given bureaucratic positions, working to develop a sense of national affiliation and loyalty among the people and the newly formed PA. A former intifada singer, now a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Culture, characterized the process as “using traditions and customs [taqalid wa ʿadāt] as a means to help ease the [PLO’s] transition from an ‘outside’ political formation in exile to an ‘inside’ national government [naẓām barra li naẓām jūwa].” The rigid social forces of wasta (nepotism, connections) created a great deal of animosity between artists left off the state payroll. Still other artists refused to join the PA for fear that they would lose creative control of their work and be turned into propagandists for the new regime. Many highly talented and well-trained artists declined par-
participation in the government for these reasons, choosing rather to pursue their art in the private sector as freelance musicians, teachers, or administrators.

Where formal employment in the developing Palestinian public sector was either unavailable or unattractive, artists found support in the many cultural nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) developing in the West Bank and Gaza strip. With the opening of dialogue and international recognition of the peace process, foreign aid began to flood into newly established NGOs devoted to Palestinian cultural and humanitarian needs. Underground intifada singers in the West Bank were courted to establish presentational folkloric dabke groups, teach private lessons, or administer music and heritage programs in Palestinian refugee camps funded by international aid agencies. Many of these groups have over the years developed strong reputations and received critical acclaim in the international art world for their efforts to provide artistic instruction to Palestinian children.

**SABREEN AND THE RISE OF RECONCILIATION**

While the majority of frontline resistance singers eventually faded from public view, there were several groups legitimately inspired by the widespread feelings of hope and optimism brought about by the Oslo period. Among these, Sabreen is perhaps the best remembered. During the “post-Oslo honeymoon” Sabreen released its fourth major album, *Jay al-Hamam* (Here come the doves), in 1994 (see figure 4.3). Their signature piece, “The Doves Are Coming,” is often cited as the hallmark anthem of the period.34

Your food is a locust,
Dipped in a drop of honey.
Your dress, burlap and camel hair.
Your shoes are thorns,
Your path is thorns, its flowers few.
The moon on the outer edge,
A prophet exiled.
Calling in the wilderness:
Widen the roads, For the deer of love and peace.
Widen the roads, The doves are coming from the mountain,
The doves are coming.
Taken as a whole, *Here Come the Doves* presents a truly imaginative tapestry of textual and musical dialogue. However, while it is true that its signature piece is indeed a testament to new feelings of hope and peace, in looking carefully at the remaining tracks it becomes apparent that this album is less a political celebration of the peace process per se than a pronouncement of a new Palestinian aesthetic. The statement being made is not of political accomplishment but of cultural dialogue and catharsis. Sabreen’s liner notes state that it is their desire to create a new voice, a “modern originality,” akin to that of Sayed Darwish and Umm Kulthum.35 Their hope was to develop their own individual style born of transcending traditional musical relationships. To do this, composer Said Murad sought to balance “old and new,” “East and West,” melody and harmony in his compositions. “The world has become a small village, and music breaks down the borders and overcomes distances. It weaves diverse elements into one continuous and harmonious weaving—a contribution to the formation of the new Palestinian, the new Arab, the new Mediterranean.”36 This new Palestinian seeks to break down political borders through musical dialogue and discussion with the “outside” non-Arab world.

Musically the collection of songs on *Here Come the Doves* navigates diverse terrain. The opening track, “The Gypsy,” pays homage to the reggae
of Bob Marley with overemphasized strummed up-beats, reggae-esque set drumming, and syncopated bass lines. Yet the melodic contour, song-style, and mode (bayātī) are quintessentially Arab. “Ramallah 1989” is reminiscent of a slow mournful blues. “Yammay” is a stylish rendition of an indigenous Palestinian folk song given new life through virtuosic tabla, harmonic ostinati, and the use of the lesser-known Egyptian reed-flute, qawala, instead of the traditional Palestinian shabāba. “Thirty Stars” is an experimentation of sorts, mixing Latin jazz beats and harmonies with Arab melodic ornamentation, contouring, and extemporization on the ‘ūd, violin, and nai. The most explicitly Arab piece on the album, “St. George,” also frustrates simple definition by its use of chordal ostinati and a pronounced electric bass line.

The texts of these pieces are equally enigmatic in form and content. Though each of the texts is composed by Hussein Barghouthi, there are only sparse moments of continuity between songs. Barghouthi’s disjointed poetic style defies linear narrative and thus follows nicely in the tradition of Sabreen’s earlier work with Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qassam. In contrast to Darwish and al-Qassam, however, Barghouthi brings a fresh voice and style to an otherwise exhausted repertory of resistance poetry. As a sociology professor at Bir Zeit University, Barghouthi was more familiar with the popular slang and dialect of the younger generation of protestors and activists demonstrating in the West Bank. He developed a more conversational, free-flowing poetic style, incorporating the cadence and dialect of his university students. This was more accessible to and idiomatic of West Bank youths than the canonized Darwish and al-Qassam. Of the more politically charged texts on this album, “Thirty Stars” is particularly illustrative of the hope, uncertainty, and youth culture characteristic of the time.

Thirty stars twinkling over a 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 power.

Thirty stars falling over a cypress valley,
Thirty stars falling.
Half of a lifetime falling over a cypress valley
Half of a lifetime of falling
And the days have changed,
And dreams exchanged,
And a cypress tree has broken.

Imagery of the night, its protective stars twinkling over a cypress valley, giving light to the darkness of war and occupation, each speaks to the stock repertory of intifada trope and metaphor. The cypress, a sign of northern Palestine/southern Lebanon, has been broken by the falling of stars and the wounding of the moon. Any source of light in darkness (stars, moon, fire) is said to represent life, hope, and resistance. Half a lifetime of falling stars signifies the sacrifice of Palestinians throughout forty years of occupation, resulting in the loss of days and the exchange of dreams. If only the youth of Palestine, or “the pretty ones,” would understand that despite the darkness of occupation there is power in hope for a better future.

Barghouthi’s most powerful writing follows shortly after in the song “Ramallah 1989.” Sabreen sets this text as a slow blues, incorporating swung eighths, melodic and harmonic emphasis on a pentatonic blues scale (lowered third and seventh, dominant seventh chordal harmonies), and a pulsating backbeat brought out by acoustic guitar and creative brushwork on cymbals and snare drum.

Sometimes I walk alone
In the middle of the night,
And the night is like a river
My hands in my pockets

I whistle, or smoke
In so much bitterness.
The whole town is shattered,
No one around
But the void and the army . . .

I stand by the fence,
My chin in my hand.
I stand and think, how?
All that’s left of a lifetime
Is a month, merely.
Yet I walk, whistle, or smoke,  
In so much bitterness.

A blues aesthetic seems ironically appropriate for the setting of this text. Contemplative, mournful, and grief-stricken, “Ramallah 1989” eulogizes the loss of social and cultural vitality long associated with the city of Ramallah. The bitterness of witnessing the devastation of such a vibrant artistic community causes one to walk the night smoking, whistling, looking for answers. In song and text, however, there are no answers. The listener is left to contemplate, or to taste, the final phrase, *hayk min kathar al-qahar* (in so much bitterness). Al-Qahar, while figuratively translated here as bitterness, has a multilayered meaning. From the root q-h-r, *al-qahar* literally means to be subjugated by force, vanquished, overpowered, or defeated. The “bitterness” of “Ramallah 1989” lies not only in the loss of a lively community and city to occupation, but also in the loss of hope and agency to even resist that occupation.

In relation to the established repertories of resistance song, “Ramallah 1989” is truly transgressive. Written at the height of the intifada, it is one of the very few songs that refuses to characterize the resistance uncritically as a heroic struggle of the masses. Rather it very honestly depicts the intifada and its devastation in terms of a very personalized experience of wandering the streets at night without direction, an experience nonetheless shared among many. Moving beyond the empty rhetoric of faceless “resistance,” “Ramallah 1989” argues for a new style of Palestinian song that deals with personal experience and emotion. There are no right answers, it seems. “Victory,” “liberation,” and “resistance” as they are characterized in countless intifada songs are revealed as illusory byproducts of political discourse and do not capture the lifeways and experiences of the people grappling for meaning within its cages. Its critical imagining of the resistance in terms of personal experience, loss, and the bitterness of occupation marks “Ramallah 1989” as truly revolutionary in comparison to established repertories of nationalist song.

Immediately following “Ramallah 1989” Sabreen intentionally places the title track, “The Doves Are Coming,” to offer the listener some relief from the despair and emptiness of the previous song. Perhaps Sabreen has revealed that the ultimate solution to “Ramallah’s” bitterness and subjugation is found in the plea of “Doves” to “widen the roads” for the coming of peace. Indeed the coming of peace is likened to the return of an exiled...
prophet, the dawning of a new moon. “Its food is locusts” (plague, violence, hatred), its “dress is burlap,” and its “path is thorns” (difficult, painful, treacherous). The coming of peace here is not the anticipated glorious victory espoused in the vitriolic nationalist songs of the intifada. Rather it is signified in the difficult, often-painful path of dialogue and reconciliation.

What distinguishes each of these songs from its contemporaries is an innovative, if not trangressive, approach to poetry, melody, lyric, and instrumentation. Inasmuch as Sabreen’s hybridized approach to melody and rhythm signaled a new compositional style, so too did their lyrics enable new possibilities for depicting Palestinian trauma and experience. For a group such as Sabreen, which had made its name singing in support of the intifada, *Here Come the Doves* is a bold statement. Touted for its strong message of redemption through dialogue, *Here Come the Doves* provides a compelling benchmark of artistic and cultural production during the early post-Oslo years. Though some have labeled Sabreen’s work during this period as merely reactive celebration, a close reading of the songs themselves reveals this to be a superficial interpretation. True, several of the songs on this album are explicitly supportive of the peace process (“St. George,” “Thirty Stars,” “The Doves Are Coming”). Yet in large part the overall power of this album lies not in its overt message of peace, but rather in its drive to innovation and dialogue across rigid cultural, political, and aesthetic borders. Peace, in and of itself, is never the overt theme of the album. Rather *Here Come the Doves* is a testament to aesthetic and political dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli, Arab and Jew, East and West. Sabreen’s stated desire for creating a “modern originality” entailed drawing from a diverse tapestry of musical and textual devices. In blending cosmopolitan reggae, blues, and pop styles with classical and folk Arabic songs and instruments, Sabreen attempted to push the envelope of Palestinian nationalist song, “contributing to the formation of a new Palestinian.” Here Sabreen doesn’t celebrate “the coming of the doves” but rather “the coming of the new Palestinian.”

This is perhaps the most extraordinary legacy of Sabreen in particular, and of the “post-Oslo honeymoon” in general. Situated on various sociocultural axes, the post-Oslo period, though short-lived, had a formative impact on processes of Palestinian identity formation. Sabreen’s emphasis on musical and cultural dialogue dovetailed nicely with widespread feelings of hope for reconciliation with Israel and the non-Arab
world. Amira Hass, writing of her experiences living and working in Gaza at that time, observed that during episodes of high hope children began “playing soccer again; men were leaving the mosques [the only public safe haven during the intifada years] to cheer at the soccer field.” Hass goes on to mention that in 1994, as hopes again ran high, “the sale of hair-care products suddenly went up.” Women in Gaza, trapped in their homes by occupation and strict religious edicts to cover their heads, were starting to see the end of the curfews and began planning for their return to public social life.

Musicians in Ramallah recounted to me how during this period the number of wedding performances increased exponentially. With the coming of dialogue, and an opening in the occupation, families were quick to seize the opportunity to marry off their children. The time offered a small window where wedding celebrations would most likely not be interrupted by curfews, closures, or incursions. Likewise, in Gaza and the West Bank, when curfews were temporarily lifted and soldiers were redeployed, the streets came alive with cafes, theaters, restaurants, and assorted falafel carts. Families and young couples assembled each night after work to stroll through the streets, picnic in the hills, or walk the Gazan coastline. Memories such as these, though incidental, are in fact significant for understanding how Palestinian sociality was so tremendously altered by the hope for an end to the occupation.

As the so-called resistance musicians of the 1970s and 1980s faded into obscurity or the state establishment, their absence created a vacuum within which Sabreen was able to constructively promote its more cosmopolitan vision of nationalist song. The intractable hold of the occupation on identity politics had, if only momentarily, released, allowing for innovation and dialogue and bringing with it a new appreciation for cosmopolitan music and aesthetics. Though many Palestinian musicians had always been interested in Western instruments, scales, beats, and harmonies, up until the post-Oslo period Palestinian music was largely governed by a discourse of resistance that discouraged innovation in favor of the militant preservation of turāth al-shaʿbī (popular heritage) and other “national” musical devices. Musicians were charged with the task of preserving and affirming a distinct Palestinian identity besieged by occupation and forced exile. At a time when hope reigned supreme, such aesthetic obstacles momentarily lifted, allowing many musicians the opportunity to innovate, augment, or develop a “new Palestinian sound.”
For the next five years the post-Oslo honeymoon continued. Palestinian musicians seeking to develop and innovate new repertories of song and dance found fertile ground in networks of multinational nongovernmental organizations, conservatories, and potential travel to Europe and North America. Collaborations between Israeli (Jewish) and Palestinian (Christian and Muslim) artists were also commonplace. New networks of collaborating musicians and artists on both sides of the Green Line emerged, creating a new music scene born of hope and reconciliation. The intermingling of musicians from diverse Israeli and Palestinian communities coalesced with an intermingling of aesthetics, producing a unique musical and cultural hybridity.42