A Place for Musicking in Palestine: Stories from the West Bank and East Jerusalem

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What is the impact, for Palestinians living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, of teaching and learning music? How does this experience interact with other aspects of Palestinian life in those locations? In this paper I explore interpretations of these questions expressed through stories gathered during a 5-month residency at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM), a Palestinian entity with branches in major Palestinian cities and East Jerusalem.

As an American music education professor, my first encounter with the *Ma'ahad Edward Said* (as it is known in Arabic) was in the spring of 2010 when I was invited to join a jazz ensemble faculty exchange between my university and the Conservatory. I learned during that short visit that the ESNCM offered a Western music curriculum modeled on the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and had created an Arabic music curriculum modeled on that same system. First conceived in 1990, the first branch location was opened in Ramallah in 1993 and the second in East Jerusalem in 1996. I visited both of those branches and learned of other branches across the West Bank in the planning stage. In addition, the ESNCM supported a bi-annual Palestine National Music Competition and other public musical festivals. Its Palestine Youth Orchestra (PYO) brought Palestinian youth from the diaspora together with those from the occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel for international tours. The branch locations provided jobs for musicians, as well as for maintenance staff and others needed to support the activities of the conservatory.

With a stated mission to teach and promote "music to all Palestinians wherever they are within the framework of strengthening the cultural and national identity" (ESNCM 2017), the ESNCM appeared to me to have created an infrastructure in Palestine for what Christopher Small calls *musicking*, that is, taking part "in any capacity, in a musical performance" (1998, p. 12). As Small describes, musicking occurs when "[m]embers of a certain social group at a particular point in its history are using sounds that have been brought into certain kinds of relationships with one another *as the focus for a ceremony* in which the values—which is to say, the concepts of what constitute right relationships—of that group are explored, affirmed, and celebrated" (p. 183, emphasis added).

I likened this infrastructure to Ray Oldenburg's (1999) concept of *third places*, which Oldenburg suggests are critical for socialization. After the home, "the most

important place of all…" and "the work [or school] setting, which reduces the individual to a single, productive role…" (p. 21), Oldenburg suggests that third places constitute "the core settings of the informal public life" (pp. 14 and 16). But what was the impact of this experience on Palestinian music learners and teachers?

Method

Wanting to know more about what I had seen in this short visit inspired me to explore possible research options. I returned to Palestine in June 2014 for a preliminary 3-week participant-observation residency where my tasks included teaching chamber music as well as interviewing a number of teachers, administrators, and students. The following year during a sabbatical leave I served as a scholar-in-residence from July through December. During the summer camp my role was again as a music instructor; in the fall term my work included teaching, providing workshops and offering general assistance as well as observing and interviewing research participants.

Research participants were recruited purposefully. During the pilot study, an administrator from the ESNCM helped me gain access to teachers who represented a broad cross section of the Palestinian social spectrum. During my residency in 2015, participants were recruited either from recommendations of previous participants or simply by personal invitation. Between both residencies I interviewed 29 women and 41 men between the ages of 12 and 70 with the majority between 20 and 39 years old. Most participants were teachers in the conservatory who had once been students, although a few had other roles such as administrators, parents, and both adult and adolescent students. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at my university. Each participant, whether in an individual or group interview, was asked to read and sign an informed consent letter prior to the interview. After transcriptions were completed, they were sent to participants for a second consent. As some participants preferred not to be anonymous, all participants were given a choice of whether they wanted to remain anonymous or not. Thus, some names and locations in this paper are pseudonyms while others are not.

Semi-structured interviews began with the question, "What's your "musical story?" I continued by asking (if it did not emerge organically) whether elements of that story were "uniquely Palestinian." Questions about participants' interactions with the Conservatory followed; their personal experience as well as their perspective about the role the Conservatory played in the community, As the interview came to an end, I asked for a second story to bring together ideas that had emerged in the interview. All interviews were conducted in English; a few required the assistance of an English/Arabic interpreter.

Data were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). The data used for this paper were drawn from sections of interviews that met Linde's (1993) criteria for life stories: 1) Their details made "a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is," and 2) they held enough interest to be

"told and retold over the course of a long period of time" (p. 20). Analysis of these stories suggested the impact of making music, for these participants, resided in interactions between two themes: "becoming a musician" and "being Palestinian."

Frames of Thought

Before continuing, I must "locate" myself vis-à-vis the Orient" per Edward Said (1979, p. 20). "For a European or American studying the Orient," Said asserts, "there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second (p. 11, emphasis original). Said's concept of *Orientalism* challenges Westerners not only to look beyond the literary, racial, and political stereotypes that characterize Arab people as exotic or violent "others," but also to recognize that the basis for these misconceptions says as much about the interpreter as those being interpreted.

Taking Said's challenge seriously, I note that my journal reflected a limited knowledge of the oPT and its people, which led to my surprise upon encountering the ESNCM for the first time. While I did not have specific expectations, scenes involving Palestinian religious or political extremists were more familiar to me (based on portrayals in the Western media) than images of children learning to make music. Thus, as a researcher, the very existence of a conservatory in this geo-political location was most striking. I thus sought to understand its impact—as an entity and as a collection of physical places—on the Palestinian musicians who worked and studied there. I had taken for granted that the entity that was most familiar, even "normal" to my Western sensibilities was also most important to the Palestinian musicians who worked and studied there. In so doing I had ignored what should have been obvious—that for a people living under occupation, the place that matters most to their musicking is the land itself.

Becoming a (Palestinian) Musician

This section presents details of the two themes from participant stories that were most closely related to social impacts of making music: *becoming a musician* and *being Palestinian*. People I interviewed describe experiences related to becoming a musician in ways that are similar to those from anywhere. They include having a desire to study music; finding safety, belonging, and fulfillment through learning and performing music; identifying and performing with others; and self-expression. Like musicians everywhere, however, those experiences occur in the context of daily life, which from the West Bank Palestinian point of view is experienced as occupation and oppression by external force (Frierson-Campbell & Park, 2016, p. 83).

Living "the situation." Colloquially, the Israeli occupation is known to West Bank Palestinians as "the political situation" or simply "the situation." Living as a child during times of conflict, according to Mohamed (whom we will meet later), *it was often not allowed that you talk about the situation, or politics, because you are part of it. As a*

kid, you can't take yourself away because you live it. In response to Mohamed's story, I changed the theme "being Palestinian" to "living the situation." This theme includes specific experiences mentioned by participants that illustrate the experience of being involved in music making while living under Israeli occupation. Sub-codes from this category included in this paper include conflict, social barriers, and political barriers.

Conflict. There have been major conflicts in the oPT and the state of Israel approximately every 20 years since the Balfour Declaration announced the British occupation of the region. Prior to the British occupation, however, the region was occupied by the Ottoman Empire for approximately 400 years.

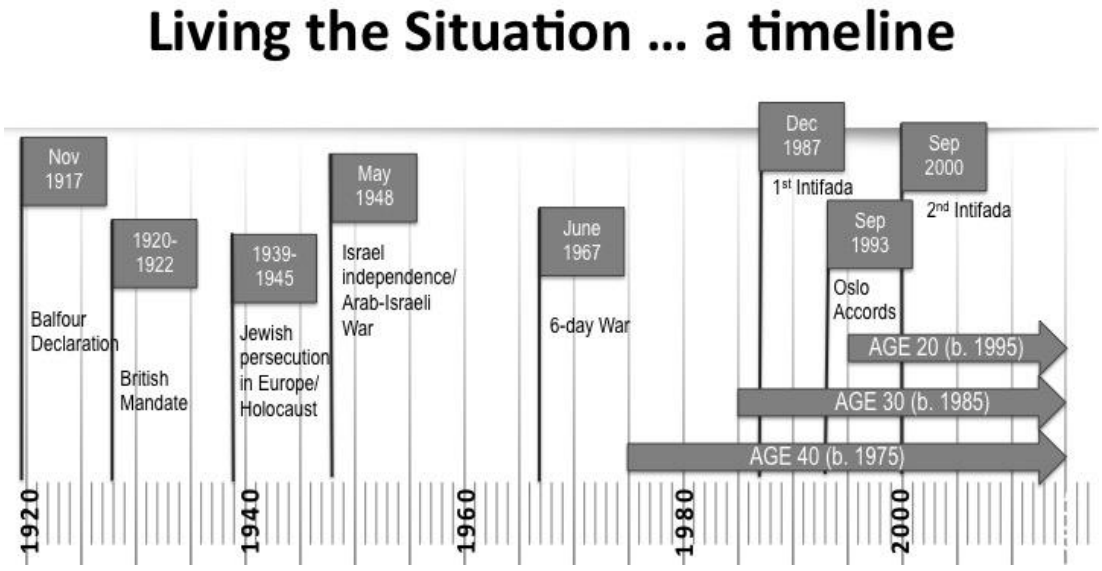

Figure 1. Timeline illustrating conflicts experienced by Palestinians since 1917.

The major conflicts experienced by West Bank Palestinians since 1917 are displayed in Table 1. They include the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, the 6-day war in 1967, the First Intifada in 1987 and the Second Intifada in 2000. Musicians in every age range were children during at least one major conflict; several were children during one and young adults during another. Not surprisingly, conflict played a part in many musicians' stories, often exacerbating existing social barriers, as can be seen in the stories they shared.

Social barriers. Social barriers in traditional Palestinian society include gender-based expectations regarding life and career decisions. Beliefs about appropriate activities for males and females (and whether unrelated males and females should be allowed to interact outside the family), suitable marriage partners, and appropriate types of work and work preparation have a lot to do with whether or not parents support serious music study for their children. This was especially true when parents and students were making decisions about serious music study in high school and whether to continue studying music at the university level. Such social barriers, however, were mentioned less

frequently than the political barriers that are a daily part of Palestinian life, particularly in the West Bank.

Political barriers. Since the implementation of the Oslo Accords, both Palestinians and Israelis have been required to carry color-coded ID cards that indicate what they are allowed to do and where they can travel (within Palestine and Israel as well as outside) based on a combination of ethnicity, family religion, and birthplace. Israelis of Jewish and Arab descent who live within Israel are permitted to travel almost anywhere across the West Bank and Israel. The exception is that the Israeli government forbids Israelis from visiting West Bank areas governed by the Palestinian Authority without obtaining a permit. (Large red signs with wording in Hebrew, Arabic, and English are placed at the entrance to Palestinian cities and villages. They warn "The Entrance for Israeli Citizens is Forbidden, Dangerous to your Lives, and is Against the Israeli Law.") Arab Palestinians born within the Jerusalem municipality, while enjoying the same freedom of movement as Arab Israelis, may not hold Israeli or Palestinian passports, and instead are issued what is known as a "Jerusalem ID." They are known colloquially as "Jerusalemites." Arab Palestinians born within the West Bank call themselves "West Bankers." They carry Palestinian passports as well as color coded ID cards that include their religious affiliation and birthplace. They may (in theory) travel freely within the West Bank; however, they frequently must pass permanent checkpoints near areas populated by Jewish Israeli settlers, and their travel may be interrupted at any time by a "floating checkpoint," which is a roadblock set up during regional "clashes" or other times of political turmoil. In addition to ID's and passports, color-coded automobile licenses exhibit clearly which cars and trucks are allowed on Israeli roads and which are not.

A notable political barrier is the Israeli separation wall, begun in 2002. The wall is officially an Israeli government response to Palestinian terrorism within Israeli territory. Palestinians, however, see the wall "as a tool intended to achieve the security goals of Israel, while they are ignored and their needs are marginalized" (Benster & Shlomo, 2011, para. 9). The wall has had a particularly strong social impact on the Arab villages that ring East Jerusalem, as it has literally separated families from their land and from each other (Dhaher, 2014). Many of the permanent checkpoints described above control entry into Israel from the occupied Palestinian Territories.

A Place for Music in Palestine

Early in my research, one participant described the founding of the ESNCM in this way: *When they started, I think they started to create a place for music.* As I have written elsewhere (see Frierson-Campbell, 2014), it was curiosity about this "place for music" in the oPT that stayed with me upon returning to the United States, and inspired my continued interest in the experiences of Palestinian musicians. In a journal entry, I noted that several possible interpretations of place based on the stories I was hearing:

· the fixed, observable elements

· the "place" of music and of this entity/institution in Palestinian society

· the participants' interpretations of these place(s), and

· the process by which these interpretations develop and/or are adopted.

Findings from this research thus far suggest that the impacts of music making occurred in the process of musicking. Being part of a community engaged in music learning, teaching, and performing, which was enacted via the "place for music" provided by the ESNCM, enabled participants to interpret and re-interpret their place as Palestinians in the oPT.

Responding to Conflict. As can be seen in Figure 1, political conflict is familiar to many Palestinians who live in the West Bank. The major conflicts mentioned most frequently by participants in this research were the First and Second Intifadas. Specific experiences depended on when participants were born and where they were living during times of conflict. The social impact of musicking was related to conflict in a variety of ways; individually from inspiration to solace, and collectively as a symbol that life was returning to normal after a time under siege.

Inspiration and having a voice. Mohamed, now a multi-instrumentalist living and working in Europe, was a young child during the First Intifada. This meant spending a lot of time indoors because it was dangerous to play outside. He was inspired by a musician who dared to defy the curfew by playing the *nay* (the Arabic flute) on his rooftop at night:

The nay, in the evening, it was just scotching across, I mean against the wall. And I just listened through the window. Because also you should not appear your head from the window, it's dangerous. Anyway, that guy was, didn't care, he was going on his roof playing, and I was listening. And it just, you know, took me deeply. Like, this sound was really affecting me a lot. So I said, "I want to learn that."

For Mohamed, one of the social impacts was the sense of having his own unique voice heard through music:

And I started expressing myself more, and saying everything I can say in the society. For political reasons, and… When I play, everybody listens and nobody interrupts me. Nobody is against with what I'm saying. Musically, maybe, but I can express myself! I mean, this is me.

Coping. Despite the danger, people did manage to plan social gatherings where music and *dabke*, an Arabic folk dance, played a prominent role. Several research participants spoke of being inspired toward music because of their parents' participation in these festivals when they were children. Muna, a manager for the ESNCM during my research, was a child during the First Intifada. Going with her parents to dabke festivals made her feel safe from the conflict.

May, a former ESNCM teacher who is now living in Europe and working on a Ph.D. in community music, played the flute in her house as a way to deal with the trauma of living in a war zone during the Second Intifada. She has carried this experience into her Ph.D. studies, where she is examining community music participation as a positive intervention for traumatized Syrian refugees who have re-located to her adopted country.

Imagining a future for their children. In a group interview, parents from a newly opened branch of the ESNCM in a large Palestinian city explained how living as children under siege during the First and Second Intifada meant that there had been no place for music; daily life was about survival. As one parent shared:

[Our city] was closed for nearly 10 years. We were like Gaza now. We were really closed. And before that, during the First Intifada, it was also we had. . . [pause]. Because of that grew the thinking that we should not think of these things. No, we should study. We should let our children give all their time for learning and making a living and even working. . . [pause]. Even schools were not, all the time, going on. So because of that, some groups of people our age and maybe a little older were raised on thinking in a different way.

For these parents, the loss of their city's musical culture was especially painful; the city had previously been a major cultural center where major Arabic artists performed on a regular basis.

That's why I want to say that I feel sorry when people think that [from our city] people do not like music. No! We are interested in music and we like music, but you know, for nearly 20 years it was so difficult to deal with these things because it was a bad time.

Having the ESNCM in their city enabled these parents to provide for their children in ways they did not experience when they were young. It also gave them a social outlet.

Her father and I are very happy, because first, it's a safe environment to place our children in, and it is offering a good space for them to express themselves, and it's also a good place for us to talk to each other when we are waiting for our children during their lessons. And sometimes listen to our kids playing music.

One father described a renewed sense of hope for the future:

This is a joy beyond description, actually, for us. Music is not only a way to express themselves, but a path that someone – one of them might take as an alternative to our normal expectations, maybe. I'll leave it open to them and see, hopefully, what will happen.

The mundane act (taken for granted by so many) of transporting children to and from music lessons was an act of musicking; as Small suggests, "a ritual whose relationships

mirror, and allow us to explore and celebrate, the relationships of our world as we imagine them to be" (1995, para. 47).

Challenging social and political barriers. According to many of the people I talked to, years of conflict meant that many Palestinians believed that formal music study music had no place in the society. The corresponding reality was that there were few places to study music or to find work as a musician. One social impact of the opening of the ESNCM was to change those perceptions by providing not only a place to study, but also opportunities for work within the institution. In some cases this work helped participants challenge gender-based expectations. Another impact was providing a mechanism for personal growth, and a third was being a vehicle for the building of a collective Palestinian narrative to replace the Orientalist narrative of victim or terrorist.

For men in particular, imagining life as a musician—a difficult proposition even now—was virtually impossible prior to the establishment of the ESNCM. Not only are men expected to be "breadwinners," there is the sense in the society that music is for parties and therefore not a suitable way to make a living. Of the male music teachers who took part in my interviews, all but one started university studies in another area; some had learned music separately from their university studies. One of the conservatory branch administrators had initially worked as an electrician. As one of the first students in the Conservatory after it opened, he was eventually invited to join an Arabic music ensemble that traveled the world. He then became a teacher and administrator. Other male music teachers who I interviewed had begun their work life as cabinetmakers and auto mechanics, fulfilling necessary jobs in a society that was rebuilding after conflicts in 1967 and 1987. As one teacher expressed,

It's very important to say that my father didn't encourage me to study music. The music in Palestine, you can't make your life with the music only. Because you need good salaries, and the music in Palestine is not very good income, or you can't rely on it. Musicians, like your career as a musician in Palestine, you can't make a life on it. So my father told me, as an interest, hobby, whatever you want, but you should study something else. I registered at [a local university] as major business administration and minor marketing.

Experiences with the conservatory led two Palestinian women from different cultural backgrounds to challenge gender-based limitations imposed by their home cultures. May, a Palestinian flutist and community musician, registered to study at the ESNCM shortly after it opened, primarily to compete with her older brothers who also studied music there. While her brothers eventually dropped out, she continued. Simply making the two-kilometer trip by herself from her village to Bethlehem was unusual for a girl of 11 or 12, and this led her to be self-reliant at a young age. Since she attended a Catholic girls school, the conservatory gave her a chance to interact socially with boys. And being part of the conservatory gave her an identity as a musician, which included opportunities for travel abroad. May believes that traveling and working with musicians

from other parts of the world helped to open her eyes to possibilities she otherwise would not have known:

There's the steps in your life, in our society. It's like school, university, engagement, marriage. End of story. And I was like, no, I want to do something different. I want to do Master's, I want to maybe do Ph.D. I want to go, I want to do, I want to see. I want to travel, I want to learn. I mean, I wonder sometimes if I didn't study music, what would I have ended up like. You just can't imagine that difference. Would I be different? Would I have a different kind of thinking?

Leila, who comes from a large conservative West Bank city, was interested in music from a young age but, as she said: *In [my city] there was very few, very, very few music players. I met only three or four people in my city, who are introduced to music and to playing.* After finishing high school at age 16, Leila decided to register as a student at the conservatory in Bethlehem.

For a variety of cultural reasons this did not please her family: *It was really weird for people … to see a girl (and I used to wear a scarf also), to hold a guitar, and then to go to Bethlehem in order just to take a music lesson and then to come back.* In fact, when a relative saw her walking with her guitar toward the Bethlehem bus instead of attending Friday prayers, he complained to her father, who wanted her to stop immediately: *[My father] was like, "*Khallas *(enough!), Leila, you need to quit. It's enough; you don't have to go through this. We don't have to go through this also."* After explaining its importance to her father, *then I invited him to my very first concert, and everything was changed afterwards.*

When I asked Leila about connections between music and the rest of her life, she answered: *I'm not really good at thinking things, and connecting things. But music, it made me stronger, and it made me more powerful, and more conscious about myself. Music, I think in a way, made me believe more in myself, and believe more that I can do things.*

Constructing a shared Palestinian identity. Limitations on movement have a definite impact on the daily life of Palestinians. The difficulty of finding work, for instance, is closely related to the economic situation, which is exacerbated by the travel limitations imposed by the occupation. Travel restrictions also make it difficult for Palestinians to meet people outside the communities where they live. This is particularly true for Arab villages that were suburbs of Jerusalem prior to the construction of the Separation Wall (Fenster &Shlomo, para. 2).

May, whom we met earlier, shared how one impact of the conservatory's summer camp was camaraderie amongst a diverse group of Palestinian students from across the West Bank, Israel, Gaza and the diaspora. Several of them had been "pranking" each other, but only one got caught:

…and the manager came and he saw only this guy, he was so angry, and it was like, in the morning, please pack your bags and then put them down. You're going home! And we were so, like, oh, hell no. So everybody packed their bags. And everybody was ready to go home.

As a result, the camp manager relented and they continued with the music camp.

Collective musicking in Palestine, whether hosting music camps, planning a performance at a specific location, or even scheduling a music lesson, requires mobilizing groups of people with different access to physical places (Frierson-Campbell & Park, 2016, p. 91). Such mobilization is especially fraught when planned performances involve crossing Israeli military checkpoints within the West Bank, an experience for Palestinians of being non-persons in a non-place (Tawil Souri 2010).

A teacher/administrator from the ESNCM described one such scene. When a mixed group of students and teachers from Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah, and Bethlehem were returning from Nablus to Ramallah via the Hawara checkpoint, the soldiers at the checkpoint made everyone exit the bus.

They go inside the bus, and come out. Then a lot of questions—where have you been? What did you do in Nablus? What kind of music did you play? Where are you from? And you know, we are mixed. Like one from Jerusalem, one from Bethlehem…because we are, all of us are students from the five branches. And a lot, a lot of questions, what do you play, what is this instrument…and more than two hours asking questions at the checkpoint before they would let us go.

Rather than an experience of being non-persons, this became a collective experience described by my informant as "very, very silly treatment on checkpoints." While it was still negative, its impact was their collective expression of the absurdity of the experience. As noted by Belkind (2014), collective experiences like this one "serve to reterritorialize geographic and social fragmentation into a continuous Palestinian cultural space" (p. 100).

Closing Thoughts

Returning to the questions that opened this paper: What is the impact, for Palestinians living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, of teaching and learning music? How does this experience interact with other aspects of Palestinian life in those locations? For the Palestinian musickers involved in this research, the first question cannot be answered without reference to the second. The social impact of musicking, while it may have originated with having a physical "place for music in Palestine" or with the musical sounds learned in that location, ultimately emanated from participating in what Christopher Small would call musicking rituals, which in turn impacted the tellers' relationship to the land in which they were born.

Through playing the Arabic or Western flute—in defiance of a curfew or as solace during a siege—two young musicians find a model for non-violent resistance and a means of self-expression. Transporting children to and from music lessons at the conservatory inspires hope for a group of parents whose childhood memories include life under siege with no place for music. Interacting via musicking with male and female Palestinians and others from around the world motivates two very different women to challenge gender boundaries and make a difference in their communities. Horseplay after hours at a music camp and shared experiences of "very silly treatment on checkpoints" prompts diverse groups of music students to build collective Palestinian identities on their own terms. Small (1995) suggests that the relationships brought into existence through musicking model "exemplary relationships." Through musicking, "participants not only learn about the relationships but actually experience them in action. They explore them, they affirm their validity and they celebrate them without having to articulate them in words" (para. 31). In other words, through acts of musicking, "'the lived-in order merges with the dreamed-of order'" (para. 31)

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