

# Voices of peace and the legacy of reconciliation: popular music, nationalism, and the quest for peace in the Middle East<sup>1</sup>

NASSER AL-TAEE

## Abstract

*This article explores political, cultural and musical issues surrounding the dispute between Palestinians and Israelis, particularly over Jerusalem, which each party uses to symbolise and promote their own perception of the conflict. Specifically, I examine selected popular musical landmarks that capture the essence of the struggle from the ultra-nationalistic tones of the 1960s and 1970s to the more reconciliatory ones in the 1990s advocating peace. Special attention is given to musical cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian singers who played a strong role in the promotion of peace within a utopian dream of coexistence between Arabs and Jews.*

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand whither.  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,  
If I do not remember thee,  
If I do not set Jerusalem  
Above my highest joys.  
(Psalm 137, *The Holy Bible*)

O Jerusalem, the choice of Allah of all his lands! In it are the chosen of His servants. From it the earth was stretched forth and from it shall it be rolled up like a scroll. The dew which descends upon Jerusalem is a remedy from every sickness because it is from the gardens of Paradise. (From the *Hadith* by Prophet Muhammad)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The Middle Eastern crisis between Arabs and Jews is usually discussed from a purely political standpoint. Fifty years following the establishment of Israel, however, such a tactic looms as reductionist, to say the least. While both sides continue their struggle for land and identity, a big part of their cultural, intellectual and musical creativity is aimed at promoting their own visions of the struggle. Not surprisingly, decades of hostility and fighting have resulted in monolithic readings of the problem, whereby each group is uncompromising and unwilling to listen to the other side's point of view. In the early 1990s, however, both the Palestinian and Israeli sides showed greater flexibility and desire to resolve the conflict, perhaps motivated by world events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the aftermaths

of the Gulf War, growing diplomatic contacts between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states, and a shift in focus from politics and military action to the promise of economic prosperity. Recent waves of violence between Palestinians and Israelis, however, show how sensitive and fragile the road to peace is and how easy it is for both parties to revert to old and uncompromising attitudes.

This ancient struggle has inspired both sides to renewal cultural, intellectual and musical creativity, aimed at elucidating their viewpoints. In this essay, I explore some of the issues surrounding the dispute between Palestinians and Israelis, particularly over Jerusalem, the City of Peace, which each party uses to symbolise and promote their own perception of the conflict. Specifically, I examine selected popular musical landmarks that capture important moments of the struggle, from the ultra-nationalistic tones of the 1960s and 1970s to the more reconciliatory ones in the 1990s advocating tolerance, peace and co-existence. With the recent al-Aqsa uprising and the subsequent election of the right-wing Ariel Sharon as the Prime Minister of Israel, however, it remains to be seen if such a trend can continue or whether nationalistic sentiments will return.

### History of the Middle Eastern conflict

Each of the three main monotheistic religions holds a history and a host of traditions that has made Jerusalem the centre for its faith. For Jews, Jerusalem is the site of the Western Wall or Wailing Wall, of remains of the Second Temple built by Jews following their exile in Babylon, and the holiest site to the Jewish people. To Christians, it was the scene of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection and the birthplace of the Christian faith. As for Muslims, Jerusalem (known in Arabic as *al-Quds*, 'the holy') is the home of Haram al-Sharif, or the 'Noble Sanctuary', which includes the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque, from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to Heaven. Recognising such profound significance to all religions, the United Nations issued a partition agreement in 1947 making the city an international district. But conflict erupted and the city was divided between Muslims, Christian Arabs and Jews. In 1967, Israel captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordanian authority, the Golan Heights from Syria, Sinai and Gaza Strip from Egypt.

In recent history, the Middle East conflict was raised to a new level of intensity and international recognition by the Palestinian *intifadah*, a rebellion against the Israeli occupation started in 1987. Shortly thereafter, in October 1990, the first public negotiations of the current process between the Israelis and Palestinians began. Throughout the negotiations, the outline of a permanent peace and the status of Jerusalem have been core issues. Israelis have proposed extended limited or joint sovereignty to the Palestinians in some Arab neighbourhoods in Jerusalem; Palestinians insist on full authority over East Jerusalem, captured by Israel in 1967. Moshe Amirav, who participated in the 1967 war but since has worked with the Palestinians to find a solution to the contested city, acknowledges the division of Jerusalem and voices his criticism of Israel's expansionist policy:

Jerusalem is not a united city. It is a divided city, one of the most divided in the world. More divided than Belfast . . . In the euphoria of 1967, we annexed 28 Arab villages that later on became Arab neighborhoods . . . Our aim was to enlarge the Jewish population, but we did all the most stupid possible things. (Kifner 2000, p. 4)

In 1993, in Oslo, Norway, a Palestinian–Israeli Declaration of Principles was signed. This Accord, secretly negotiated behind the scenes between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Isaac Rabin, gave Palestinians limited authority in education, health, social welfare and tourism, but reserved issues of security and foreign affairs for the Israeli authority. It stopped short, however, of embracing a Palestinian State and left the status of Jerusalem unresolved. Palestinian spokesperson Hanan Ashrawi, who worked with Arafat during negotiations, voiced severe criticism of the Accord and spoke of the diversity and purity of Jerusalem, now distorted by decades of war:

Jerusalem was being altered before our very eyes, its people evicted and dispossessed, its ancient walls studded with soldiers, its rolling hills violated with settlement fortresses, its open roads blocked with military checkpoints, and its spirit soiled by possession as the conqueror's spoils. It lay stifling under siege, slowly strangulating, bereft of the lifeblood of its own children, groaning under the boot of military occupation. And we mourned Jerusalem instead of revelling in its magnificence. (Victor 1994, pp. 247–8)

By the mid-1990s, however, the harsh tone previously adopted by many on both sides had eased as they realised the necessity and inevitability of living side-by-side in the Holy Land. Faisal Husseini, one of the chief Palestinian negotiators, expressed his feelings: 'I dream of the day when a Palestinian will say "Our Jerusalem" and will mean Palestinians and Israelis, and an Israeli will say "Our Jerusalem" and will mean Israelis and Palestinians.' In response to his statement, hundreds of liberal Israeli scholars, writers and former Knesset members issued a similar statement outlining their vision for a shared Jerusalem: 'Jerusalem is ours, Israelis and Palestinians – Muslims, Christians and Jews . . . Our Jerusalem must be united, open to all and belonging to all its inhabitants, without borders and barbed wire in its midst' (Armstrong 1996, p. 419). Many outside observers have also proposed joint custody of the city; however, after several bloody wars and years of intense peace negotiations, the realisation of such remains a utopian dream. The difficult negotiations regarding the status of Jerusalem are not surprising. In addition to its religious significance, Jerusalem stands as a symbol of independence for both sides.

In the summer of 2000, Ehud Barak, then Prime Minister of Israel, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat met at Camp David in one last attempt by the Clinton administration to conclude a historic peace treaty in the Middle East. After two weeks of daily meetings, talks broke off. As before, one of the primary obstacles remained the status of Jerusalem.

### **Musical images of Jerusalem**

The image of Jerusalem as a Holy City and as a City of Peace is a common thread throughout history. In the Middle Ages, Jerusalem was dubbed the golden land of 'milk and honey', a city radiating with light and glory.<sup>3</sup> The Spanish poet, Lope de Vega (1562–1635), referred to it as the 'cradle of the Orient':

The Orient's cradle, bathed in light  
Of that first dawn in snowy Bethlehem  
And that setting of the sun,  
The mortal bed of suffering Christ.

Will Jerusalem then be like the cloak  
 Of the divinest Captain, and the soldiers,  
 Those Christian Kings of Europe  
 Casting lots over the seamless cloth? (Grindea 1968, p. 153)<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, many Arab nationalist artists sang for Palestine and expressed support for their right for a homeland. One of the most popular and dramatic Arab songs about Jerusalem is Fairuz's 'Zahrat al-Mada'in' ('The Flower of All Cities'). As one of the most revered Lebanese/Arab voices, Fairuz began her career in the 1950s singing lyrics composed by the legendary Rahbani Brothers (Abou Murad 1990; Morrow 1998). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, she was recognised as the Lebanese musical ambassador, chanting for peace in her beloved homeland torn by a bloody civil war. As an Arab-Christian, Fairuz sings about the significance of Jerusalem to all humanity, narrating the historical significance of the city to the three monotheistic religions (see Figure 1).

The symphonic prelude to 'Zahrat al-Mada'in' introduces two contrasting themes, beginning softly with the strings and a solo keyboard. The first theme, a descending melodic sequence, suggests the tragic nature of the struggle over Jerusalem. As the theme repeats, it grows louder, punctuated by heavy beats from the timpani and loud blasts interjected by the brass. The second theme evolves from the first with heavy participation of the brass in a military fashion. With ominous drumbeats and dotted rhythm, there is a strong indication of struggle, terror and war that eventually disrupts the peace in the Land of Peace. As the prelude subsides, Fairuz's heavenly voice begins with a prayer:

**I**  
 To you, oh City of Prayer  
 I pray.  
 To you, the one with the most beautiful buildings  
 The flower of all cities.  
 To you Jerusalem,  
 The City of Prayer,  
 I pray.

**II**  
 It is to you that our eyes journey everyday;  
 They roam through the narrow streets of your temples  
 And reach out to the old churches,  
 Wiping out the sorrow from the mosques.

**III**  
 Oh the night of *Isra*,  
 The path for those who ascended to heaven,<sup>5</sup>  
 Our eyes journey to you every day  
 And I pray.<sup>6</sup>

Having set the tone as to the importance of Jerusalem to all factions, Fairuz moves in the fourth stanza to recount the Christian connection, recalling the birth of baby Jesus tended by the Virgin Mary. The music shifts to a Christmas carol, lightly orchestrated by a solo flute accompanied by a triangle and pizzicato strings:

**IV**  
 The child in the cave  
 And His mother Mary  
 Are two crying faces.

But the mood of the carol is soon shattered by the recurring blasts of the brass from the prelude, echoing the sadness of Jesus and His mother. The lyrics then shift to a narration of the historic events from the 1967 war, voicing criticism of the Israeli army as the violators of peace: Jerusalem became a warzone, giving way to injustice, intolerance and terror. The song culminates with Fairuz claiming Jerusalem for the Arabs:

**IV**

Crying for those who have been forced out of their homes,  
Children without shelter  
Those who defended it and died in the smoke of wars.<sup>7</sup>  
And peace became a martyr  
In the Land of Peace  
And justice collapsed by the smoke of wars.

When the city of Jerusalem fell  
Love subsided  
And in your hearts, war resided.

**V**

The glowing anger is coming  
And I am full of faith  
The glowing anger is coming  
I'll overcome my sorrows.  
From all paths,  
Riding horses of fear,  
And like the glowing face of God,  
It's coming.

The gate to our city will never shut  
For I am going to pray.  
I will knock on doors,  
And I'll open all doors.

And you, oh river of Jordan,  
Will wash my face with your holy water,  
And you will wash away all traces of barbarism  
And we'll defeat the forces of evil.

**VI**

The house is ours,  
And Jerusalem is ours.  
And with our hands,  
We will bring to Jerusalem  
Its beauty and peace.

And to Jerusalem  
Peace is coming.

Fairuz's sentiments are a testament to rising Arab Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, their claim to the city, and to the increasing hostility between Arabs and Jews over contested territories. Following the 1967 war, there was much frustration and pain on the part of the Arabs and the Palestinians, who were ousted from their homes and subjected to refugee status across the Middle East, and anger that Israeli immigrants to Palestine would not acknowledge responsibility for their wrong doings.

Throughout history, the Jewish claim to Jerusalem has been intense, expressed through numerous political, cultural and artistic dicta with a variety of emphases. For example, as Barak was preparing to negotiate handing over the Eastern part of



*Figure 1. Fairuz, the legendary Lebanese singer.*

Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty, dozens of right-wing Israeli politicians met at the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, protesting and airing a video clip from Barak's campaign pledge to keep Jerusalem undivided. Barak had promised that: 'Israel is united around a united Jerusalem' (Sontag 2000, p. 12). The fact that most Israelis hold Jerusalem at the centre of their beliefs is echoed in numerous poems; Jewish and Israeli sentiments towards Jerusalem are exemplified strongly in the Jewish prayer book and Medieval (Sephardic) Jewish poetry. The 1967 war had sent waves of nationalism and euphoria amongst Israelis that was translated in politically charged songs such as 'Y'rushalayim Shel Zahav' ('Jerusalem of Gold') and 'Lakh Y'rushalayim' ('Your Jerusalem') that commemorated the return of the Old City of Jerusalem to Jewish sovereignty for the first time since the biblical era. According to Motti Regev, Israeli popular music of the early 1960s reflected ideological dominance and political centralism with Zionist motifs (Regev 1992, p. 2). One such genre that promoted these ideals was the *shirei erez Israel*, most of which served within the Army Entertainment Ensembles.

Contemporary artists and poets continue to glorify Jerusalem, motivated by nationalist agendas that reflect the regional conflict. As the guns of war fell silent following the signing of the Oslo Accord, some artists responded with softer tunes that reflected the sentiments of the times. In many of the renditions cited herein, Jerusalem is mentioned explicitly or implicitly as the symbol of the struggle; peace in the Holy Land stands as a symbol for peace not only in the Middle East, but also as an iconic symbol for universal harmony between races and religions from all over the world. Consequently, many Middle Eastern artists are transcending their own struggle to envision a broader and more encompassing path to peace and harmonious coexistence.

## Middle Eastern popular music and poetry

### 1. Arab and Palestinian popular music and poetry

Contemporary Palestinian music may be related to a wider set of Arab traditions and has been partially discussed by Amatzia Bar-Yosef (1998), Amnon Shiloah (1980), Habib Touma (1996) and Christian Poché (2001), to name a few. Despite its variety of styles, Palestinian music shares a common tradition that connects it with Arab history, geography and language. Relying on the *qasidah*, a classical poem that serves as an accompaniment to rituals and ceremonies, with lyrics fluctuating between colloquial and classic Arabic, music within Palestinian society is performed in various social, religious and processional contexts. In these ceremonies, the responsorial interaction between performers and their audiences elicits significant interaction and feedback that elevate the music to a higher level of intensity (Racy 1991). Both males and females participate in a variety of body movements and cries of 'Allah' while women, in particular, express their exhilaration through ecstatic ululation. Some genres involve a great deal of improvisation; in the '*atābā*', for example, two *shu'ara'* (poet-musicians) improvise drawing upon old heroic narratives and combine them with symbolic allusions to modern events. The '*atābā*' is a freely improvised poem in stanzas of four or eight lines with a metrical syllabic refrain. Its theme is love, and like the *qasid*, also known as *shurūqi*, it is strophic in nature and allows a considerable degree of rhythmic and melodic flexibility (Racy 2001, p. 423). Other important genres include the *qasid*, a long rhymed poem, and

*hidā*, a heroic chant performed in responsorial style. The poetic genres, according to Poché, are usually accompanied by dances such as the *danbka*, a chain dance performed by either men or women, or the *dahhiyya*, a Bedouin dance popular in Negev region (Poché 2001, p. 936).

Musically speaking, Palestinian songs are usually pure melody performed monophonically with complex vocal ornamentations and strong percussive rhythmic beats. Rhythm is also enhanced by hand clapping, which often results in polyrhythmic patterns that play against the inherent rhythm of the melody. The use of the *maqam* (mode) is a common feature linking popular music with folk and art music. Complementing the vocal line are various musical instruments such as the *mijwiz*, a single-reed clarinet with double pipes, the *arghūl*, a single reed clarinet with double pipes of unequal length, and the *shabbāba*. Drums like the *daff* and the *darbukah* provide an active and lively beat.

Much of the Palestinian music of the past half-century has been devoted to resistance of Israeli occupation and to the preservation of national identity. The emergence of the cassette industry helped popularise the songs of resistance, mostly based on folk tradition and mixed with Arab popular music. The poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, for example, was synonymous with the popular music of Marcel Khalife, who set much of his lyrics in the 1980s and 1990s. Their collaborative works such as 'Promises of the Storm' (Paredon Records, 1983) and 'Ahmed the Arab' (Nagam Records, 1984) were the fuel of everyday struggle, resistance, and celebration of freedom.

In his comparative study of Palestinian folk music of *haddāy* in northern Israel from the 1960s to the late 1980s, Bar-Yosef traced the genre's transformation in style and aesthetics that accompanied the socio-political changes of Palestinian society in Israel (Bar-Yosef 1998). This primarily vocal genre employs the Arab *maqam* or mode, and is typically accompanied by traditional instruments and performed within private gatherings. Bar-Yosef's research shows how the *haddāy* has been modernised through the use of electric Western keyboards and the addition of complex vocal phrasing. One of the significant changes noted by Bar-Yosef is the shift from love songs to more national and public issues voicing dismay at occupation and expressing pride in Arab roots (Bar-Yosef, 1998, p. 71). The complex melodic features (compared to the limited formulas of the traditional style) gave way to a growing irregularity of form and fragmentation of phrases. Bar-Yosef equates this shift of style with transformation of expression and feelings from tranquillity to more 'intense and exciting musical expressions' (Bar-Yosef 1998, p. 73). The Palestinian political diaspora and the struggle for independence very likely played a decisive role in this transformation.

## 2. Israeli popular music and poetry

Though some Israeli music shares common features with that of the Palestinians, primarily in its predominantly melodic character and in its use of similar modes and embellishments, it differs in its base and use of Slavic and Russian melodies as well as in its orchestration. As immigrants converged on Israel from various parts of the world, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews brought with them their own Jewish heritage and musical traditions. In her examination of power relations in Israeli popular music, Inbal Perelson argued that since 1982, 'Israeli popular music has embodied the heterogeneity and inner contradictions of Israeli society and reflected

all its social and cultural problems' (Perelson 1998, p. 114). Tensions between East and West were caused by the cultural and political domination of European settlers over their Eastern immigrant counterparts. Perelson claims that the cultural and musical products of the latter, referred to as 'Oriental', were not only influenced by the music of the Arab world, but have been relegated to the 'margins of the Israeli system of popular music' despite the producers being Israeli citizens. Regardless of the deliberate attempts to 'integrate Eastern and Western music . . . the results were somewhat forced – Oriental (Middle Eastern and North African) rhythms and motifs not lending themselves easily to orchestration in a classical Western style' (Dubi Lenz 1996, p. 363).

Since Israel's native tradition is relatively short, much of its popular music is judged to be based on how it promotes and defines the state's national identity. While some dominant Western genres are embraced and celebrated, other genres like rock strive to be on the margins, as they rebel against tradition in a quest to gain a cosmopolitan appeal. Musical genres of minorities, however, are shunned from the national consciousness. In his assessment of Israeli popular music, Regev argued that while the dominant genre of *shirei erez Israel* (the songs of the land of Israel), which has a Russian influence and is experienced as indigenous and 'authentic', *musica mizrakhit*<sup>8</sup> (Jewish Oriental or Middle Eastern music) struggles to find its place within the mainstream (Regev 1996).

### 3. *Musica Mizrahit*

Important to any discussion of peace within Israeli popular music is *musica mizrakhit*, which has been gaining steady popularity inside Israel. Research by Amnon Shiloah and Erik Cohen (1983), Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi and Pamela Squires-Kidron (1989), and Motti Regev (1996) have advanced our understanding of its musical characteristics and impact within mainstream Israel. Due to its particular 'ethnic' sound and its association with 'low culture', the music of the Oriental Jews exists 'outside the usual repertory of *zemer ivry* [Hebrew song]' (Halper *et al.* 1989, p. 140; Regev 1996, p. 277). The culture of the Sephardic Jews remains marginalised within Israeli society and their music is rarely played on Israeli TV or radio stations. Its ethnic labelling is also a point of dispute, especially since the mainstream culture can also be subjected to ethnic labelling as well (Russian, Polish, Romanian, etc).

Yet perhaps it is this marginalisation that prompts many Oriental Jewish artists to sing for peace and reconciliation with Israel and its Arab neighbours. They



Figure 2. Chava Alberstein, a devout advocate of peace in Israel (courtesy of Rounder Records).

are torn between assimilating into the 'melting-pot' and preserving their own heritage, a situation reflected in their song lyrics which fluctuate between 'expressing the enthusiasm of the immigrants and . . . their protest, particularly against alleged discrimination and injustices perpetuated against them' (Shiloah and Cohen 1983, p. 238). In attempts to reconcile their national identifications and historical origins, which are now cast as the 'enemy', Oriental Jews were asked to 'integrate' into an 'alien' Western culture. Consequently, while preserving its distinctive musical sounds, *musica mizrakhit* attempts to appeal to Israel's modern Western audience. Being familiar with both cultures (Israeli and that of their native land), and suffering from discrimination in their own adopted land, Oriental Jewish artists can serve as a bridge between Israelis and Palestinians and are perhaps in a better position to negotiate with the complex dynamics of the conflict.

In its ability to fuse Eastern and Western elements, *musica mizrakhit* is a reflection of the social and cultural infrastructure of modern Israel. Ofra Haza, for example, modulates freely between *shirei erez Israel* and *shirei Teiman* (Yemenite songs) without contradictions, while in *Silan* (Amiata Records, 1998), Yair Dalal and the Al Ol Ensemble successfully fuse Jewish, Arab and Indian musics. Similarly, Bustan Abraham is a progressive ensemble that combines Israeli and Palestinian musicians who sing in a variety of styles ranging from Oriental to flamenco to jazz.

### Music, nationalism, and the voices of peace

In recent years, many Middle Eastern artists have sung about their hopes for peace in these complex times, under sometimes difficult conditions. Some of the songs come from a strongly defined nationalistic viewpoint using traditional musical styles; others suggest peaceful coexistence through cooperation and collaboration, in musical genres, through different languages, and by artists of various backgrounds.

One of the celebrated Palestinian figures from the 1970s and 1980s was Mustapha Al Kurd, who sang about hope under occupation, combining Arab folk with pop and Western rock (Morgan and Adileh 1999, Vol. 1, p. 386). The Israeli government responded by imposing censorship that eventually sent many artists underground. At border checkpoints, Israelis not only confiscated Palestinians' personal belongings, but took their tapes and other musical products as well. Poets and composers were considered just as dangerous to the occupation forces as the rebels and militiamen. Once a single tape made it across the border, tens of thousands of copies could be made and distributed in a matter of days. News of artists' arrests and confiscation of their material served only to popularise their name and created a higher demand for their tapes. The celebrated Palestinian songwriter Suhail Khoury explains what it meant to write and sing under such conditions:

. . . the Israelis did quite a good marketing service for me because they announced on the radio and TV that I was arrested for making music and could be imprisoned for ten years. So everybody wanted to know what kind of tape that was. Of course, I'm laughing now, but I was tortured for twelve days. They wanted to know who composed, who sang, who played. I didn't tell them anything and I was sentenced to six months imprisonment. (Morgan and Adileh 1999, p. 387).

Such censorship of Arab and Palestinian music was practised by the Israeli media, who had total control over the broadcasting networks. According to Perelson, this resulted in the banning of Palestinian nationalistic lyrics and consequently led to the marginalisation of their music:

... it is hardly necessary to mention that Arabic songs with strong social and political messages were never aired, not even in the special programmes for the Arab minority in Israel. These Arabic songs were totally marginalized by the institutions whose judgements go to make up the canon of Israeli popular music, and although the Arab minority in Israel did operate within its own institutions of canonization, they themselves were politically and socially marginal. (Perelson 1998, p. 116)

In the 1990s and following the signing of the Oslo Accord, Palestinians were able to turn their attention to more social celebrations and festivities. Many artists began to look into the future and to sing for peace. The musical group Sabreen, which had previously released 'Mawt al-Nabi' ('Death of a Prophet') during the *intifadah*, was able to inspire and instil hope in a generation that has yet to aspire to their dreams. In the 1980s, Sabreen emerged as one of the pioneering Palestinian music groups, whose repertoire is dedicated to issues concerning Palestinian identity and political struggle. They sang lyrics by celebrating Palestinian poets such as Mahmud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim.

In later recordings, lyrics by the Palestinian contemporary poet Hussein Barghouti gave Sabreen's songs a modern appeal. Their musical style also changed, combining elements of Palestinian folk with American blues and jazz. In their efforts to bypass the Israeli cultural and artistic siege, Sabreen reached out to new audiences beyond their geographical territory by diversifying their style and through the use of contemporary sounds. In the 1990s, their style became even more eclectic. Their melodies grew more fragmented and increasingly disjointed; the vocal line blurred and merged with the instruments. The process further involved a more active role by the instruments, no longer merely accompaniment but equal partners in the presentation of the song. 'Our own originality lies in giving the instrument its rightful place when the human voice disappears between the folds of the song' (Sabreen 1994). Some of these ideas reflect the views of the *intifadah*, which required equal participation from all facets of Palestinian society to be effective. Sabreen's new style was intentionally distorted and inconsistent. Responding to Palestinians' harsh economic and political realities, it would have been ironic to sing in 'balanced' phrases, 'steady' rhythm and 'constant' beat.<sup>9</sup>

The 1990s were times of optimism, as both sides seemed more determined than ever to reach a lasting peace. In 'The Doves are Coming', Sabreen sing for an end to the conflict and call upon all forces of nature to widen the road for the doves of peace:

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.  
O moon on the outer edge  
O 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. (Sabreen 1994)

In the current Israeli popular musical scene, important artists such as Chava Alberstein, Yair Dalal, Noa (Achinoam Nini) and others continue to use music and poetry as a vehicle for expression. Among Israelis, the status of Alberstein, for example, is legendary due in part to her commitment to peace and abhorrence of violence in the Middle East (see Figure 2). Her song 'Chad Gadya' or 'One Goat' was almost banned because of its references to violence and Israeli soldiers' brutality against *awlad al-hijarah* or 'children of stones' during the *intifadah*. Alberstein explains her approach to the song:

I based it on a traditional song we sing at Passover when we sit down to eat together. It is something like 'The Woman who Swallowed a Fly'. In this version a dog bites a cat, a stick beats the dog, fire burns the stick, water puts out the fire, an ox drinks the water, a butcher kills the ox and then the Angel of Death comes, and so on. It is a circle of violence, and I wanted to make a modern song about this, and how you can get drawn into violence. (Broughton 1999A, p. 364)

This traditional Israeli song is circular in both lyrics and music. The text is dependent upon effective story-telling, embedded in the folk nature of oral tradition. Yet the repetitiveness serves only to enhance the sense of calamity as the level of destruction grows bigger and bigger, symbolised in the imagery of the oppressor, culminating in the image of the Angel of Death (cat, dog, fire, water, ox, butcher, Angel of Death). The text is set syllabically to a monotonous, yet haunting melody. Its strophic form, narrow range, and use of a drone in the background give it a naïve ethos, and an ironic feel that does not match the violence of the text. This places a heavy burden on both the singer and the listener, aware of the cycle of violence yet powerless against the harshness of reality.

The irony and the dichotomy created by the violent textual images set to simple folk-like music combine to create an eerie feeling that makes one's hair stand on end. The melody is punctuated by a strong percussive beat on the downbeat, designed to violate the overall soft sentiments of the song and enhance the tension between the text and the music. Toward the end of the piece, one begins to understand where the song is leading to when Alberstein directs us toward the real purpose behind her singing. Referring to a Passover Seder tradition, Alberstein sings:

On all other nights  
I asked only the four traditional questions.  
Tonight, I have one more question –  
How long will the cycle of horror last?  
The chased and the chaser  
The beaten and the beater  
When will this madness end?

I used to be a kind of a peaceful sheep.  
Today, I don't know who I am anymore. (Alberstein 1998, p. 1)

### **Musical cooperation**

Musical cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian singers in Israel began in the 1980s and has been a strong factor in the promotion of peace within a utopian dream of coexistence between Arabs and Jews. Perelson claims that the shift in

power, which began in 1977, caused a gradual change in aesthetic norms that enabled the penetration of the Oriental songs into the Israeli mainstream market. Perelson mentions Olearchik's 'Shalom Salaam' performed by the Palestinian singer Amal Murkus in the annual children's song festival in 1986, and the collaborations between Murkus and Israeli singer Ci Hayman in 'Shooting and Crying' and with Corrine Alal in 'I Have No Other Land'. Perelson elaborates on the phenomenon:

One must take into consideration, however, that this phenomenon flourished at the very height of the *intifadah*, and so makes an unequivocal political statement. Undoubtedly, the penetration of Arab songs into the canon of Hebrew song is much more immediate and direct than the parallel process in the literary system, since popular music is a less formal cultural domain. (Perelson 1998, pp. 119–20)

Another Israeli musician committed to building bridges between Israelis and Palestinians is Dalal, whose music exemplifies the diversity and rich heritage of Israeli society (see Figure 3). As the son of Jewish–Iraqi parents, Dalal grew up listening to both Arab and Jewish musical traditions. His recent release, *Silan* (Amiata Records, 1998), extends the idea of globalism and fusion beyond the Middle East to include India. Dalal freely utilises a unique blend of instruments like *'ūd*, *sitar*, guitar, violin, clarinet, *tabla*, and other Middle Eastern percussion. He also incorporates diverse melodies from the Arab, Turkish, Jewish and Indian traditions. The songs themselves reveal a multicultural approach. For example, the first song is 'Acco Malca' ('The Queen of Acca'), named after an old port city where Jews and Arabs lived together in harmony. The title cut, 'Silan', refers to the date honey delicacy served during Passover. 'Dikklat Nur', on the other hand, is based on *Raga Shiva Rangjani*, first recorded by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

In 1994, Dalal performed at Oslo as Israelis and Palestinians celebrated the anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accord. His song 'Zaman el Salam' ('Time for Peace') combined a huge chorus of children made up of fifty Israelis and fifty Palestinians, accompanied by the Norwegian Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Zubin Mehta. 'Zaman el Salam' is written in both Arabic and Hebrew to signify togetherness, harmonious co-existence, and equality, Dalal's principal wishes:<sup>10</sup>

*Arabic:*

Like an ocean – peace, my love,  
Has a wide embracing soul.  
There are times of ebb and flow  
In days of struggle and of sorrow,  
Between storms and thunder,  
Feelings burst out – my love,  
Time for peace – *inshallah*

*Hebrew:*

There is a time, I know  
From faraway, I long  
Like a lone star in the rain  
Up there in the sky.  
There are times of ebb and flow  
In days of struggle and of sorrow  
Out of lightning, the rainbow glows  
And I'll know, the time has come  
Time for peace – *inshallah*.

The structure of the piece, like its message, fuses Arab and Israeli traditions. Dalal begins with an improvisatory section, *taqsim*, on the 'ūd before singing the Arabic stanza in a recitative style. From that emerges the Hebrew section, bridged again by an improvisatory section on the violin. The chorus of children brings the song to a symphonic conclusion with Dalal's voice soaring with a prayer 'time for peace – *inshallah*'. Regarding the performance of this song, Dalal states that 'Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat were there, but they weren't speaking. After hearing the song they signed a contract they hadn't signed before. Perhaps it's a bit naïve to believe that music can influence the Peace Process, but I believe it' (Broughton 1999B, p. 366).

The reviewer for Dalal's *Al Ol* CD summarised his style as a 'rare mixture between conflicting trends in music, traditional versus modern, east versus west and Jewish versus Arab. As his original music illustrates, these dichotomies can coexist peacefully. He presents the Jewish Arabic tradition in a new spirit, strictly preserving the essence and characteristic of the old.' (Dalal 1995 & 1996, p. 5).

In a manner similar to Sabreen's 'The Doves Are Coming', the use of doves as a symbol of peace was used in a collaborative work by the Palestinian Samir Shukri and the Israeli songwriter Ehud Manor in the song, 'How Long Must We Wait'. Shukri performed the song in 1990 for the annual children's song festival and won second prize (Perelson 1998, p. 119):

Like a bird on the wing  
 Man glides,  
 A loving heart, an open heart  
 Is not always wrong  
 We are in the desert of eternity for thousands of years,  
 But he who listens will hear the bells ring  
 Like an ancient prayer.  
 May the earth be peaceful for forty years  
 Till the dove returns,  
  
 From Moses to Mohammed  
 This land was not soothed  
 How long must we wait? How long can we go on?  
 How long must we wait? We will never rest.  
 The sons of Moses and the sons of Mohammed will go up the mountains  
  
 I will not lock the door  
 I will not lock the heart  
 Because the sun of hope permeates me  
 I hear the violin and I hear the ud  
 And suddenly I know that not all is lost  
 Like the earth, be peaceful for forty years  
 Till the doves return.

### Rai and the quest for peace

Since its resurrection in the mid-1980s, the Algerian popular musical genre of rai has emerged as a tool of resistance defiance, even as it bears characteristics of postmodernism in both its lyrics and music. Though modern rai was largely based on a traditionally private and sacred genre, its resurgence into the musical scene as a popular form of musical expression took on the role of rebellion; rai defied categorisation as to its form, instruments, lyrics, nationality, and any labelling that would limit its quest for global acceptance. In keeping with the



*Figure 3. Yair Dalal, who sang for peace in Oslo, Norway.*

political and cultural crisis in modern Algeria, rai artists injected their music with fiery lyrics, Western instruments, and funky beats that spread from the desert of Algeria to capture the hearts of millions in Europe, Asia, Africa, and to a lesser extent, the US.

In the 1990s, Khaled, formally known as Cheb Khaled, emerged on the European musical scene as the 'King of Rai' (see Figure 4). Aided by his musical talents and contacts, he carried the burden of transferring the Algerian folk genre to the national musical scene in Paris. Politically, Khaled sang passionately about the civil war that was tearing up his country, and especially his hometown of Oran.<sup>11</sup> Socially, his lyrics challenged conventions by celebrating sensual desires and glorifying love and rebellion. Musically, Khaled borrowed equally from East and West in a testament to a genre devoted to bridging gaps and promoting peace around the globe.

Khaled's most ambitious project toward peace in the Middle East is a song released in his album *Kenza* (Barclay 1999) entitled 'Imagine', which addresses the ongoing conflict between Arabs and the state of Israel. For this piece, Khaled collaborated with Israeli artist Noa. This was not a surprising choice: Noa, like Khaled, has experimented with fusing folk traditions with elements of jazz. Such a fusion is not something new to the rich music of the Middle East, which has been a cultural crossroads since ancient times.

Basing their duet on John Lennon's famous song of the same name, Khaled and Noa's lyrics celebrate the vision of peace through a peaceful and just co-existence in the Land of Peace. The daring duet between Khaled and the Israeli star looks beyond Algeria and reaches out to the Arab–Israeli conflict:

*Noa (in Hebrew)*

Damyen Olam blee pachad  
Olam lelo sinaa  
Shebo Nichye beyachad  
Olam shel ahava  
Nivneh atid lishneynu  
Be oto makom

Imagine a world without fear  
A world without hatred  
In which we live together,  
A world of love  
We will build a future for the two of us  
In that place.

*Khaled (in Arabic)*

Hadi Kouroune Oua auouame  
Tethakak koul el Ahlam  
Rani atmena el yawm  
Essilm fi hada el Kawn  
Oum'aa mourour el Ayyam  
Essilm fi kull makan

These are centuries and decades  
For dreams to come true,  
For I wish today  
Peace in this universe,  
And as days pass by  
Peace all over the place.<sup>12</sup>

Through 'Imagine', Khaled and Noa affirm their vision of peace and their wish for a world with no boundaries and divisions. The new version of the song is written in three languages: Hebrew, Arabic and English. In their duet, Noa starts singing the Hebrew text alone, followed by Khaled's section, before they both converge into English and sing Lennon's original text. In the fourth stanza, Noa and Khaled exchange lines in a call–response style before concluding together, 'Imagine all the people, living life in peace'.

Perhaps the Eastern connection between Khaled and Noa made such a noble message possible, for the two artists share similar traditions, having ties strongly connected to the Middle East and its musical traditions. Despite the Western tone of 'Imagine', both singers relied strongly on their collective experiences as Middle Easterners committed to peace and as artists willing to include Western musical traits in their music. Yet there is a strategic logic in 'Imagine' that puts Middle Eastern traditions and concerns above the Western sound of the song. That Khaled and Noa both start singing in their mother tongue reinforces the message of peace and gives Lennon's song a more specific objective and focus. The fact that Arabs and Israelis can have a common tradition and a shared history in Jerusalem and its spiritual connection to their respective faiths offered an opportunity for both to articulate such claims without fear or hesitation. Toward the end of the duet, both artists join together singing in harmony, thus symbolically shattering the long and hostile history of racial and religious differences fuelled by their people's political history. There is also defiance against the binary system of viewing the conflict that has always projected differences as 'us' against 'them' toward a more global notion that makes room for both races and religions in the Land of Peace.

Khaled never ceases to inject his duet with Noa with his own Middle Eastern signature. While borrowing from the music of Lennon, Khaled is constantly embellishing his stanzas with his signature melismas and pitch bending, especially toward the end of each line (*el ayyam* and *makan*). The most poignant musical statement, however, comes after the fifth stanza following what appears to be a final cadence. The Arabic orchestra, which has been limited to playing in the background in support of the piano, bursts into a wonderful melodic bridge in a descending sequence. The luscious sequence of tenderness and beauty is infectious with its subtle trills and rich Oriental lyricism. It reminds us that the place of the conflict and the source of this noble creativity remain grounded in the Middle East.

In his valuable examination of popular music within postmodernism, George Lipsitz showed how hip-hop culture bridged gaps between cultures through its fusion of musical styles, uniting performers, dancers and listeners (Lipsitz 1994, esp. pp. 23–48). As a part of world music, rai excelled in such avenues through its fiery lyrics, challenging and often disturbing fusion, and in its politically oriented struggle within war-torn Algeria. Consequently, Khaled and Noa's 'Imagine' offers a unique moment of cross-cultural collaboration with a universal tone of globalism. It celebrates the power of music to transcend boundaries, and demonstrates the will of Middle Easterners who despise war and yearn for peace. 'Imagine' echoes the visions of many poets and artists from Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.

As it acknowledges our political shortcomings in resolving the conflict, 'Imagine' penetrates our souls and brings us closer together. Consequently, and as noted by Lipsitz, popular music plays an important role in building solidarity within multi-cultural communities, serving as a site for 'negotiation and contestation between groups' (Lipsitz 1994, p. 126). In essence, Khaled's 'Imagine' affirms our unity and defiance of the *status quo*, and it reflects the complex process of our artistic, social and political beings. Through the courageous collaboration of Khaled and Noa, and the efforts of artists like Fairuz, Sabreen, Alberstein and Dalal, Middle Eastern artists are trying to build a core for a lasting peace, celebrated through music. Their contributions not only strengthen the position of world music as a legitimate musical and cultural avenue that celebrates commonality, but more importantly, they transcend differences and create a cultural fusion/coalition beyond violence, prejudice and stereotypes.

## Conclusion

For the past three decades of the Arab–Israeli conflict, Jerusalem has been the most contested territory to both parties. Palestinians and Israelis understand, now perhaps more than ever, that they are destined to live with one another in a shared territory. And just as Palestinians are starting to accept Israel as a reality, Israelis are beginning to recognise that Palestinians have deep roots in the area as well. In his book on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the Israeli historian Meron Benvenisti acknowledged the complex dynamics: 'The outline of our native lands' panorama . . . is composed not only of the physical landscape, flora, and fauna, but of people, and it follows that there is no Eretz Israel without Arabs. The Hebrew map on one level of my consciousness is intertwined with a second, Arab level. I am well aware of the great bond to their birthplace that millions of Palestinians keep secure in their hearts' (Benvenisti 1995, p. 211).



Figure 4. *Khaled, the King of Rai.*

As is no doubt apparent to all parties involved, both directly by virtue of living in the area and indirectly through ethnic, religious, emotional or political ties, it is not a situation that will be resolved overnight. The seemingly unending cycles of war and peace, negotiations and stalemates, are a testament to the deep-seated and long-held feelings about the region. The recent eruption of violence is proof of just how volatile things can be there, as Palestinians responded to their state of despair and injustice. The renewed fighting has shattered years of negotiations, but more importantly, robbed its citizens of trusting the other side and of the peace process. Sentiments of peace have been replaced by fear, hate, anger and frustration on both sides.

A few days following a bombing in Tel Aviv on 1 June 2001, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported that the family of a Palestinian pharmacist killed in a refugee camp had donated his organs for transplanting into five Israelis. Samuel Freedman commented that prior to the Palestinian al-Aqsa uprising, such an article 'would have looked like the future for Israel and Palestine. Now, it seemed like the residue of a squandered past, one awesomely difficult to recapture' (Freedman 2001). Nevertheless, there are strong hopes among many that a lasting peace will eventually be attained. The hopes of those people, in these times, are just one more phase of a very long history in the quest towards justice until a comprehensive peace is achieved.

Amidst political tensions in the Middle Eastern conflict, artists' dreams of a unified Holy City beyond racial differences are envisioned through the works of courageous and innovative Arab and Israeli artists. Though their task is no doubt easier, and in many respects, more fantastic than those of politicians, nevertheless it embodies the central need for tolerance, reconciliation and peace. To all parties

involved in Middle Eastern politics, there is clearly no simple solution to the conflict and to the status of Jerusalem; the latter remains a key point of contention between Jews and Arabs, far too important to leave unaddressed. To both parties, Jerusalem is the centre for each side's identity and sense of belonging to a homeland.

The role of popular music is not limited to raising awareness of social and political tensions, but to actively participate in offering tools for understanding the shifting dynamics within a disputed territory. As music soars above the temporal crossroads, it enables people to come together and reach better understandings of one another despite their political differences. To this end, music not only reflects our vision and understanding of history, but also expands our appreciation for the present, illuminating conflicts and paving the way toward a better future. The challenge remains, however, for each party to accept the other side's views in a way that would ensure a just peace, equality, and reconciliation for all.

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### Endnotes

1. Shortly following the completion of this article, violence erupted again in the Middle East. More than one thousand have died and thousands have been injured, the overwhelming majority of them Palestinians, in the fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinians since the new wave of violence erupted on 28 September 2000. The clashes were instigated by the right-wing, then the opposition leader, Ariel Sharon's visit to a disputed site in Jerusalem that is regarded as sacred by both Jews and Muslims. While Palestinians protesters swarmed the streets throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, hundreds of Jews protested in Tel Aviv chanting, 'Death to the Arabs'. On 7 October, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1322, which condemns acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against Palestinians, resulting in injury and loss of human life, and called upon Israel to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.  
Once again, it seems that Palestinians and Israelis are at each other's throats and the Peace Process appears dead. Still, the author remains committed to the path of peace and to music as a pathway that transcends differences. We should never allow the sounds of guns and war to destroy bridges of peace. As allusive and treacherous as the road might be, the need for a comprehensive and just peace is even more critical than ever.
2. As translated in Collins and Lapierre (1972).
3. See, for example, 'Jerusalem the Golden' by Bernard of Morali (c. 1145) and more recently, 'Jerusalem Delivered' by Louis Untermeyer.
4. The excerpt is from *Jerusalem Conquistada*, Book I, translated from the Spanish by Amalia Leguera and is reproduced in Grindea (1968), p. 153.
5. This is in reference to the *isra wal mi'raj* incident cited in the Qur'an that involves the journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem and on to heaven on the back of the winged horse *al-Buraq*.
6. Author's translation.
7. Fairuz uses the word *madakhin*, lit. 'chimneys', symbolically alluding to war, fire, smoke and destruction.

8. The term is also commonly known as *musica cassettot* (cassette music) and the derogatory term 'central bus station music' in reference to the market where it is sold.
9. It should be noted, however, that much of these innovations and changes are criticised by conservative scholars who view Western influence on Arabic music in negative terms. In his evaluation of the performance of Arab music in Israel, Suheil Radwan, for example, voiced his concern of the infiltration of such 'cheap songs performed in a pop-rock style, imitating the Anglo-American rhythmic patterns, using keyboard instruments, bass guitar, and with an emphasis on the rhythmic role played by the drums, cymbal, and tambourine'. He adds: 'Traditional instruments are losing their importance in these ensembles. The main goal of the singers and players is to motivate the young people to dance in a hysterical way. The songs are performed in a monotonous style that tries to imitate the popular singers of Egypt and Lebanon'. See his remarks in Radwan (1997), p. 42.
10. In the liner-notes to the CD, Dalal, who sang in the presence of Peres and Arafat, states: 'The song on this CD is an attribute of my biggest wish; Peace in our region – and the world'. See Dalal (1995 & 1996), p. 10.
11. See, in particular, his 'Wahrane' (Barclay 1992) and 'Wahrane Wahrane' (Barclay 1996).
12. I am grateful for the help of Ahuva Braverman who translated the Hebrew section. The Arabic is translated by the author.

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