Musical Bridges—Crossing the Divide of Where Fear Meets Music: How Autoethnography Contributes to an Evolving Cultural Identity Through Multiple Musical Worlds

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Music
University of Toronto

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2019

Abstract

This research explores the presence of rich, multi-layered political, socio-economic Levantine identities within three musical narratives which challenge and inform views about the relationship between politics and music. The dissertation draws on auto-ethnography and narrative research as a pedagogy for cultivating empathy, courage, and social justice in music education settings. The purpose of the study is to explore the function of music in diverse socio-political global contexts as a means of understanding ourselves in local contexts. Additionally, the stories demonstrate how music has played a role in reconciling multiple identities and connecting people of disparate backgrounds and experiences, and how music has played a role in disconnecting people (including myself) through the socio-political forces that at times may have been too strong. Through narrative analysis, personal reflection, and musical inquiry of three
stories, I investigate the standard narratives of the positive role of music, the political acts of forming solidarity and moments of resistance in musical contexts, and the political interactions in a Canadian context that question music’s capacity for inclusivity within a pluralist society.

This study joins a vibrant conversation in music education about the inextricable link between politics and music, as well as discussions about the need to develop empathy and courage in presenting, performing, and educating in, through and about music from diverse cultural contexts. I argue that music is political and can be difficult to negotiate in the rehearsal room, but that difficult elements such as empathy and courage can bring people together and change the narrative. Empathizing by acknowledging the humanity of others raised to think differently, as well as courage to overcome fear, can stir to action, embracing true inclusivity in a Canadian context.
Acknowledgments

As I ventured into writing my thesis, it felt that I was walking on a path that saw no end, but there were many people that have been integral to my journey. The truth of the matter is that I would not have seen the finish line had it not been for all the support and love I received along the way. Each one played an important yet different role in working through my insecurities, struggles, exhaustions, excitement, and joy in my writing journey. Thank you!

I have to start by thanking my doctoral committee headed by my advisor, Dr. Lori Dollof. Dr. Dollof had deep insight that unveiled slowly, timely, intuitively, and accurately. Her knowledge and love for narrative research was contagious, and her guidance was essential to the development of the thesis. I have been immensely touched by her presence and unconditional love throughout this process. Dr. Nasim Niknafs and Dr. Elizabeth Gould gave continuous encouragement, constructive criticism, and support in asking important questions that allowed me to look at the writing in a more objective way. I believe it contributed to making the writing stronger. Dr. Deborah Bradley, who was amazingly efficient, professional, thorough, and caring in editing this dissertation: the stories read more strongly and effectively because of her amazing work!

My friend and colleague, Hussein Janmohamed, who continuously challenged and questioned my Levantine presence in the thesis. He relentlessly asked thought-provoking questions, what Arabic words meant, their roots and their meanings, and how all of those would shape and give a strong Levantine voice to the thesis. He posed difficult questions that helped in facilitating my thoughts and feelings on paper, particularly when I felt stuck in the writing. Dr. Yaser Yacoob, my friend and colleague who was particularly present in the last few months of my writing: his daily phone calls, support, deep perspective and conversations helped in keeping the momentum and excitement moving. His help in framing my thoughts eased the process of writing and in that ease, the discovery of writing difficult chapters was joyful and exciting. Iman Annab was gracious in sharing her paper on decolonizing the self; her passion for Palestine seeped through in voicing my Palestinian identity. Judeh Majaj, my friend and colleague in Amman, was relentless about helping me identify scholars from the Levant and offered his insightful thoughts on identity in the region. Dozan wa Awtar choir members shared their active participation in discussing thoughts and feelings stemming out of singing.
My family: mother and father, Nicola and Bella, encouraged me every step of the way; my mother’s persistence and continuous encouragement, especially when I felt like I could not complete my thesis. My brother and sister gave continuous support and humor provided lightness when things felt heavy. A special thank you goes to the rock of our family; my father, who shared his story with open arms, showed courage, and insisted that the story be told. Last but not least, my biggest thank you goes to my husband, Roger, and my beautiful daughters Samia and Naya, without whom I would not have been able to complete this work. His support, love and ultimate compassion held our family together when things got crazy! Thank you for your unconditional love and for never letting me quit. To both of my daughters, who understood how important this work was, thank you for the endless hugs and kisses throughout my long hours on the computer; “yes, Samia! I’ve got this!”
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Chapter 1 Musical Bridges—Crossing the Divide of Where Fear Meets Music: How Autoethnography Contributes to an Evolving Cultural Identity Through Multiple Musical Worlds

*Can I tell you stories about my “home”?*

*Will you hear my words?*

*May I open my heart and speak of my family?*

*Will you listen to my intimate thoughts?*

*Will you? Will you listen?*

### 1.1 Introduction

Music lies at the heart of my life journey—an evolving quest to define and defy who I am. As I seek to negotiate multiple identities, music is the medium through which I question, express tensions, and sometimes defy standards and expected norms. Through music, I discover and come to understand where I stand, and I learn to respectfully welcome the internal and external influences that shape me. When the musical forces are too strong, I also feel pain, at times helplessness, and even brokenness; however, it is through music that I become liberated and enjoy the space to dream of new possibilities. The politics and the complex socio-cultural realities of the Levant region where I was raised are also very much part and parcel of my journey. With my ancestral roots in the region, I identify as an Arab, a woman, a Palestinian, a Christian, and a musician. I was raised in a post-colonial, male-dominated, predominantly Muslim and Jordanian culture. I lived in many places and different regions as my family responded to the impacts of complex socio-political realities in the Levant. This context in which I lived thus presented dichotomous ways of being that I had to negotiate. Music has been inextricably linked to navigating this socio-political context—be it through singing, conducting, or arranging choral music. Music became the medium through which I navigate identity, ask questions, express tensions, and sometimes defy the norms. Compelling narratives arising from

---

1 A poem I wrote during my Narrative class at the University of Toronto 2016
my work have demonstrated how music played a role in reconciling multiple identities and connecting people in remarkable ways. At the same time, music played a role in disconnecting people through socio-political forces that were, at times, too strong.

Living in postcolonial Jordan presented many juxtaposing thoughts and ideas as I navigated my Arab, woman, Palestinian, Christian, and musician life. In Orientalism, Said (1978) surveyed the history and nature of Western attitudes toward the East. He argued that the Europeans divided the world into two parts: the East and the West or the Occident and the Orient. This was an ideology that was created by writers, philosophers, and colonial administrators as a way to “Other” the Eastern culture. I am, along with many from the region, a product of that ideology. It is essential for me to develop a deeper understanding of my sawt (voice), and how postcolonialism played and still plays a role in defining and defying the “essence” of my being—how it was strongly built, inseparable from the Eastern Levantine day to day reality.

1.2 Background of the study

In his book, In the Name of Identity, Maalouf (2012) claimed there is a universal human need for identity. Identity is a loaded term. Coupled with cultural, social, imagined, national, and political nuances, the term identity takes on many different definitions and dimensions stemming from theories and philosophies rooted in Western literature. I struggle with these definitions because they are understood separately from one another. While isolating specific elements of identity is beneficial to tease out unique meanings, the danger is that we lose sight of identity as an interconnected, holistic, fully embodied sense of self.

I highlight definitions of identity that resonate with my research and then present definitions of identity informed by their meanings in the Arabic context. I conclude this section on identity with an emergent definition that has steered this research.

Some of the definitions in the Western literature describe identity as:
People’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others. (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 2)

Identity is used to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. (Deng, 1995, p. 1)

Identity “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities.” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4)

There is no one fixed, monolithic identity, but a series of what I call “allegiances”: all the various vicissitudes of history, customs, religion, gender, class and the outlooks they entail . . . through each one of my affiliations, taken separately, I possess a certain kinship with a large number of my fellow human beings; but because of all these allegiances, taken together, I possess my own identity, completely different from any other. (Maalouf, 2012, p. 19)

One of my favorite definitions is from Said’s (2000) autobiography, Out of Place, in which he said: “I experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance” (p. 295).

Here are some definitions that stem from the root of ḥāwīyah² (identity):

āl ḥāwīyah āl ʿinsānieh (human identity): A person’s ultimate truth and his/her values and self worth.

āl ḥāwīyah āl waṭanieh (national identity): Unique, and special attributes to a nation (not its people).

āl ḥāwīyah (identity): The essence of being—differentiating oneself from another (not the “Other”).

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² Found in al Ma’ani Dictionary
āl hāwiyeh: understanding and feeling the self’s unique attributes

One interesting word that stems from the root is Hāwā, meaning Love.

The definition of identity that I use in my research is: *A cluster of flowing currents negotiating the essence of being, constructed and deconstructed by another (not necessarily a person, but by an environment, landscape, sounds, and more) and is continuously evolving.*

1.3 Post-colonialism and the Levant

Bhabha (2004) uses the “in-between,” the spaces within and among individuals and cultures which do not maintain a single position but form identities in an on-going process.

In my experience, being a Jordanian of Palestinian origin presented other challenges beyond a post-colonial experience. I existed in Jordan but lived in an imagined Palestine—a shared vision by many in Jordan, as many of its population is Palestinian. As a Palestinian, I grew up continuously reminded of the Palestinian struggle and what it means to be exiled. I was reminded of resistance and how important it is to preserve the Palestinian identity, and lastly, the right of return for the Palestinians. To my family and me this “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 2001) of Palestinian dispossession and exile is a powerful one and to this day, very much alive.

Growing up, colonization and the Israeli occupation were the two external major forces playing a role in shaping the Levant; however, they were not the only forces. Internally, Jordan faces challenges mainly revolving around its democracy, economy, and education. In a recent conference in Amman, Queen Rania of Jordan called for serious educational reform and a strategic plan for 2016-2025 (Rania, 2016). In an article titled, “Is Music Haram? Jordanian Girls Educating Each Other about Nation Faith, and Gender in School,” Adely (2007) finds contradiction between patriotism and new forms of religiosity and gendered propriety. Journalist Omar Razzaz from the Jordan Times (who is now the Minister of education) said, “Jordan has a long way to go before democratic concepts and practices are ingrained in our way of life . . . Building such a culture is not easy, in light of a trend of mistrust in the community” (Razzaz, 2014, para.12). There are many other examples, but suffice it to say, there are issues to overcome.
Throughout my life’s journey, music, choral performance and arranging have been an avenue for expression—a small space for my Jordanian, Palestinian, Christian, female, and humane voice (ṣawt) to be shared and many times, calling out to be heard.

1.4 Purpose of the study

Because my Western schooling and my Eastern being are interconnected (Levantine identity and music making—conducting, composing, singing) in my musical journey, I want to understand how these connections relate to one another, how they meet, or even if they meet and related to each other. Do these two sides of my being communicate with one another, inform each other, as a part of my identity parcel? I seek to understand what the connection between voice, language, and music may be, and how the three have steered, formed, and informed identity.

The narratives are compelling. They shed light on the socio-political contexts of music making from which research can be drawn, and I believe music educators will find of value. I was able to bring forth the Levantine³ (Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese) voice, local narratives, and literature by exploring multi-vocal narratives that have defined my professional practice and played a crucial role in negotiating my identity and thus my practice as a music educator. Throughout my journey, music and choral performance and arranging have definitely been an avenue for expression—a small space for my Palestinian voice to be shared and many times calling out to be heard.

The Levantine voice is under-represented, excluding the political narratives and implications that might otherwise enrich the field of music education. Language, both English and Arabic, when considered in the writing of autoethnography, offered the space to examine the highly contextual meaning and significance for conceptualizing and theorizing our practices. I know that local knowledge emerged as the narratives of my research unfolded. My hope is that this research represents a step towards breaking the misconceptions and complexities of the region.

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³ Levant as used in this dissertation refers only to Arab speaking countries.
I have only started to scratch the surface. Living in Canada also limited my access to Arabic resources on this topic, which were few and far between. Language was also an important factor; for example, words have different meanings and fit into different contexts that I felt were important to consider in order for local knowledge to emerge as the narratives of my research unfolded.

My musical life in Jordan revolved around the establishment of a music organization: *Dozan wa Awtar Music Establishment*. Most of the concerts, specifically vocal musical events that happened during my time in Amman (2000-2013), were through and because of this organization. I provide a short synopsis of the institution in order to provide context for the two of the stories.

*Dozan wa Awtar Singers* is part of *Dozan wa Awtar Music Establishment*. The vision of the organization states that *Dozan wa Awtar* “transforms lives by building, uniting and inspiring communities through passion for singing.” Although the singers were officially established in Jordan in 2001, *Dozan wa Awtar* as a vision held a deep transformative meaning to me years before.

The inspiration stemmed from my work in Palestine (1998-2000). Through my work with the Edward Said Conservatory in Ramallah, the Conservatory established a men’s choir named *Dozan* and a women’s chorus in Jerusalem named *Awtar*. When we did a joint performance, it was under the name of *Dozan wa Awtar*. Innovation, creativity, and personal connections were key to these groups’ success. In every performance programmed, the members found ways to make it their own (particularly the men’s chorus). Performances were creative, interesting, and connected with the local culture and life. These connections formed within the choir, and the community inspired me to continue with the concept upon my return to Jordan in 2000. In 2001, *Dozan Wa Awtar Music Establishment* was officially formed.

Innovation became key to the choir’s mission in Amman, and with that in mind, every show was designed to inspire, create, unite, and respond to the changing socio-political context. Our music making was allowed for experiences and possibilities that otherwise might have been difficult and challenging. Since then, our stories in music making, performing, and composing have been in and through multiple places and spaces. In them, we grieved, laughed, defied the norms, had conversations, stood in solidarity, built friendships, and created our own *Dozan* family. Soon
enough, the focus of singing was not on the “how” of singing but rather the “why” (Countryman, 2010). We made music personal. It was not there to be performed as much as it was there to be experienced and lived. Since 2001, I believe the vision has shaped the local musical identity through the various programing and arranging of performances.

The vision organically grew and extended to other projects such the Arab Choral Festival *Aswatuna*:

In 2008, the choral Festival *Aswatuna* (Our Voices) took place in the ancient city of Petra, Jordan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The festival directed by Andre de Quadros and Shireen Abu Khader happened to be the first choral encounter between Arab choirs and Western musicians, and brought together about two hundred choral singers and conductors. Among festival participants were the Sharagan choir from Iraq, the Magnificat Choir of the Custody of the Holy Land from Palestine, the choir of students at the Conservatory in Damascus, Syria, the Fayha Choir from Lebanon, the Dozan wa Awtar Singers from Jordan and Voces Nordicae from Sweden. The Aswatuna festival demonstrated the role of choral music as an effective means to build bridges between countries and cultures. (Quadros, 2012, p. 174)

**Dozan wa Awtar** Singers was the first and only Jordanian choir to compete in the open competitions in World Choir Games in Latvia 2014. It was the first Arab choir represented to win the open competition, and in 2016, the choir again competed in Sochi, Russia, where the choir won gold; it was the first Arab choir to have won in this category.

### 1.5 Why autoethnography?

Fear is an incredible messy force. Personally, I believe it lies at the heart of most of the existing world issues. It creates barriers, insecurities, mistrust, lack of compassion, lack of empathy, and lack of love. It separates. **Dozan wa Awtar** allowed an opening for everyone involved to share his or her ʿawt (sounding) for possibilities, for understanding, for unity, and even for freedom. It reflected “an essence” of their hearts. In this case, music not only became a way to understand and defy some of the social structures that separate us (Christians and Muslim) in society but
became a vehicle of hope to envision a society that recognizes a shared humanity. It gave us room to coexist, navigate our floating currents, reconcile our differences, and possibly heal beyond fear.

My musical life world was a mirror to understand and name the struggles and fears our society faced and to re-connect through the natural encounters amongst peoples (humanity) that existed before colonialist intervention—as if it reflected my inner postcolonial self, the quest for reconciling multiple identities, and working with the Arab community to do the same. Being the subject of my own story/cultural context rather than an observer in the field provided opportunity to fill the gap and fill in knowledge, and although somewhat limited in perspective, shows the local perspective which otherwise might be distorted by the media.

Throughout this humble narrative journey, I encountered several situations and lived through compelling experiences that involved music making, singing, and teaching. I experienced how music has played a role in connecting people in remarkable ways but also has equally disconnected them (including myself). Since I am the thread that runs through this journey of multiple musical worlds, auto-ethnography resonated as the most appropriate methodology for my research.

Autoethnography is the methodology chosen for this research. Three narratives drawn from personal stories were used to convey how music played a role in negotiating identities in different spaces and places. This methodology resonated with me as a first instinct. It gave me access to much knowledge that otherwise could not be expressed or shared easily. It was a way of knowing, healing, reconciling, questioning, and growing. This methodology required courage, and although my initial resonance stemmed from a need to find my voice in the narratives, I hope this dissertation promotes further knowledge about the politics of music and can be a way of promoting change in the future, as Toyosaki and Conway (2015) argue. “Doing” autoethnography helps autoethnographers come to know (epistemology), evaluate (axiology), become (ontology), and do (praxeology) our “selfhood in the world.” Finally, by examining “the self” and how it responds to social injustice, autoethnography becomes praxis for social justice (p. 560).

This was an avenue that deeply resonated with me; it was worth investigating and exploring further. Could my stories act as praxis for social justice? The possibility was exciting! Having
the physical and emotional space since moving to Canada in 2013 gave me neutral access to the stories, with clearer criticism and more informed knowledge. Having considered the methodology’s strengths, it is important to acknowledge some of its issues and criticisms. Finding the balance between the writer (me) and the interactions within and through the stories was challenging. Also, “autoethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful” (Ellis, 2010, p. 36), and I can see how that may be a concern. When writing in a “story” form, the language is different; it is more “felt”—sometimes spiritual and metaphorical. These combinations can render facts as undetermined. What the stories illuminated were more questions, and in those questions lies a stronger and deeper form of knowledge.

1.6 The stories

The dissertation consists of three personal narratives that touch on the power of music in the socio-political context of my Levantine identity. Each story occurred in a different location and was told in the chronological order of their happening. Location played a major role in guiding the telling of the stories, and these multiple locations were crucial to the findings of the research. All three stories looked into political dialogues and narratives, including the meeting of politics in a Canadian context and in an international festival.

Did the location change, ease, or strengthen the fear within the politics in stories? How did it change from Jordan, to Sochi, to Canada? This was integral to the telling of the stories, as well as the implications that unfolded.

1.6.1 “When Silent Night was No Longer the Narrative”

This story relays the events that led my family and me to move to Canada in 2013. The events took place during our annual 2012 Christmas concert in Amman, Jordan. As a way to draw attention away from the political and social pressures faced during the Arab Spring, attention was placed on my family, targeting my father specifically. This incident shattered the positive dominant music education narrative and its power for tolerance, peace building, and unifying forces, causing me to ask the question, what does music really serve?
1.6.2 “Winning Gold”

“Winning Gold” sheds light onto the process of understanding the complex identity to which I belong. The story involves the choir’s representation of Jordan as a mixed, secular choir community competing in an ancient sacred Levantine (Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Lebanese and Jordanian) category performance. Both the weeklong event as well as the competition presented various elements that had to be negotiated and understood within the socio-political context of the region. The narrative allows for those political challenges to unfold, bringing solidarity within the group and new knowledge to the music education research world.

1.6.3 “Reclaiming Silence”

After a request to present a piece under the theme of justice, struggle, and peace to a Canadian choir, the choir’s board denied its performance because of a Palestinian dedication that was deemed “too political.” The circumstances surrounding the negation of the piece raised many questions and actions. Was the institution instilling the inclusivity vision it claimed to promote? Who has the power to decide whose story should be told? The main reflection revolved around how such negation could occur in a country that claims pluralism.

1.7 Research questions

1. How does music function in socio-political global contexts as a means of understanding ourselves in local contexts?
2. How has music played a role in reconciling multiple identities and connecting people of disparate backgrounds and experience?
3. How has music played a role in disconnecting people (including myself) through socio-political forces that at times may have been too strong?

1.8 Locating the Stories

Approaching the thesis was exciting. The avenue of storytelling was thrilling and in many ways liberating. It opened the door for expression I was now ready to write and share.
The writing of the stories started with “When Silent Night.” Initially, the story was written for my narrative research class. At that point, I had not thought about the thesis. But this story provided me with practice in the art of writing. It was a story that stirred up deep feelings and revealed many restrained emotions. The recollection of events was powerful. Although I wrote the story two years after the event, it felt like it happened only a few weeks before. I remembered many conversations, specific moments, scents, even random exchanges that seemed unimportant but were very vivid in my brain.

When I started thinking about my dissertation, however, I started with “Winning Gold.” The Sochi event was relatively recent, and the emotional experience that the choir felt was something I wanted to better understand. The prompt for “Winning Gold” was listening to the music. I had a poor recording on my phone, but every time I listened to particular sections, I would relive powerful moments, and the hair on my arm would stand. Realizing the resonance did not change; the story was worth exploring. This story also began my venture into the roots of Arabic words starting, with Tanneh u Ranneh. Thinking about Arabic words and the several meanings that a word might convey opened a huge door into understanding the world in which I lived. Realizing that there was an evident, different way of being and looking at the world was eye opening.

During my visits to Amman, I had several conversations with choir members who had been in Sochi. I wanted to see if what I felt and saw during our time in Sochi rang true to others. I asked them what they felt or thought happened during the concert. Many expressed powerful feelings that were present during the concert and after. Their confirmation gave me strength in the writing, because now I was not only writing my sole perspective, but knowing what the choir felt, also was somehow present in the telling.

Unlike the other two stories, “Reclaiming Silence” was written as it occurred. I remembered receiving the first text message from the director. I did not know what to feel or think. I was going to meet a friend for coffee that morning, and upon sharing the text with him, he put his arm on my shoulder and said, “I am really sorry, Shireen.” This act of empathy opened a can of worms. My advisor that afternoon also learned of the incident and suggested to include it as one of the stories. My initial feeling was shock mixed with pain. I could not believe such a thing could happen in Canada. In trying to make sense of what I was going through, I wrote daily in a journal. Again, understanding my feelings opened a strong avenue to the writing, as I also used
some of the journaling in the story. The events were unveiling on a daily basis and writing them was the hardest of the three stories. Where I had time to process my thoughts in the other two stories, with this one, I could not. It was immediate, it was happening in the now. The main concern in this story was the ending. Because it took so much time for the incident to resolve, I contemplated many times how to end it. It was a struggle and I often felt stuck.

Having said that, the discussion in all the stories opened the door to much needed knowledge, especially in the historical, political, and socioeconomic knowledge of the region. In “Reclaiming Silence,” In my attempt to understand non-Palestinian perspectives, I read material by Jewish writers, such as Illan Pappe, Gideon Levy, and Yeshurun. “Winning Gold” pulled knowledge from the Arabic language and looked at its roots. Many words emerged throughout the story, but resistance, solidarity, and ancestry prevailed. The story unveiled the richness of the Levantine region, its multi-national and religious community, and brought about a sense of pride as the story unfolded. “When Silent Night” brought stories of family, love, fear, and courage. It was also a story in which the role of music was shattered, questioned, and dropped.

Overall, the stories contained many elements that were crucial to the music education research table. All three tackled issues of identity within a Levantine political, historical, and socioeconomic context—a context that is not often found in the Western academy, and a context that can offer a step forward in shifting researchers’ vision from the local to the global.

1.9 Limitations of the study

Although choosing the stories was an organic process, there were some limitations that I believe made the study challenging:

1.9.1 Access to Information

It was very difficult to access local scholars from the region of the Levant. It was easy to identify Arab scholars who wrote in English, but not so many Arabs who wrote in Arabic. Most of my information gathering stemmed from conversations with friends and colleagues who pointed me to some writers and books. Being geographically located in Canada made the information scarce and inaccessible; however, during my travels to Amman, I visited several libraries, bookshops,
and people’s homes. I had many conversations with intellectuals who guided and gave advice as to how I might approach certain topics. Eventually, I managed to find the ways and information, but it was not easily accessible.

1.9.2 Identity research

Although I was able to find several Arab writers who spoke of collective identity, sources that discussed individual identity were lacking. I predicted such findings; the region is struggling with so many powerful outside forces that attention is drawn more to the collective than the personal. The region is continuously under turmoil, and when one is worried about the political situation and constantly thinking about security, it is easy to understand why not much is written about individual identity. Even so, predictably, expressions of individual identity were highly rich and found in poetry, music, dance and visual arts.

1.9.3 Fear seeping into the writing

I want to be able to say that I found all the courage in the world to write my stories, but the truth is that fear was a constant companion. What to include? Who to include or not include? Whose safety might be jeopardized? How will the academy react to this? Will I be able to go back home if someone reads my stories? Why is it important? All of these questions and many more were continuous reminders of my Levantine identity.

1.10 Outline of the thesis

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The introduction in Chapter 1 provides the geopolitical context and history alongside the literature review. Chapter 2 includes Western and Eastern theorists, as well as Levantine scholars living in the West, who wrote of identity. In the chapter, I also discuss expressions of identity found in the region through a variety of art media. In Chapter 3, I discuss autoethnography as a methodology used in the writing, specifically how autoethnography informed the research and the methodology’s strengths and concerns. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 relay the three stories, which took place in three different locations. All stories look at the role of music education in a geopolitical context. These stories were written in their chronological form, and each story is followed by a relevant discussion. Finally, answers to the
research questions were discussed in Chapter 7 along with the thematic threads that connected the three stories, ending with conclusions and implications for further research.
Chapter 2 Geopolitical Context

*I am from there. I am from here. I am not there and I am not here. I have two names, which meet and part, and I have two languages. I forget which of them I dream in.*

--Mahmoud Darwish

2.1 Geopolitical context

2.1.1 The last thousand years

The story of the growth of the modern nation states throughout the Arab world is captivating. It is one of the oldest inhabited places on the planet, and the complexities of its politics reflect this situation. Empires and religions have risen and fallen in this region over the past five thousand years. Many empires and kingdoms have settled in the region, from the Roman, Byzantine, and Sassanid Empires, to the Caliphate, Seljuk, The Crusader Kingdoms, Saladin, the Ottoman Empire and ending with European colonialism. By looking at several maps of the region, one can see the dynamic changes, the multi-nations, faiths, cultures, and countries that have stepped, roamed, and settled in and out of the Middle East region.\(^4\)

Although this thesis focuses on *Bilād il Shām*, the Levant,\(^5\) and specifically the regions of Jordan and Palestine, it is important to know that the mobility of all of the past cultures have shaped and rooted in the sociopolitical context and identity of its nations and peoples.

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\(^4\) This short video gives a visual to the last 5000 years; [https://youtu.be/2iVXPqnoC_A](https://youtu.be/2iVXPqnoC_A)

\(^5\) The Levant is the region on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of Arabian Peninsula and south of Turkey usually including the area of Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria (Gill, 2017).
The two maps below may aid the reader’s understanding of the geographical changes in the region. There were two main empires that settled in the region prior to European colonialism: the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires. Arabs were part of the Byzantine Empire for over 300 years. The Byzantine Empire was a vast and powerful civilization. “Located on the European side of the Bosporus (the strait linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean), the site of Byzantium was ideally located to serve as a transit and trade point between Europe and Asia” (Byzantium, 2010), making the Levant region crucial for that movement. The Byzantine Empire finally fell in 1453, after an Ottoman army stormed and controlled even a greater area. It was a multiethnic state based in Istanbul, Turkey.

Figure 1. Byzantine Empire (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.)
A complex and intricate course of events in the 1910s brought about the end of the Ottomans and gave rise to new nations with borders running across the Middle East. While there were many different factors leading to the current complex Arab jigsaw puzzle map of Bilād il Shām, the British played a far greater role than any other player in the region. Three separate agreements made conflicting promises that the British had to uphold: the MacMahon-Hussein Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the Balfour Declaration. The result was a political mess that divided up a large part of the Arab world.

2.1.2 The Arab world between World War I and II.

2.1.2.1 Arab revolt

The war broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914. A complex system of alliances, a militaristic arms race, colonial ambitions, and general mismanagement at the highest government levels led to this devastating war that would claim the lives of 12 million people from 1914 to 1918. The “Allied” side included the empires of Britain, France, and Russia. The “Central” powers consisted of Germany and Austria-Hungary.
The British immediately began to conceive of plans to dissolve the Ottoman Empire and expand their Middle Eastern empire. They had controlled Egypt since 1888 and India since 1857. The Ottoman Middle East lay right in the middle of these two important colonies, and the British were determined to exterminate it as part of the world war.

In 1915, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, offered Sherif Hussein of Mecca an independent Arab state if he would help the British fight against the Ottoman Turks. The British would provide money and weapons to help him fight the Ottoman army. They also promised him that after the war, “he would be given his own Arab kingdom that would cover the entire Arabian Peninsula, including Syria and Iraq” (Alkhateeb, 2012, para. 2). This agreement led to what is known as the Arab revolt.

With British support in the form of soldiers, weapons, money, and advisors (including the “legendary” Lawrence of Arabia), Sherif Hussein was able to capture numerous cities in Hejaz (including Jeddah and Makkah). To be used in battle, the British in Egypt created a flag for the Arab revolt, Flag of the Arab Revolt. Other countries such as Jordan, Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Kuwait later used the same flag, representing their solidarity with the one another.

The expansion of the Arab Revolt advanced to include the cities of Jerusalem, Baghdad, Amman, and Aqaba. There has been disagreement as to whether the promise included Palestine. “Palestine, far to the south was by implication included in the McMahon’s letter to Sherif Hussein” (Spooner, 2015, para. 2), but the British later denied its inclusion because of other promises they had made.

2.1.2.2 The Sykes-Picot Agreement

Before the Arab Revolt began, and before Sharif Hussein could create his Arab kingdom, the British and French had made other plans. In May of 1916, two diplomats, Sir Mark Sykes of Britain and François Georges-Picot of France, secretly met to draw a different agreement involving these countries in the partition of the Ottoman Arab world.

According to what would become known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the British and French divided up the Arab world between themselves. The British were to take control of what is now Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan. The French were given modern Syria, Lebanon, and southern Turkey.
“The status of Palestine was to be determined later, with Zionist ambitions to be taken into account” (Alkhateeb, 2012, para.5).

The Sykes-Picot Agreement directly contradicted the promises the British made to Sherif Hussein and caused a considerable amount of tension and lack of trust between the British and Arabs; however, this would not be the last of the conflicting agreements the British would make.

### 2.1.2.3 The Balfour Declaration

Another group that wanted a part of the political landscape of the Middle East were the Zionists. Zionism is a political movement that started in the latter half of the 1800s and calls for the establishment of a Jewish state in the Holy Land of Palestine (Zionism, 2017, para. 2).

Zionists, i.e. “Jews who supported the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel” (Yehoshua, 2018, par 7) pressured the British government during WWI into allowing them to settle in Palestine after the war was over. Within the British government was Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, who was sympathetic to this political movement. On November 2, 1917, he sent a letter to Baron Rothschild, a leader in the Zionist community. “The letter declared the British government’s official support for the Zionist movement’s goals to establish a Jewish state in Palestine” (Alkhateeb, 2012, para. 6)

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Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspiration which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.
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I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of Zionist Federation.

Yours,

Arthur James Balfour (Sulayman, 2019, para. 2)

The influence of the Balfour Declaration on the course of post-war events was immediate: According to the “mandate” system created by the Versailles Treaty of 1919, Britain was entrusted with the administration of Palestine, with the understanding that it would work on behalf of both its Jewish and Arab inhabitants. (Yehoshua, 2018, para. 6)

The British, by 1917, had made three different agreements with three separate groups promising three distinctive futures for the Arab world. The Arabs insisted upon receiving the Arab kingdom that was promised to them through Sharif Hussein. There was an expectation between the French and the British to divide up that same land between themselves, and the Zionists were to be given Palestine as promised by Balfour. In 1918, the war ended with the victory of the Allies and the complete destruction of the Ottoman Empire. Although the war was over, the Middle East’s future remained in dispute between three different sides.

2.1.2.4 The League of Nations mandates in the Levant

After WWI, the League of Nations (a forerunner to the United Nations) was established. They implemented the “mandates” for the Arab world and divided the area by drawing its borders. It is important to note that all of this happened without regard for the wishes of the people living there, their ethnicity, their religion, or their geographic placement. Even to this day, political borders in the Middle East do not give a true representation of its people. “The differences between Iraqis, Syrians, Jordanians, Palestinians, etc. were entirely created by the European colonizers” (Alkhaeteeb, 2012, para. 7). Some believe the division was an intentional method used to divide the Arabs against one another.

Because of the mandate system in the Middle East, the British and French were able to get the control they wanted. The sons of Sharif Hussein were allowed to rule over these mandates under
British “protection.” Prince Faisal was made king of Iraq and Syria, and Prince Abdullah was made king of Jordan.

The mandates that the League of Nations created after WWI are shown in Figures 3 and 4 (Hourani, 1991, p. 490):
Initially, Jordan was known as Transjordan. Before 1921, there was “no territory, people, or nationalist movement that was designated, or that designated itself, as Transjordanian” (Massad, 2001, p.11). Transjordan had a population of only 350,000; it overlooked the Jordan Valley inhabited by nomadic tribesmen. The British did not initially conceive of Transjordan as a separate state in its own right. The territory initially was awarded to Great Britain as part of the Palestine mandate.

In 1923, the decision to sever Transjordan from Palestine was formalized, driven by two considerations: “Britain’s wish to confine the Balfour Declaration’s promise of a Jewish national home to the lands west of the Jordan River; and Britain’s wish to confine Amir Abdullah’s ambitions to territory under British control” (Rogan, 2018, Loc. 3823)

Regarding Palestine, the population did not agree with the partition of its territory:
This was particularly problematic as major Arab towns and cities were included in the proposed Jewish state. To iron out such anomalies, the Peel Commission held out the possibility of “population transfers” to remove Arabs from territories allocated to the Jewish state—something that in the later twentieth century would come to be called ethnic cleansing. (Rogan, 2018, Loc. 4299)

Britain’s recommendation of forced transfer won the chairman of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), over to the partition plan. “This will give us something we never had, even when we were under our own authority in antiquity, he enthused—namely, a ‘really Jewish’ state with a homogenously Jewish population” (Segev, 2001, p. 403-404).

2.1.3 Post WW2

2.1.3.1 Nākbā

World War II came upon the Arab world which was firmly held within the British and French imperial systems. The war brought rapid changes in power and social life to the region. For the first few months, the war was a European one, but during 1942-1943, things started shifting for the Middle East. Among the many changes, the circumstances of the war strengthened the idea of a closer unity between the Arab countries. At the forefront of their agenda was their solidarity with the Arabs of Palestine. Unfortunately, not much could be done to stand up against the power of the Zionism supported by the British, and in May of 1948, the state of Israel was established.

Among Palestinians, this date is referred to as the Nākbā, which means catastrophe. It refers to the violence leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, which saw the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages. Various sources have published estimated figures of the number of Palestinian refugees that resulted from the 1948 war. Figures vary between 700,000 and 1,000,000 refugees. Refugees spread all over, but a large number moved to refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria. Others found home in Jordan, and eventually were able to obtain Jordanian citizenship. This provided a chance for expelled Palestinians to create a new life, but to some, the Palestinians’ presence in Jordan represented a triumph for Zionism: “Jordanizing the Palestinians meant the Judaization of Palestine” (Massad, 2001, p. 265). The political mess that Britain created in the aftermath of WWI remains today. The competing agreements led to political instability throughout the Middle East. The rise of
Zionism coupled with the disunity of the region has led to corrupt governments and economic decline for the Middle East as a whole.

2.1.3.2 Nāksā

What came about in June 1967 was a continuation of a prior central event that paved the way for another war, Nāksā (set back). Israel defeated the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and to the Palestinians that meant losing all that remained of their homeland. By the end of the war, Israel had expelled another 300,000 Palestinians, including 130,000 who were displaced.

The motives behind the war are a point of contention among various historians and analysts.

Some believed that Israel had “unfinished business” for failing to seize the whole of historic Palestine in the 1948 war. On the eve of the 1967 attack, Israeli minister Yigal Allon wrote, “In . . . a new war, we must avoid the historic mistake of the War of Independence [1948] . . . and must not cease fighting until we achieve total victory, the territorial fulfillment of the Land of Israel.” (Tahhan, 2018, para. 21)

Figure 5. Palestinian refugees carrying their belongings while crossing Allenby Bridge of the Jordan River from the Israeli-occupied West Bank on June 22, 1967
2.1.3.3 Oslo Accords

The attempt to establish peace was known as the Oslo Accords. The Accords were a landmark in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East. Although many Palestinians were not sure about the specifics of the agreement, some believed this was one step in the right direction and were hopeful that the Oslo Accords would finally allow for many displaced Palestinians a possible reclamation of their land. Two separate agreements were signed by the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization\(^6\) to create a Palestinian state in the region. The Oslo Accords were approved in Washington, D.C, in 1993 (Oslo I) and in Taba, Egypt, in 1995 (Oslo II). The Accords included the recognition of Israel’s right to exist, renounced the use of violence, and called for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza, Jericho, with the understanding that Israel would withdraw from other unspecified areas of the West Bank. Unfortunately, and for a number of reasons, many of the provisions, though still standing, have long been abandoned, and to this day, the Israeli Palestinian conflict has exacerbated. To the Palestinians, the hope of returning or reclaiming anything seems distant and desperately improbable.

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\(^6\) Known as the PLO, it is a militant organization established in 1964 to create a Palestinian state in the region.
2.2. The intricate facets of identity

This section seeks to succinctly convey the rich, complex history of Arab identity in plural geographical contexts. Identity in itself can constitute an entire dissertation. I have drawn on some authors who have eloquently addressed identity: Western, Arab, and what I consider “hybrid” Arab scholars living in the West. In addition, this section includes a brief discussion of various artistic expressions of identity which illuminate the road explored in this dissertation.

2.2.1 Western interpretations of identity

The concept of *identity* was described in Erikson’s concept of *identity crisis* (Fearon, 1999, p.10). Erikson’s concept brought a new meaning to the table. The following excerpt from the preface to a 1965 book by the psychoanalyst, David de Levita, gives some indication of the novelty of Erikson’s usage:
Erikson spoke of the “The Sense of Inner Identity.” I was deeply impressed by Erikson and the exposition of his brilliant ideas . . . We all felt that this . . . “concept of identity” was extremely important, but it was not clear what that exact meaning was, so loaded with significance was the new term. (Levita, 1965, p.15)

Erikson (1970) proposed, “The sense of identity provides the ability to experience one’s self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly” (p.749). Interestingly, Webster’s Dictionary indicates that the word identity came from the 16th century Latin identitat, dentitas, meaning, “the same”; the Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edition, 1989) contains a similar definition: “The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.” It is also in the sameness of the other that we identify ourselves.

Identity may be seen as “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 2). It may also refer “to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4). “Identity is used to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (Deng, 1995, p.1). Vagan (2011) outlined and exemplified how a sociocultural approach to identity formation may be used to shed light upon self-identities. Handlar (1994, p. 28) says that in everyday discourse, identity is used to reference to three aspects of human experiences: first, to the individual human; second, to collectives or groups of human beings; and third, the relationship between the two—in particular, to the ways in which individuals assimilate elements of collective identities into their unique personal identities. In understanding that the construction of identity can be problematic, Handlar (1994) suggested that instead of focusing on the “invention” of minority identities, traditions, and cultures, we need to focus our attention on the ways in which the majority itself is continually reconstructed and reimagined as a homogenous cultural entity. Handlar, Vagan, and Fearon refer to social terms in forming identity.

The construction of identity, therefore, relies on “sameness” with the self and with the other in order to make meaning of oneself and one’s function in the society. Be it race, ethnicity, gender,
religion, language or culture, it is within the sameness of association that one’s identity takes shape.

Fearon (1999) argued that identity ultimately falls under two categories: social and personal. The social term refers to “social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes” (p. 2). Most of the key concepts in social identities derive from or enter into ordinary language. Power, rationality, democracy, ethnicity, race, the state, and even politics are examples. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some “distinguishing characteristic that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable. (p. 4)” They can be viewed as outer versus inner influences of identities; one emphasized by the social structures sources and the relations among identities, and the other focuses on internal, cognitive (behavioral and emotional) identity process (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Hall (1989), however, critiques the concept of identity as being constructed within a discourse in which its emphasis is on marking differences rather than sameness.

Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses. . . . [Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action . . . the logic of something like a ‘true self.’ . . . [But] identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship [difference] of the Other to oneself. (Hall, 1989, p.11).

According to Mishler and Gregg (2011), identity is also multi-layered and organized, containing multiple thematic layers that interconnect and inform each other; therefore, identity implies that the self is multifaceted, made up of interdependent and independent, mutually-reinforcing conflicting parts, “asserting that persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286).

It is important to note that, though Erikson’s use of the term identity was the most important and best-known, there were other paths of diffusion as well (Brubaker & Cooper, 2002). The original notion of the psychoanalytical identification context as introduced by Freud was later linked to
ethnicity and to other sociological role theories. The term identity became highly resonant in the 1960s and quickly seeped into disciplines of journalism, language, political science, social practice, and more.

There are also challenges in defining identity:

It is used to highlight non-instrumental modes of action; to focus on self-understanding rather than self-interest; to designate sameness across persons or sameness over time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist; to highlight the process, interactive development of solidarity an collective self-understanding; and to stress the fragmented quality of contemporary experience of “self,” a self unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently “activated” in differing contexts. (Brubaker & Cooper, 2002, p. 8).

Stryker and Burke (2000) argue that some use identity to refer to the culture of people (with little distinction between identity and ethnicity). Others use identity to refer to common identification with a collective or social category. Finally, some use the term with reference to parts of the self-composed meanings that persons attach to multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies. Social structures affect the structure of the self, and the structure of the self may influence social behavior. The internal dynamics of these self-processes affect social behavior, too.

Brubaker and Cooper (2002) recognized five key uses of the term identity, understood as:

1. A ground or basis of social or political action.
2. A collective phenomenon (sameness among members of group or category such gender, race, ethnicity and nationalism)
3. A core aspect of individual or collective “selfhood,” or as a fundamental condition of social being; i.e. attributes of the self that are valued, cultivated, recognized and preserved.
4. A product of social or political action; developing the kind of collective self-understanding or/and solidarity making action possible.
5. The passing product of multiple and competing discourses highlighted in the unstable, multiple, fluctuating and fragmented nature of the contemporary “self.”

Ehala (2017) believes that it is an illusion to think that identity is our “essence.” Identities are not what we are, but they are what we possess, similar to how one possesses money. He calls them signs of identity; the signal or the micro level (being social and how people see you) and the meaning or what he calls the macro level (how they interpret the signal).

Micro level approaches focus on how identities are manifested in individuals, their beliefs and emotions . . . Macro level approaches focus on the structure and content of identity, and how different identities related to each other in society . . . How individual identifications relate to the identity as a group phenomenon, how individual identifications influence the content of identity on the macro level and vice versa, how groups are formed from individuals or how the groups disappear when individuals cease to identify. (Ehala, 2017, p. 2)

Regarding different thoughts about a “fixed” identity versus one that moves between identifications, Bhabha (2004) describes it as “in-between, the designations of identity and that ‘this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’” (p.4). The spaces within and among individuals and cultures do not maintain a single position but form identities in an on-going process.

If identity is something we possess (Ehala, 2017), and true identity is the essence of the self, then identity exists only by separating oneself from the other so as to determine their “specific identity.” It also cannot be or belong in one place or space; it cannot be represented by location or borders. Hall (1989) argued that a new definition of identity needed to be analyzed, focused on suturing. Leaning towards Hall’s definition, Katzenstein said, “The term [identity] references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other” (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 59, italics in original). Some are multilayered, affected by social structures and cognitive responses.

The diverse viewpoints mentioned suggest that the term identity comes with much ambiguity. It is clear from the above definitions and thoughts that identity “is riven with contradictory
meanings and encumbered by reifying connotations. Qualifying the noun with strings of adjectives—specifying that identity is multiple, fluid, constantly re-negotiated, and so on—does not solve the problem of entrapment in the word” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2002, p. 34).

2.2.2 Levant interpretations of identity

*It is not enough to describe the waves and the appearance of the ships when talking about life in the ocean . . . It is important to understand what lies beneath . . . the strange . . . the currents . . . the beasts . . . and the slaves and sailors who lie beneath with their oars rowing tirelessly for days . . . carrying goods and wealth of its passengers . . . sweating, and their bodies exhausted . . .

Yes! It’s important to give me the full picture when trying to convince me of something*

-- Ibn Khaldoun (translated from Fayyed, 2008)

Identity has multiple definitions; however, unlike the Western philosophical approach to understanding identity, the concept of identity in the Levant is seen differently, more as a collective. Not much attention is given to the identity of an individual (as sameness or different, fixed, or floating). Because of the larger forces—effects of colonialism, political tension, Palestinian occupation, wars in the name of religion and other social contexts—identity is seen as something that was being threatened and later led to modifications in the “expression” of identity. It is strongly and interchangeably associated with belonging. Identity is affiliated with national, religious, social, cultural, and colonial ways of being. The approach for individual and personal connection to identity is relatively new and as a result, theories related to individual identity are briefly discussed.

2.2.3 Textual meaning in Arabic language: hāwiyeh (identity)

The word hāwiyeh in Arabic is defined generally as identity. The root of the word is huwa, and the meaning of this root contributes to a richer understanding of identity. According Al-Māʿāni (dictionary), hāwiyeh means the essence of the self (wiḥdit athat). Fayyad (2008, p.11) adds, ḥaqiqat āl shāy (the absolute truth), and āl khāṣaʿ is āl Muṭlaqa (absolute attributes). Analysis of the word itself suggests pulling it apart. The root in Arabic contains two letters: ه (hu) and و (wa). The pronunciation of both letters should be free from tension; there are no constrictors to the sound and only a breath the pushes out the two letters. This thought of openness could allude to the essence of the self.
2.2.4 The concept and identity of the Levant

In order to give light to identity in the Levant, it is important to note that heritage in the Levant is understood as a tradition, involving collective memories of the past, conceptions of selfhood and social identity, as well as attitudes toward the future. One could look at heritage in the Arab society similarly to what autobiography is to the individual. Autobiography attempts to construct, build, and create order from the chaos of a life’s events and experiences, and heritage for the Arab society attempts to make sense of itself, to find or impose order, and often to round out the rougher edges of what is commonly understood as history.

There were two prevailing ideas to the identity of the Levant: one pushed for the ideology of an Arab nationalism throughout the Arab nations (1920-1960), and another focused on the diversity found in the Levant. They could be viewed as providing a transition from collective identity to individual identity, as they correspond to global forces of human development.

In calling for a political union in the Arab world (from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean), Arab nationalism emerged in reaction to European dominance as an ideology that declared the Arabs as one nation, promoting their unity and celebrating the splendors of the Arab civilization, language, and literature—constituting itself as one nation bound together by common ethnicity, language, culture, history, identity, geography and politics.

Many resonated with this ideology, which to this day rings true to many. Leaders such as Iraq’s King Faisal I, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Arab Nationalist Movement, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and more called for multinational communalism among the Arab states. Artist, writers, and more promoted this ideology. The song, “The Arabic Dream” (1998) was released and within weeks successfully reached a large audience. It called for Arab unity. Written by Egyptian composer Midhat Al ‘Adl and produced in the gulf region, it was one of the most important songs released at the time. Another popular song, written by Lebanese musician Marcel Khalifeh, draws on Mahmoud Darwish’s poem, “Record, I am an Arab,” which called for all Arabs to end and defy the Israeli occupation.

Some believed, however, that a stronger ideology than Arab nationalism exists in the Levantine, rooted in the actual existence of geographic Bilād il Shām from the time of the Ottoman rule up
until the end of the First World War in 1918. Arab nationalism was based on an ideology that aspired to become a reality (Sa’adeh, 2011). Levant scholars had different thoughts on their Levantine identity. Although the region was divided and borders were established, encompassing a more pluralist setting in the region was invoked: a political and cultural idea—a multilayered crucible of identities, supplanted the notion of an exclusivist Arab identity called the Levant.

Arab national identity remains a puzzling question for many Middle Eastern writers and intellectuals. Lebanese ideologue Omar Farrukh argued that “regardless of the hybridity found in the Middle East; Syriac, Armenians, Persians, Kurds, Turks, and others, they would still be considered Arabs in spite of their racial diversity because the overriding factor in their identity formation is the Arabic language” (Salameh, 2012, p.36). For Arab nationalists, the dream of a united Arab state in spite of the political havoc reigned supreme. But alternative ideologies were also endorsed. Syrian thinker Adonis (b.1930) proposed the possibility of a greater degree of pluralism in the Middle East. The Levant was rich, and Arab exclusivity meant that other languages, faiths, and ethnicities were excluded. “I have no doubt in my mind,” he wrote,

that the lands that conceived of and spread man’s first Alphabet; the lands that bequeathed and taught the principles of intellectual intercourse and dialogue with the “other,” since the very early discovery of Alphabetic writing; these lands that bore witness to processions of the world’s loftiest civilizations, from Sumerians to Babylonians, and from Egyptians to Hebrews, Phoenicians and Romans; these lands that spawned monotheism, humanism, and belief in a compassionate deity, etc.—I say that I am confident that such fertile and bountiful lands will no doubt shake off the torpor, intransigence, and immobile-ism [of Arabism], and will hurtle skyward toward modernity and progress. (Adonis, 2009, p. 65-66).

Although the map shown in Figure 7 is more “imprecise than inaccurate” (Izady, 2017), it reflects the diversity found in the region.
Combining both ideologies, Khoury (2018) summarized the validity of Arab nationalism in a few points. The first was the importance of a united Arab language as the founder of expression and communication. The second was a shared and long history that expanded from the western north of Africa all the way east, reaching the gulf as well as some southern countries. Lastly was the shared Arab culture, literature, arts, and even Arab hospitality—shared with its coffee. All of these elements contribute strongly to a feeling of belonging and loyalty to the Arab world.

Khoury continued to say that within that ideology lies three areas or blocks: āl-Māšrek āl Arabi (The Eastern Arab) encompassing Bilad al Sham or the Levant, āl Māghreb āl Arabi (The Moroccan Arab) encompassing the northern African countries, and finally the āl- Khālij āl Arabi (The Gulf Arab), encompassing countries in the gulf region. Khoury emphasized that all three lie under the Arab philosophy of belonging. He did not deny the diversity that is found in the region but suggested that “Arab unity does not erase diversity and diversity does not erase Arab unity. . .
our biggest challenge at this time is to preserve our unity and respect our diversity” (Khoury, 2018, 5:25).

Even though individual identity is not commonly written about among the Levantine scholars, poets, musicians, and more frequently express it. Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (2019) describes identity as multiple and layered, with several faces of belonging and at the same time transforming. It is not fixed but ever changing and moving, as expressed in an excerpt from the poem, “On Edward Said” (Prost, 2019):

*What about identity? I asked*

*He said: It’s self-defence . . . Identity is the child of birth,*

*but at the end, it’s self invention, and not an inheritance of the past.*

*I am multiple . . .

*Within me an ever new exterior. And I belong to the question of the victim. Were I not from there, I would have trained my heart to nurture their deers of metaphor . . .

*So carry your homeland wherever you go, and be a narcissist if need be

*The outside world is exile, exile is the world inside.*

*And what are you between the two?*

* * *

*Myself, I do not know so that I shall not lose it.*

*I am what I am.*

*I am my other, a duality gaining resonance in between speech and gesture.*

*Were I to write poetry I would have said: I am two in one,*

*like the wings of a swallow content with bringing good omen when spring is late.*
Identity in the Levant is highly affected by the political and social forces in the region, as well as by globalization. Zuhair Fayyad’s (2008) book, *Identity and Struggle*, argues that the world of social media, Internet, and the idea of globalization has shifted and even caused confusion to the concept of identity. He believes identity needs to be redefined. He argues that feeling identity in the context of belonging differs from the context of feeling identity in globalization, bringing new formations to what construes identity. To him, identity is belonging, and belonging is grounded in one’s language, culture, religion, and nationalism. Scholar Ibrahim Mahmoud asks, “Did globalization cause identity to explode?” (Fayyad, 2008, p.14) He argues that it is almost impossible for an identity to be formed, knowing that is not rooted first in its own environment.

Fayyad defines *National Social Identity* as the most crucial in the formation of one’s identity. His definition of national social identity is not related to one’s language, faith, or culture, though all of these stem from national identity. “National social identity is the foundation for a moving dynamic living interaction between humans and their environment, human and human in and with their environment creating a nation from one womb” (Fayyad, 2008, p.18). He summarizes that national social identity is strongly connected, if not the foundational essence, to a human’s identity.

Because history plays a major role in the development of identity (Khoury, 2018; Fayyad, 2008), colonialism played a significant role on the effects of its formation in the Levant. The discussion in this section thus far has focused mostly on the collective, social and national identity. So far, it has ignored the individual component. Individual identity is mostly expressed amongst poets, musicians, and artists. In contrast, writers about the manifestations of identity focused on a collective social and national identity.

**Occupied Palestinian Territory**

I have opted not to use the United Nation’s legal term *Occupied Palestinian Territory* (OPT) in this dissertation. Initially, it did not cross my mind to use this phrase to describe my situation or the situation of those whose stories I share. To my Palestinian heart—an identity that I only have

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7 Occupied Palestinian Territory, which includes the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza strip, and the Golan Heights, is the legal term used by the United Nations.
more recently found comfort in using—the stories and what they have revealed tell of a state of being and understanding of self in society that goes beyond international, politically driven labels. It is a compassionate and empathetic Levantine spirit that inspires my music making and a hope for fluid and porous co-existence of Arab peoples. Yes, the socio-political environments that continue to generate divisive and bordered tensions must be addressed; however, upon deep reflection and consideration of this research, I submit that it is these very same political boundaries that create barriers to living together with the hope that I address in this thesis. Music provides us the means to engage those politics and, at the same time, to transcend them.

An externally determined label of a geographical area does not cancel the location, boundaries, or the people of that geographical area. Nor does that label determine the identity of the subjects implicated by the label. In the act of re-translation and seeking agency, it is important for me to challenge the use of an internationally imposed label and explore the possibilities for a different kind of understanding of Palestinian identity—as human—and not as the subject of other people’s narratives.

A portion of this thesis is focused on the re-construction of my Palestinian identity and keeping the Palestinian story—the heart—alive in the face of many challenges. By using the OPT as a term, I ask whether I am again contributing to the re-creation and re-telling of the political story of Israel and the erasure of Palestine and the Palestine that is in my heart. Through this dissertation, I aim to liberate the Palestinian heart from this occupation.

2.2.5 Hybridity

I am the son of the road, my country is a caravan and my just unexpected of voyages. I belong to earth and to the god and it is to them that I will one day soon return.

--Amin Maalouf (2012)

The definitions of identity stem from theories and philosophies rooted in Western literature. While isolating specific elements of identity is beneficial to tease out unique meanings, the
danger is that we may lose sight of identity as an interconnected, holistic, fully embodied sense of self. Additionally, for the Levantine context, these definitions fall short in expressing how identity is taken up. This section discusses identity from the point of view of scholars, thinkers, and artists who came from the Levant: Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, but lived in the West, culminating in different definitions of identities.

Amin Maalouf (b. 1949), born in Lebanon where he grew up, is a journalist, novelist, and intellectual. He discusses his interpretations of identity in his notable book, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. In 1976, Maalouf moved to France, where he currently resides. Amin is a Christian who grew up in a highly tolerant and diverse period in Lebanese political evolution. His novels and writings are in French and Arabic. He sheds a different light on the questions of identity that are prominent within this dissertation.

Maalouf claims that there is a universal human need for a sense of identity (Maalouf, 2012). He acknowledges that identity is a loaded term. Coupled with cultural, social, imagined, national and political nuances the term identity takes on many different definitions and dimensions, which Maalouf calls the vertical and horizontal identities (Maalouf, 2012, p.102): vertical refers to the ancestral knowledge of where one comes from, the language one speaks, the faith to which one belongs. Horizontal refers to the identity that keeps evolving as the environment changes.

Identity is a word; that rarely stands alone. It is usually coupled with another word such as cultural, national, political, ethnic, gender, self, and more. These pairings bring new constructs and definitions. They allow the word to interact with another to define itself, changing it so that it is perceived differently. Maalouf (2012) says that identity is what “prevents one from being identical to someone else” (p. 10). It is linked to the deconstruction of what makes up an individual. In Maalouf’s case, what prevents one from being identical to the other is a comparison factor. One will need to have a reference point to determine its identicality: “The fact of simultaneously being Christian and having as my mother tongue Arabic, the holy language of Islam, is one of the basic paradoxes that have shaped my identity” (Maalouf, 2012, pg. 16).

Maalouf argues that if people can reach a point of acknowledging multiple identities, recognizing different identities and accommodating these differences, a better and safer world will result. Absent that, tribal identities are always present and assert their exclusionary nature anywhere and within all groups. He says that identity cannot be compartmentalized; it cannot be split in halves.
or thirds, nor does it have any clearly defined set of boundaries. He claims that he does not have several identities, but only one, made of all the elements that have shaped its unique proportions (Maalouf, 2012). He concludes that there is “no one fixed, monolithic identity, but a series of ... ‘allegiances’: all the various vicissitudes of history, customs, religion, gender, class and the outlooks they entail” (Maalouf, 2012, p. 10). One has to take all elements of their allegiances,” and just like genetic code, determine what makes each one unique. He also explains that in this time in history, unfortunately, there is a tendency to favor one single allegiance, to confuse it with identity, and to overlook other affiliations. Looking at the world today, this can be a dangerous reduction of human experience.

_**I am not ashamed of my identity, it is still under construction,**_

_**But I am ashamed of some of what is written in the Ibn Khaldoun Introduction: You, as of now, are someone else!**_

__Mahmoud Darwish__

Edward Said (1935-2003) was one of the most prominent and influential Arab American (Palestinian-born) scholars. He was complex and controversial. He was a Christian Palestinian Arab whose father served in the American army during the First World War. He was an academic, a professor of comparative literature who lived in the United States from the age of seventeen. As an out spoken member of the Palestinian national council, he mistrusted nationalism. Educated at Princeton and Harvard, Said loved the very novels in which he discerned racism and imperialism. He continued to be an influential thinker who changed, along with other theoreticians, the landscape of postcolonial theory, which came into play in his thoughts about identity. He was continuously engaged with literature, music, and political matters. His most influential book, _Orientalism_ (1978), forced academics to think about and face up to their political allegiances, mostly to the West. His body of scholarly work focused on matters of ethnicity and identity.

Said believed that the life of an intellectual should be that of a migrant and an exile. He used the term _exile_ in a metaphorical sense, referring not only to leaving one’s physical home but also to

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8 From his poem, _You, as of now, are someone else._
leaving the conventions and accepted truths of one’s community, emphasizing the importance of criticizing these truths, and not shrinking from addressing the failures of one’s audience, no matter how powerful. However, there are also paradoxes and tensions created in Said’s own cultural identity which reveal the very complexity of the process of constructing one’s identity in the modern postcolonial world (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 1999). In those tensions lie his strength and depth of analysis through the lens of postcolonialism.

Said wrote, “there can be generosity, and vision, and overcoming barriers, and finally, human existential integrity. Who cares about the labels of national identity anyway?” (Said, 2000, p. 410). With his identity as a Palestinian stemming from a place of loss, he asserted the need for home and the nation. He pointed out that attachment to home and place persist for the exile. “Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, the native place . . . what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are loss, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both” (Said, 2000, p.185).

Said affirmed that our only ethical position, the only place we can be as human beings with integrity is to know that we are all in a state of diaspora and exile, and this recognition is the only way towards what can be described as an honorable life and one hopeful way of facing up to Homi Bhabha's question “how can we live Other-wise?” (Constantinescu, 2005, p. 174)

In his last two essays, “Freud and the non-European” and “Thought on late style” (2004), Said urged us to engage with that which contradicts and unsettles, in order to better understand one’s identity. Exile and home and belonging were at the heart of his writing.

"Most people are principally aware of one culture, of one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that, to borrow a phrase from music, is contrapuntal. For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. (Said, 2003, p. 8).

He ended this essay stressing strengths in thinking about broken identities of exile.
is that it can speak to besieged identities—not through dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion but, rather, by attending to it as a troubling, disabling, destabilizing secular wound—the essence of the cosmopolitan, from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm, and no Utopian reconciliation even within itself. (Said, 2003, p. 53)

He wrote that the ideal identity is “to transform the Unitarian identity to an identity that includes the other without suppressing the difference. That is the great goal!” (Njoenka, 2012, 34:52)

It is important to note (especially for this dissertation) that Said traced the path of the modern diasporic Palestinian identity through many of his writings, political activism, and his dedication to peace. Said detoured his pain away from hatred and towards a universalistic, inclusive, and secular Palestinian identity based on justice, equality, and reconciliation with the Jewish people. He called for the Jewish state to publicly acknowledge the pain that its creation and continuous colonization has brought upon the Palestinian people, and for Palestinians and Arabs to invest in understanding and engaging Jewish history and Israeli society (Constantinescu, 2005).

The Palestinian diaspora may have the impact of what Volkan (2001) referred to as the “chosen trauma,” which may cause dramatic and destructive consequences to one’s identity. In order to understand large group psychology, Volkan showed how social and behavioral sciences, useful interdisciplinary cooperation, could be pushed forward to result in valuable theoretical and practical concepts. Gillis (1994) also believed that memory and identity have lost historical context and reconnecting them both in time and place was important.

Habib (2013) discussed issues of displacement for the Palestinians, bringing forward the difference between exile and diaspora. She focused on three elements: the struggle and the meaning of exile, the struggle of resistance and preserving identity, and lastly, the right or the notion of return for the Palestinians. She used narratives interweaving literary, political, and spiritual concepts in the reconstruction and reaffirmation of identity and geography. She explored experiences and notions of exile and return in order to attempt reconstruction of identity and nation in Palestinian literature. She referred to it as the continuity of Palestinian-ness.

Said’s (1999) Out of Place’s central purpose was to record a subjective account of an “essentially lost or forgotten world” (Said, 2000, p. ix). In order to help explain some of the
many paradoxes of Said’s identity as a public intellectual, literary theorist, and political activist, he wrote about traits that are a product of postcolonialism, as a Palestinian living in exile. He explained that our identity was formed in relation to the Other: many times referring to the groups we feared, hated or/and resented. As the social surroundings shifted and changed, so did the identity. It kept evolving and morphing into new facets.

In a political ideology, identity is a separator and a way of telling how different one is from the other. Through this lens, identity becomes problematic and in Said’s final thoughts on identity, in his autobiography, he wrote,

> I experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance . . . These currents like the themes of one’s life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are “off” and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom. (Said, 2000, p. 295)

In summary, migration appears to increase and perhaps impose the continuous evolution of one’s identity. Diverse experiences, challenges, and thoughts are inevitable forces that uniquely expand human experience. Maalouf and Said are authentic representatives of this experience.

### 2.6 Aspects of identity that are relevant to this dissertation

#### 2.6.1 Jordanian identity

Jordanian national identity is no more “imagined” or “invented” than other national identities, but it has a harder battle to wage than its counterparts elsewhere in the world. By the creation of Transjordan, the British were able to keep part of their promise.

Jordan gained its independence from the British in 1925. In *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*, Massad (2001) described the different strategies used by the nation-state of Jordan to create an identity that was crucial to the emergence of the nation-state itself
(amongst them a gendered strategy). The new cultural identities that were created in the making of Jordan were deployed not as the “new products, which they in fact were, but as eternal essences that had always existed” (Massad, 2001, p. 276). “The result is a Jordanian national identity and national culture that think of themselves in essentialist terms. Like other postcolonial national identities, Jordanian national identity and Jordanian culture are products and effects of colonial institutions” (p. 277). Fayyad (2008) wrote that the “legacy” left by centuries of colonization has created a heavy burden on the region. The effects are very much alive and present.

Massad (2001) explained how the 1948 Arab-Israeli War resulted in the “Zionist expulsion of close to a million Palestinians from their homeland” (p. 233). As a result, Jordan’s population expanded from 375,000 to 1,270,000 people. Massad offered several opinions about the “Jordanizing” of Palestinians and whether or not it was the right thing to do, for both the Jordanians and Palestinians.

Jordan’s dependence on the military and judicial law is central to the production and preservation of its nation identity. Furthermore, it reaches into other state agencies, educational institutions, cultural scenes, and society at large to define national culture. “ Outsiders” (mostly non-tribal), people whose roots lie outside the new borders of the country, ruled and continue to rule it. Its people are composed of diverse geographic “origins” from outside the borders of the nation-state (this refers not only to Palestinian Jordanians, but also to Syrian-Jordanians, Hijazi-Jordanians, Egyptian-Jordanians, Iraqi-Jordanians, Lebanese-Jordanians, Turkish-Jordanians, Circassian-Jordanians, Kurdish-Jordanians, Chechen-Jordanians, and Armenian-Jordanians). The country depends largely on foreign money to support its resource-poor economy, “and claims are put forth by neighboring powerful states on its very identity (Israel, Saudi Arabia, and at the time, Nasirist Egypt, to list the more prominent ones historically), or on parts of it (the West Bank and Palestinian Jordanians) by a strong nationalist movement (namely, the PLO)” (Massad, 2001, p. 15).
2.6.2 Identity resonances, voice, expression and more

*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.* --Mahatma Ghandi

Identity is, in fact, a loaded term that results in much ambiguity. Much has been discussed about identity as an individual and a collective term. I draw on several resonances in the hope of expanding my own knowledge and understanding of identity.

There is no doubt that postcolonialism played a major role in what I call “labeling identity.” The Occident creation of what the Orient should look like or be, indirectly positions people in categories: the Orient, the mysticism, the camels, the Arabs, the terrorist, and so forth. By creating an East and a West, postcolonial theory in itself is built on separating and showing the difference in the other and by doing so, what is shared amongst humanity becomes lost. What Maalouf refers to as favoring “allegiances” may be a product of this philosophy driven by political action or thought.

The definition of the Arabic word *hāwiyeh* draws on meanings such as *essence of the self* and *absolute truth*, and in English, they are related to “sameness” or drawing on differences. In looking at the words, *hāwiyeh* is connected to an internal experience and maybe even a spiritual one. By understanding the essence of who we are, we draw on feelings, emotions, existence, faith, and being. This connection is related to a universal understanding of how one might fit/belong in the universe. In this “wholesome-ness” idea, one becomes wrapped around the word.

The Western term related to sameness or difference is problematic, as it automatically creates a duality, a separation; i.e. what is similar or what is different, and separation is dangerous.

I am drawn to Amin Maalouf’s horizontal and vertical idea of identity. The vertical is grounded in history, ancestry, language, and more, while the horizontal represents the daily shift and changes that occur. I would like to add that vertical identity may possess different strengths

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depending on justice, diaspora, and loss. As a Palestinian, I am rooted more deeply in my national identity because of the injustice that is found in the region. I often question my attachment to my national identity otherwise. I also believe that strength of attachment to identity plays a role in the horizontal identity, and both directions are deeply affected by postcolonialism theory and political context. The combination of both vertical and horizontal identity may be what Mishler and Gregg (2011) referred to as multilayered, organized, and informing one another.

In addition, Maalouf’s horizontal identity may be understood as a dynamic identity versus the fixed. Maalouf’s horizontal identity falls under Said’s “cluster of floating currents” (1999, p. 295) concept, as well those of Hall (1996) and Katzenstein (1996), for whom identity is an evolving, moving and not fixed. In agreement, Syrian musician Kinan Azmeh (Edwards, 2019) says that identities are a process; some identities are imposed on us, and we must sometimes fight hard not to be labeled as such. He describes how his identity changed within minutes after 9/11, from musician to “the Arab,” becoming the “other.”

After studying at Julliard and moving to the United States, Kinan discussed his struggle over how he neither wanted to be the expatriate or the immigrant:

I want to have a “fluid” identity . . . I wanted to go somewhere and interact with it in the deepest form and not have to be labeled in any way . . . fluidity of identity . . . of what home is and what is not. (Njoenka, 2012, 7:35)

In his conversation with renowned musician Yoyo Ma, who explained how identity over time becomes more inclusive. Using himself as an example, he shared how throughout his career, his title changed from the Young Syrian clarinet, the Syrian clarinetist, Syrian musician, to the musician. Reminding him that he forgot the last step, Yoyo ma told him, “After the musician you then become a human because it’s not what you do, but what you do with it” (Njoenka, 2012, 9:03).

Through his composition, Azmeh has expressed some concepts of identity and home. It is in this expression of music that the next section evolves.
2.7 Embodiment of music in gesture

Embodifying the music and understanding my identity through conducting has played an integral role in informing my expression of identity in music making. Churchley (2014) defined embodiment in choral conductors as a form of dance that is self-choreographed, using standard conventions and movements, as well as being the silent embodiment of the conductor’s music in a dialogue with the sounding embodiment of the musicians’ music. The power of embodying music for the choral conductor is parallel to embodying the vision in other forms. In that comparison, Churchely says that vision happens in darkness and “audiation” (for conductors) happens in silence.

Pietilainen-Caffery (2015) suggests that conductors use the mirror neuron system, a system responsible for mimicry and creating empathetic emotions. The mirror neuron system is part of our everyday communication, and conductors use it instinctively with their choirs. He also suggests that we send subconscious nonverbal messages that are transferred to singers. Could mimicry in gesture, facial expressions, and musicality have played a role in creating empathy?

There are several factors that play a role in how conductors communicate with their groups: embodying and unifying the emotional intent and expression, actual gestures, face and eyes. “Engaging the imagination of singers with stories may engage their own brains and evoke the response of their own experiences” (Nagoshi, 2010, p. 24). This model of conducting presumes that, in addition to musical responsibilities, conductors lead their ensembles in emotional expression. How the ensemble members perceive that emotion relies upon the neural mechanism of empathy. “Conductors, in kind, need to train themselves to give the ensemble spontaneous messages that corroborate their symbolic communication. The result will be performances that are colorful, spontaneous, and honest” (Nagoshi, 2010, p. 47). Understanding how the physical, emotional, psychological phenomena, and communicative gestures of choral conducting may again inform my identity’s construct.

2.7.1 Music and identity

Frith (1996) argued that music can construct our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers the body—time and sociability—experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives. Unlike many cultural elements, Frith believed that identity in
music was special, as it defined a space without boundaries, e.g., it could cross borders. It was a matter of ritual; it described one’s place in a dramatized pattern of relationships.

Turino (2008) claimed that there were several different kinds of musical performance—four fields of practice—which do not map to particular genres of music. These fields defined the types of activity, artistic roles, values, goals, and people involved in the music making. Music is divided into “fields,” each of which is “differentiated by its own frame of interpretation, values, responsibilities, practices, sound features, and distinct conceptions of what music is” (p. 234) rather than genres. These are participatory performance (artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants), presentational performance (situations where one group, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group), high fidelity (the making of recordings), and Studio audio art (the creation and manipulation of sound). Negus and Velazquez (2002) offered a critique of a trajectory of thinking about the relationships between music and identity and argued for looking into approaches that are able to embrace a more subtle and less reductionist notion of how much may connect with, become part of, or be totally irrelevant to our sense of self and collectivity. In order for us to move to a renewal of discussions about culture, the individual and collective self, we must move away from the obvious markers of identity towards those that are more complexly coded and less easily decoded.

Both Frith and Turino discussed the role of music in the construction of identity. Negus and Vlazques talked about a relationship between the two and asked if they were relevant at all. I lean towards identity being in relationship with music rather than playing a role in the constructing of an identity. There are many narratives and theories that may arise in the crucial role music played in my career development. Edward Said (1999) believed that music transcends identity. Did music transcend my identity? Was art and particularly music the thread that informed the fabric of my identity? Could Said’s “floating currents” attain freedom? In looking at other expressions of Palestinians, I hope to develop a better understanding.

2.7.2 Expressions of Levantine identity through music, poetry, dance, and visual media

Musicians and music lovers [in the Levant] characterize and present their self characterizations [identity] through terms such as spirit and sincerity, through the
narration of such nuanced varieties of emotional experience as tarab10 [musical rapture], and through the use of critical terms such as melody (lāhn), lyric (kālimāt), and voice (ṣawt) that are thought to be vehicles for the expression of these sentiments. (Shannon, 2009, p.194)

In Among the Jasmine Trees, Shannon (2009) investigated how music in Syria shaped discussions about Arab society and culture. He attempted to show how Syrians recover a source of strength and power in the cultural heritage through their different styles of music: secular, sacred, and instrumental. In the context of the search for modernity, performing and listening to music come to play an “essential role in the elaboration of concepts of personhood, community and nation” (Shannon 2009, p. xvi). In the article “Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music,” Massad (2003) looked into how the change in musical style corresponded to the changes in and throughout the Palestinian struggle; every song represented a time in history, a feeling of dispossession and exile. Similarly, in My voice is my weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance, McDonald (2013) investigated protest songs and performers of the Palestinian Resistance. He traced and provided a thorough examination between Palestinian nationalism and musical expression.

And so, it has taken me all of sixty years to understand that water is the finest drink, and bread the most delicious food, and that art is worthless unless it plants a measure of splendor in peoples’ hearts.

Taha Mohammad Ali (2007)

Yeshurun (2012) explored themes found in Darwish’s poetry, which embodies identity and exile at multiple levels. In an interview, Darwish described the meanings behind his poems that

10 “Tarab refers to an older repertoire, which is rooted in the pre-World War of musical practice of Egypt and the East-Mediterranean Arab world and is directly associated with emotional evocation” (Racy, 2003, p. 4).
referred to his personal encounters: Palestine, exile, home, identity, and more. Ladhkani (2001) focused on a Palestinian dance group, dabke, based in Jordan who claim they were able to create a “non-violent venture for political protest” and an expression of Palestinian nationalism. dābke (a medium of expression to the indigenousness Palestinian) asserts Palestinian identity and history through its distinctive rhythms, melodies, dance movements, and costumes; i.e. voice of resistance. Abu Hani, a Palestinian in Ramallah, describes the power of dābke and identity:

You know, Da’ud [David], I have been asking every researcher who comes through this office the same question for years. And I am curious if you can tell me what the answer is. Abu Hani then stands up behind his desk and begins to stomp his feet on the ground repeatedly. “Do you know what this means when we [Palestinians] stamp our feet in the dabke?” he asks, cautiously balancing on one foot . . . We stomp our feet in the dabke to show the world that this is our land [Bālādnā] [stomping loudly on the floor], that people and villages can be killed and erased [stomping again], . . . but our heritage [turātnā] is something that they can’t reach because it is here [motioning to his heart]. They have stolen our land [stomp], forced us out of our homes [stomp], but our culture is something they cannot steal. When we stamp our feet we are saying that no matter how far we have been scattered, Palestine will always remain under our stamping feet [filasṭīn rāḥ bizāl taḥt aqḍāmnā]. (McDonald, 2013, p.19)

Borno uses film to negotiate his identity. He considers himself stateless:

the result of an arbitrary system that not only leaves a myriad of loopholes but has also shaped hierarchy of nations that considers some passports powerful and others practically useless. Around the world, there is a stateless child born every ten minutes in just five countries, which account for more than half of the world’s known stateless. (Primo, 2017)

Borno set out to re-imagine a different notion of state, inspired by his own experience and frustrations from being a citizen of no land. Palestinian Game Developer and Designer (creator of games Layla and Shadows of Four) shows the hope that rises with his art technology and entrepreneurship that unites against injustice. He expresses that although life in Gaza faces
“exclusive” challenges and limitations, creations of video games is his way of expression (e.g. Layla represents the boys who lost their lives in a Gaza attack (Abueideh, 2017).

In an interview with Iraqi Canadian singer Narcy (2017), talking about his new collaboration with a Tribe Called Red, he refers to it as a “borderless nation” and continues explaining that he always “craved belonging to a nation, or a country . . . I was always torn between Canada and Iraq . . . having immigrated to Canada, initially we [his brothers] never felt attached to the identity of a Canadian . . . or being Iraqi . . . (because we were far) . . . so we created a space where we exist” (Aspirot, 2017, 4:25).

Dozan wa Awtar Music Establishment, in Amman, Jordan, may have played a role in supporting singers’ identity, and giving agency in a space where it is safe. This space connects them with a mutual love, singing. This maybe one of the few places in Jordan where the voice (in its multiple explanations) has been negotiated, expressed, and where some found freedom. Jordan has a large population of displaced Palestinians, and Dozan wa Awtar’s music community includes many Palestinians, including me. The Palestinian resistance in its multiple art forms is very present. Songs have been very strong in symbolizing peace, hope, resistance, freedom, and identity affirmation. It is embedded in Palestinians living in Palestine and in exile. Understanding the trajectory of the performances and Dozan wa Awtar’s concert programing and community sheds light on the multiple layers of identity that are present. It is very clear that Palestinians create moving performances and have been again a major part of music learning. In writing this dissertation, I am interested to discover how much it has determined my repertoire programing, as well as my own construct of identity.

2.7.3 Voice

Weidman (2014) suggests that attending to voice in its multiple registers gives particular insight into the intimate, affective, and material/embodied dimensions of cultural life and sociopolitical identity. She focuses on scholarship produced since the 1990s in a variety of fields, addressing the status of voice within Euro-Western modernity: voice as sound and embodied practice, technological mediation and voicing, and how it is shaped culturally and historically within specific moments and categories invoked in discourse about personal agency, communication, and representation and political power. In Arabic, the word voice takes on other meanings. The word for voice is sawt, which means sound. In this case, a sound is not necessarily vocal but can
refer to any form of vibrations creating sound, noise, music, and other. It could also refer to the sounding of a person in the world, a representation of how one projects his sound (identity) in the world.

Borrowing Julia Kristeva’s terms *phenotext* and *genotext* (where the former serves to communicate competently, while the latter is a process that articulates ephemeral or non-signifying structures), Roland Barthes (1977) identifies and examines the split between voice and language. He claims that the grain of the voice, or “genosong,” as a form of bodily communication, moves away from the laws and limits of the linguistic sphere and reveals the language from within. Does this stretch the connection between identity and voice? Is this where they meet? Is this the concept of *ṣawt*? In order to “displace the fringe of contact between language and music,” Barthes (1977) states that it is better to alter the level of perception in music. Instead of changing the language on music directly, perhaps change the musical object itself. In this dissertation, I seek to know what the relationship between voice, language, and music may be, and how these three interrelated components have navigated and shaped identity.

### 2.7.4 Silencing

Although silencing may take many forms, this thesis discusses the silencing of Palestinians. Keith W. Whitelam’s (1996) *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*, and Ilan Pappe’s (2015) *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, each discuss the silencing of Palestine’s history and existence. “Over recent years we have seen an increase in Zionist attempts to dismiss resistance in the Israeli Apartheid struggle, silencing the voices of Palestinians and disregarding legitimate grievances” (Motala, 2017) through dismissing and sometimes rejecting narratives, conflating fighting for rights with anti-Semitism, and disregarding fundamental human rights.

Patrick Williams (2016) points out the absence that Palestine constituted within postcolonial studies that exist even in the scholarly space where neutrality and equality should be present. Focusing on the ways in which Palestine was centrally important in the life and work of Said, who was central in the development of postcolonial studies, Williams asks how this happens. “To the extent that the situation in Palestine represents arguably the greatest ethical scandal of the last half century, then the near-total silence of postcolonial studies on the subject is indeed shameful” (p. 18).
2.9 Summary

This dissertation brought forth various aspects connected to identity from both Eastern and Western perspectives. The geopolitical context provides a wide understanding to the region’s political and historical streams, showing the dynamic changes that are critical to the region’s contemporary identity. The fluidity of identity was discussed in general terms, after which specific drivers of individual identity that correlate with the rest of this dissertation were described. Specifically, silencing and self-expression, artistic expression in the form of music, voice, conducting, and dance were briefly discussed. Some of these themes recur in the dissertation, as they are primary influencers of the stories and experiences described, bringing about additional literature that is woven into subsequent chapters, consistent with narrative methodology.
Chapter 3 Methodology and Design

Distance permitted me to observe myself, to observe the occupation, the landscape… It added a religion of beauty without obligations. The disappearance in distance is liberation. The less one know you, the more you know yourself… It’s also a matter of maturity… I learned forgiveness. Because in the end we are all exiles… the occupier and myself, both of us suffer from exile. He is an exile in me and I am the victim of his exile. All of us on this beautiful planet earth, we are all neighbors, we are all exiles, we are all waiting in the same human fate, and what unites us is the need to tell the story of this exile. (Darwish, quoted in Yeshurun, 2012, p. 49)

After taking a class in narrative research during my first year at the University of Toronto, I knew that story telling would play a major role in my thesis. Whether or not this stemmed from an innate feeling, a cultural environment, or simply a personality preference, it was a methodology that deeply resonated with me. It was also in that class I ventured into my first narrative, “When Silent Night was no Longer the Narrative,” the traumatic story which uprooted my family and I to Canada. I had just moved to Toronto and the painful memory of the incident was still at the forefront of my life. Every picture, conversation, breath, tear, anger, silence, noise, and even scent was relived as my fingers typed effortlessly, recounting the details of those two weeks. Just like a movie, the recollection of the events was vivid, clear, and emotionally raw, and the writing of it nudged the door of healing.

Up until that moment, I considered my life journey humble, fulfilling but also lived in silence. My narratives were compelling and involved music making, singing, and teaching. Whether it was for continuing studies, musical festivals, or other interactions, I lived in multiple spaces and different regions. I have seen how music has played a role in connecting people in remarkable ways but also have equally disconnected them (including myself). Because I am the thread that runs through this journey of multiple musical worlds, auto-ethnography deeply resonated as the most appropriate methodology for my research.
“Autoethnography feeds a hunger for details, meanings, and peace of mind” (Linn, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, p. 57). I was pulled towards it as if I had no choice in the matter. I no longer looked at it as a “research” methodology; I found a new way of being and a “way of life” (p. 58). I grew up in a vibrant, open minded, and dynamic home, under a governmental system that imposed much of what I learned, how I learned it, and how I could express it. For the first time in 42 years of abundant and rich experiences, I was able to share these stories. It felt like a load of stories had been kept hidden, and writing was my way of reflecting and releasing. It was also in the writing and researched that I witnessed “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Buchner, 2000, p.739). I remember once sitting in a class and realizing that my life had been abundantly full, with numerous vibrant experiences that I was eager to share. I felt a need to add to the knowledge in the class, knowing that my Jordanian Palestinian identity had a completely different perspective from that being discussed in class, but it was difficult to voice. Unfortunately, most of my experiences were lived in silence. The experiences were mine and rarely expressed, scarcely shared, and in the fear of sharing, my life was quiet, internally and passionately vigorous but never spoken. Writing was my voice. As I started to narrate, I did not know if I would remember it all, but I was now ready to share, and the act of writing my lived stories finally allowed me to open a small window, permitting my voice to sing towards the sky rather than behind closed doors. “Autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders” (Tierney, 1998, p.66).

Autoethnography provided an avenue worth investigating and exploring further. Since my move to Canada in 2013, I had the physical and emotional space to give me neutral access to two of the stories with clearer criticism, and more balanced, informed knowledge, simply because I could more easily see things from the outside. The methodology strongly resonated with me, and the writing of the stories gave me access to much knowledge that otherwise could not be expressed or shared objectively. “Writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry” (Richardson, 2000, p. 931). Writing three personal stories was also “therapeutic for [me] as I wrote to make sense of [myself] and [my] experiences” (Poulos, 2008, p. 360; see also Kiesinger, 2002). I was able to share my burdens, bring in other stories, question authority, look at the social context of the stories and more. In so doing, we seek to improve and better understand our relationships
(Adams, 2006; Wyatt, 2008), reduce prejudice (Ellis, 2002, 2009), encourage personal responsibility and agency (Pelias, 2000, 2007), raise consciousness, promote cultural change (Ellis, 2002; Goodall, 2006), and give people a voice that, before writing, they may not have felt they had (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002). The writing indeed gave me voice, and within the crux of my sawt (sound), my heart firmly stood.

Although my initial resonance stemmed from a personal need to hear my voice in the narratives, I have come to discover and believe that “there is much to be [learned] and gained from lived experiences (because) experiences continuously evolve” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). “The sharing of unique, subjective, and evocative stories of experience that contribute to our understanding of social world and allow us to reflect on what could be different because of what we have learned” (Wall, 2008, p. 3) and therefore can promote change. The narratives enabled me to tell my story as well as fostering some compelling emotional responses and, hope for understanding and schange for a better future.

Toyosaki and Conway (2015) argue that “doing” autoethnography helps autoethnographers come to know (epistemology), evaluate (axiology), become (ontology) and do (praxeology) our “selfhood in the world.”(p. 560) So by examining “the self” and how it responds to social injustice, autoethnography becomes praxis for social justice. I deeply resonated with these concepts of change and social justice. By writing my personal stories, I have built deeper knowledge— “knowing” based on my own outlook and perspectives. Continuously reflecting and thinking through the analysis of the stories, how I saw/chose to see myself, or letting go from a specific way of being, brought a new way of “becoming” within the stories. I think this is when I began to question how much control I had over the narratives and in “becoming,” I was bound to let go. The praxeology that Toyosaki and Conway (2015) talked about in my simple terms refers to the intentional growth one goes through during this process. In this growth, one’s “selfhood in the world” somehow becomes present and proactive in evoking change and understanding.

Autoethnography is “not about giving us answers, or creating generalizability, but should provoke us to pose ever more robust questions” (Barrett, 2009, p. 25). My hope is that my study will not only build an empathetic understanding but serve to question, transform, or confirm misconceptions and biases towards politics in the field of music education.
What I did not anticipate was the level of difficulty and challenge that would accompany the task of this methodology. My initial naïve thought was that writing would be easy, but the more I investigated the research, the more I realized that I was really delving into unknown territory. The forms of autoethnography differ in how much “emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher’s self and interaction with others, traditional analysis . . . as well as on power relationships... [Also] autoethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful” (Ellis & Buchner, 2010, p. 36). “There are also questions of reliability referring to the narrator’s credibility including validity” (Ellis, 2010, p.34). Autoethnography’s complex methodology, the struggle between portraying and interpreting the narratives, and controlling them through epistemic imperialism so that it looks “academic” was a difficult task.

As I explain my research methodology, I hope to touch on some of the strengths and the challenges. There were a number of factors that played a role in completing the thesis.

3.1 Limitations and criticisms of autoethnography

_The emergence of autoethnography and narratives of self . . . has not been trouble-free, and their status as proper research remains problematic_ (Sparkes, 2000, p. 22)

There are limitations and criticisms to this methodology of which I was aware, some of which may be incorporated in my writings:

1. “The feelings evoked in readers may be unpleasant since the connections readers make to narratives cannot be predicted.” (Bochner and Ellis, 1996)

2. Being self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective and individualized. (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999)

3. Autoethnography is therapeutic rather than analytic. (Atkinson, 1997)

4. Walford (2004) asserts that “the aim of research is surely to reduce the distortion as much as possible” (p. 411). Walford (2004) sees no value in this type of autoethnography; in his view, a social research report should aim to present organized, logical claims that are supported by empirical data.
The aim of autoethnography is to recreate the researcher's experience in a reflexive way, aiming to make a connection with the reader which can help him or her to think and reflect about his or her own experiences. It is perhaps the closeness of the author to the phenomenon under investigation that causes such criticism. If researchers are supposed to be as distant as possible from the research in order to present as objective a truth as possible, how can this be accomplished by autoethnography? As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state, however, “Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations” (p. 5). Thus, the richness of autoethnography is in those realities that emerge from the interaction between the self and one’s own experiences that reflect the cultural and social context in which those events took place. It is through this representation that understanding of a particular phenomenon is accomplished. Bochner and Ellis (1996) write, “If culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self?” (p. 24).

I understand these criticisms and limitations, and as I wrote they were present. My experiences were intense, and it was important that I continuously step back and evaluate, reflect, and come back to the writing. I also depended on memory accompanied by resonant moments, which is, understandably not the most trustworthy element, but again I would write, step back, and ask some people involved to validate the information presented. I also asked a variety of friends, colleagues, politicians, and musicians to read and provide honest feedback. I gratefully incorporated suggestions.

Still with all of this knowledge about autoethnography’s limitations and criticism, for me, autoethnography is a methodology that has proven to be powerful for unveiling emotions, developing depth in the knowledge of learning, reflecting, and adjusting, in the construction and reconstruction of identity, and a definite praxis for social justice in music education research.

3.2 Walking in the unknown

What is powerful about autoethnography is that it is unplanned; it is a continuous process of discovery and knowledge—similar to how life works. We design a plan according to how we want our lives to move, but then every day a new strand of our knowledge is built, and our plan
shifts, transforms, and moves in a completely different direction, and changes. I believe the key to walking in the unknown is listening. It is in the listening that we become more articulate, empathetic, and compassionate. Gemma Fiumara (1990) calls it “‘listening silences’: silences in which we hear others and the world around us rather than waiting for our next opportunity to assert ourselves” (p. 97). I would add that it is not only in the silent listening of the world around us that we hear the world, but in the silent listening of ourselves, we can write from a place of honesty (even if it is coated by fear). We become more sensitive, empathetic, and caring human beings. This is where the strength and heart of this methodology lies. The journey of self-discovery in narrative research is like no other.

The process required objectivity and full honesty with oneself—a task at which I was good behind closed doors. Because of my silent nature, there was no need to share and explain. All was kept within, but when the opportunity arose, and I wanted to share, I had many moments of hesitation, pondering over what to include or not include. Was it necessary? Did I really want to be seen in this light? Did I just want the stories to show my best side? Being publicly vulnerable was scary, and my cultural fear of being judged or looked at differently was present.

3.3 Data collection

After writing “When Silent Night was No Longer the Narrative” during my first year in Narrative class 2014, the thesis took two years to complete. “When Silent Night” and “Winning Gold” were written from memory. I started by writing what I remembered and then filled the gaps during my frequent visits to Amman. For “Winning Gold,” I remembered feelings and specific, defined events, but in order to put it all together, I had conversations with choir members. I asked them what they recalled, what was memorable, powerful, or meaningless—basically anything that might jog a memory. I also referred to the program notes, the Choir Games’ website, and Sochi’s theater history.

“When Silent Night” was a bit trickier. In Amman, I had to be cautious when talking about the story openly. I only talked to my brother, my husband, and my dad, as they were the closest to the story. I asked them what they thought happened and why. I wanted to make sure that what I
recalled rang true to others, and it was not coated falsely because of my deep love and connection to my father.

After I finished the first draft, I shared it with my dad and made sure he was comfortable with all the details. The story not only shed light on how his daughter felt but brought understanding to how his whole family and friends dealt with this difficult situation. For ethical purposes, pseudonyms were used for all names, and we made some alternative word choices related to the government in order to protect him and me.

“Reclaiming Silence,” on the other hand, was the only story that I wrote as it occurred. The news of the piece being censored happened amidst my writing, and upon the request of my advisor, I added the story to the thesis because of its importance to the research and to Canada in particular. The story developed while I was writing. In trying to give meaning to my fluctuating emotions, I wrote in my journal daily. I used many of my journal phrases in the narrative to bring forth a newer dimension for the analysis. I also had many conversations related to the politics in Canada. I wanted to understand how something like this could occur in a “pluralistic” land. For the protection of the choir and the director, pseudonyms were also used for all the characters described in the story.

3.4 Language, translations, emotions and more

Writing the thesis unveiled different forms of translation, both literal and non-literal. While I studied in universities that stemmed from the West, I struggled at times to write in an academic mindset. This could be a lack of practice, but I also felt a cultural translation barrier. I could not explain it all the time, but how I saw things and how I struggled to find the correct way to be understood was not always straightforward. As I read a paper shared by an emotional Palestinian, I found a few things that resonated. She said,

The academy oppresses with prisons made of words that real people do not use but that as scholars, we adopt, mimic, and master in our scramble to academic legitimacy. We learn a new language, a new posture of correctness: Canadian-vegan sensibilities, the words safe space. I write this auto-ethnographic paper knowing that the academy will not like it. It will not be considered a serious work
because it does not perform in the likeness of academic holiness and will not merit any letter of the English alphabet. Because A does not mean Anti-colonial. B is not Blackness. C is not about Colonization. I write from a place of resistance. Being Palestinian is not a “safe space.” It is not straightforward. It is messy. It is problematic. (Annab, personal communication, Feb. 2019)

As a Palestinian, this brought light to an expectation that I felt was required and into which I struggled to fit all the time. I, too, struggled in the writing as a Palestinian and an Arab. I had to go back and forth to the readings in order to find the balance and fit in. Several times in the rereading of the writings, I realized that I was not able to deliver the meaning that was in my mind. It was not comprehensible. I had to ask often for editing and language support from a friend who understood what I wanted to say when I could not always frame it in the “academic” way.

Sometimes, what I thought and what I wrote were not aligned. This stemmed from my thinking in Arabic, not only linguistically but also as a way of being. While writing, I noticed that I initially thought in my cultural mindset, but when I re-read it with my academic “Western” glasses, there were discrepancies, or it would be misunderstood, and I rewrote it in a different manner to make it more academic. Sometimes my “on the spot translation” was construed as throwing blame, being judgmental or even angry (specifically in my dad’s story). Finding the right wording was not always easy, and I had to continuously write, rewrite, and sometimes leave it for a while, and then read it over and over again until it rang true to what I wanted to say. I needed a lot of help, and I had some amazing support throughout the writing process.

The Arabic language is an enormously rich language. There are 28 letters in the Arabic alphabet. Each letter can be pronounced 13 different ways. For example, the letter d in Arabic looks like this: (د). By adding articulations, the pronunciation changes. It is important to add that these are not considered vowels but short sounds: دَ = da َد = du َد = di َد = don َد = dan َد = den َد = d َد = donn َد = denn َد = da-a َد = dan-nan َد = du-u َد = di-i. With that in mind, the alphabet provides 364 possibilities, giving the language a huge dimension of expression and states of being. The Arabic language is also an emotional one. Words have roots, and roots have several meanings (Sayed, 2015). Although I am confident in my Arabic language, I still felt a need to reach out to
classical Arabic writers who could bring light to meanings and connections of words. Sometimes the connections were not to language, but to history, spirituality, and more. I mostly used the Arabic Ma’ani dictionary, which gave me the word, its root, and the several meanings it carried. Even though the dictionary was a reliable source, I was constantly in need of confirmation and further investigation. I called some friends who were translators and asked their opinions. The translations were not always clear.

3.4.1 Tanneh u Rānneh in resonance

In thinking about resonance and how it was at the forefront of one of the stories, I looked at how the word was translated in Arabic. After a post on Facebook asking friends to provide a translation for the word resonance, I came across an interesting dialogue between several people who gave suggestions. I was not only looking for meanings but subtleties and other connections. Two words were prominent: ṭaneen and rāneen, after which a friend mentioned the phrase, ṭanneh u rānneh, which is often used to describe mostly noisy sounds and events such as weddings or celebrations. I grew up hearing and knowing the term ṭanneh u rānneh but never thought about its specific meaning. In the Ma’ani (dictionary), I came across an interesting finding related to this phrase. ṭaneen means resonance related to loud noise and rāneen means resonance in sadness. In “Winning Gold,” climactic moments such as the Byzantine cantor reaching the climactic phrase and hanging loudly over the choir, was ṭaneen. Yet rāneen was found in the empathetic resonances where silence, pianissimos, and also composition lay. This brought a new insight to the research which I would not have gained otherwise, and I believe this understanding strengthened the work.

3.4.2 Sawt, Hawiyeh in voice, identity and more . . .

Further into my research, I connected with a linguistic scholar living in Jordan who was able to send me writings regarding words such as sawt (Sound) and hāwiye (identity). In his paper, he shared a physiological guide of how the word was pronounced—its constrictors and its flow.

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11 Reliable Arabic dictionary found in the Levant. https://almaany-com-arabic-dictionary-ios.soft112.com/
Then, with the addition of one physiological element, he described the several meanings the word could take, and how sometimes it takes a meaning of its own. Though I did not research the laws of linguistics, I was continuously surprised by how one simple small articulation changed a meaning completely. After delving into the actual pronunciation of the word, my friend often found resources of its historical (etymology) root. I learned more about the emotional connections through words. I was fascinated by the spiritual connection of ʂawt (sound), the relationship between love and hāwiye (identity), the link between ʂumoud (resistance) to God, the male gender connection to weaponry, location, and maal (mode), and the foreignness of modes such as A'jam.

All the digging, conversation, thoughts, and ideas about language brought me closer to my language, and I became much more curious about how the Arabic language played a role in the movement of identity, sounds, and the writing of the stories. I also believe this added a new dimension to the “western” research.

3.5 Internal dialogue and controlling the narrative

There were many polarities occurring in the internal dialogue in my writing—a continuous struggle between the I and we, the past and the present, control and letting go. As I wrote, I frequently stopped and asked many questions; why should these stories be told? Should I share this? What shall I remove, or keep? At other times, I asked myself if I was being fully honest or if my fear was kicking in. I worried about my ego getting in the way of my objectivity, and although I tried to keep myself in check, I am sure things may have seeped through. Then came the question of “when do I stop?” When was it enough, and when was it time to move to something else?

This was particularly evident in “Reclaiming Silence.” I found myself frequently stuck and not sure how to end because as I wrote, I realized the story was not finished. It was only once I knew that the piece was being re-programmed in the concert that I felt a form of closure.

Although I narrated stories that revealed my identity, my sounding, my environment, my people, my countries, and all of it as one thing, I worried about the danger of creating a single story. Adichie (2009) explains that in creating a single story, we show people as one thing (me) over
and over again, and that is what they become. Have I contributed to the single story? Would the reader see my culture and the politics as one thing and the only thing? Needless to say, the continuous questioning, analyzing, and reflecting occupied my mind and played a major role in the “how” of writing.

The other issue that appeared frequently in the stories was that the stories brought more stories. In the discussion and analysis section of the stories, I found myself organically moving to other stories. I was pulled to share more, talk more, narrate more, and I felt excited by the new stories that were emerging from the analysis. I felt that the incidents would shed even more light on the narratives and bring closer understanding to the socio-political contexts of the narratives.

3.6 The only constant is change

The truth of autoethnographies can never be a stable truth because memory is active, dynamic, and ever changing. As we grow older and/or change our perspective, our relationship to the events and people of the past changes, too. The past is always open to revision and so, too, are our stories of the past and what they mean now. (Ellis, 2009, p. 54)

The writing of the thesis took a few years. What I felt at the time of initial writing had changed and shifted by the time I completed it. The idea that words are typed and engraved in a document scared me. I was shifting all the time, and that meant the document shifted as well. It had to be seen as a continuously evolving, dynamic, and alive document. But is it? I struggled with understanding how this document will represent me “forever”; but just like many stories written, my hope is that this document will act as a small seed that will need to be planted, watered, and nurtured by many in order to take shape and bring understanding to the political context that is evident in music education—just like my historical Palestinian olive trees, grounded, rooted and implanted deep within the knowledge of understanding, bearing its nutrient olives to all.
Chapter 4 When Silent Night was No Longer the Narrative

The knower of the mystery of sound knows the mystery of the whole universe. Hazrat Inayat Khan (1996)

4.1 Amman, Jordan. Concert . . . sometime in 2007

I turned towards the audience for my last bow. The church was dark, but I recall sensing a warm feeling being emitted from our audience that evening. Beyond the people in the first few pews, I could not see anyone, but I could sense a successful performance from the heartfelt weight of the sound and echo of the claps accompanied by random Bravos heard over the applause. As I prepared to walk away, following the musicians, a beautiful but frail old lady approached me. She had a twinkle in her eye and a smile that reminded me of my grandmother’s. “Shireen, Congratulations!” she said. “I just wanted to tell you that I enjoyed the performance, but I do wish I was deaf!” She said. Her statement confused me. I had noticed her during the concert; she sat in the first row and had a smile every time I faced the audience. “Why would you wish that? I thought you enjoyed the concert,” I asked. “I loved it,” she said, “but I still wish I was deaf, because when I look at you move your arms [conduct], I can hear the music.” I was taken aback by her words and had no idea how respond to her striking comment. Immensely touched, I hugged her tightly and, in my silence, my tears thanked her.

I recall resonating with the idea of movement to music during my first “Introduction to Conducting” class in college, a mandatory class for all music education students. In a large and filled classroom, my tall music teacher, Dr. Henry, stood in front and demonstrated the ictus. 12 He modeled by bouncing his arm up and down with a smile, explaining what a beat looked like as he asked us to imitate. I was intrigued and surprised by how bouncing playfully was at the heart of conducting. I felt like a child who had discovered a new, exciting toy that gave her

12 In conducting, the instant when a beat occurs is referred to as Ictus
permission to play, bounce, and be joyful! I was ecstatic and wanted to move all the time. Moving my arms in specific patterns gave me a sensation of bliss—a connection to something higher than myself—unexplained, but deep and beautiful. I practiced everywhere and anywhere: walking around campus singing, reading and involuntary moving my arms, phrasing melodic lines in my apartment as I played my favorite romantic melodies of Verdi, Shubert, Brahms and more—breathing gestures in bed as I hummed my beloved Arabic tunes and many more. The consciousness of moving my arms opened a whole new part of my heart of which I was previously unaware. For the first time ever, I came to understand that I could freely express musical emotion through my body movement. I did not have to speak. I could just play! Be it anger, gracefulness, humor, sadness, or stillness, the music in my gesture gave me permission to express freely. Growing up in Jordan—and I believe because of cultural and environmental reasons—I had not been aware of my body’s capabilities and not courageous enough to venture into the knowledge. This new realization felt liberating.

While I was imitating Dr. Henry in one of my conducting classes, he asked me to come up in front of the class and demonstrate my movement. He told the class that my gesture was exactly what he was looking for. Now I was not only permitted to move expressively, but I was doing it well enough to lead and share it with others. Since that discovery, confidence in exploring my body’s conducting abilities, expressing lines through gesture and without verbal explanation, was something I longed for. I could now sing in my gesture, and in my silent movement, be heard.

Living in a culture that nurtured adjectives such as fear and shame, I believe this moment of demonstrating my gesture in class instantly erased any negative judgment that I had perceived about myself. Since then, conducting has given me confidence to explore my body’s capabilities, expressing lines of music without having to verbally explain them, and to lead choirs comfortably. Conviction in my “singing gesture” has played a major role in my conducting career. For Dozan wa Awtar Singers, I believe it has opened the door for them, too, to voice themselves freely. Many have expressed connection to my gestures and over time, I believe helped build a relationship of trust between the choir and their conductor.

It was not always easy to be or feel free outside the rehearsal or performance space. Living in Jordan was difficult for the artist in me. Jordan has many beautiful aspects: the unbeatable weather, the depth of its language, the picturesque landscape, and—most important of all—the
emotional connection to my family and friends. But it is also a difficult place, as the culture fostered adjectives such as khof, ‘eib and haram (fear, shame, and forbidden).¹³ Fear, shame, and forbidden to speak up freely, express oneself, or voice opinion that may go against the norm of the government or society. As a woman, I “understood” what my role would or should be. Getting married at 31 or having a job that required evening hours working amongst men, was received with criticism and judgment. So, beyond the act of music making in the rehearsal space and the security of my family, I found it extremely hard to navigate my identity and simply be myself.

Throughout my conducting career (choral and orchestral), and later composing and producing several musical projects in Jordan, music making allowed me to experience new forms of self-honesty and expression. It gave me (and I believe Dozan wa Awtar Singers) space and time to explore and to reflect on several aspects of our day-to-day lives. It was evident to me that our music making community had a positive affect on all of us, and through several conversations, I knew it empowered us (Judd & Pooley 2014). Through my gestures, I could express every musical texts, phrases, and even music’s silences. And in that movement, I have felt truths and experienced divinity; the choir could not take me seriously once when I shared the story of connecting with the universe [God] as I conducted the cello’s entrance in Faure’s “Cantique de Jean Racine.” I told them that in that melody, I experienced spiritual elevation, and the meaning of life was clear.

I never questioned or doubted music’s role in allowing dialogue and expression for peace, unity, freedom, and most importantly, a connection to something higher than oneself. But during the Christmas of 2012, I was faced with a shattering reality, one that pushed me to disown my musical belief system. Because of it, I chose to leave, uproot my family, and build a new home in Canada.

¹³ It is known that these adjectives are fostered in the Levant region. Muna Mustafa, a Jordanian lawyer, says, “The culture of fear and shame controls our society” (Abu-Farhan, 2015, my translation).

Dim red lights calmly surrounded the church, and thirteen Christmas trees were lit softly behind the choir as they eagerly stood with their eyes on me, waiting for their starting breath. Before preparing my first ictus of the night, I glanced over at our audience. I always feel a need to embrace the space, feel its energy, and connect briefly with the audience. That night, our audience emitted warmth and an eagerness for the beginning of the season. Our concerts, to many within our Christian community, were the start of the Christmas celebration in Jordan. There were my parents, as usual, sitting in the first row, but in their eyes tonight, there was no warmth. Looking at them, I felt an unfamiliar sensation. They seemed worried, but I dismissed it as I turned back to face the choir. I looked at them, smiled, lifted my arm gently and simultaneously breathed, and the choir ever so quietly sang, “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin, mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace . . . “

We had sung this carol numerous times with visuals that did this, that, or the other. This time, however, all visuals had disappeared. The beauty of this song itself echoed through the church, as if it were the first time I had heard it. Familiar to many, for me the melody captures the beginning of what Christians define as new birth and love. It’s an incredible time of the year when we are reminded of all that is good and possible in humanity. The choir sang “Silent Night” so beautifully that night, as if the spark of possibility in humanity and hope had infused our hearts. This was one of my favorite arrangements for “Silent Night.” It started with the full choir in hymn-like verse, homophonic with expected simple harmonies, followed by a canonic second verse between the alto and tenor while the sopranos floated elegantly on top, echoing some motifs of the known melody supported by the basses, and ending with a chorale-like final verse. Each verse got softer and softer until the final chord. The candles gently glimmered on the faces of the choir as they whispered their final pianissimo “Peace!”
4.3 December 16. Friday: 2nd concert night

Our new composition for the season, *A Christmas Prayer* was a success! It was a collaborative composition between the *oud*\(^{14}\) player (instrumentation) and me (vocals). This was a unique piece, encompassing melodies and rhythms from several Christian denominations from the region—Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. Throughout the conversations with the *oud* player regarding this composition, we both agreed that although there were many schools of prayers within the Christian denominations, the ultimate goal for us was a united faith. Although we sing different melodies, and religious schools differ in their teachings, we are all connected under one God, and it was in this spirit that the composition took place. I remember being particularly moved by my school’s traditional Greek Orthodox chant, *irḥamni ya allah* (Lord, have mercy), alongside the same Greek Orthodox text of *Kyrie Eleison*, a new theme which I composed.

I was brought up in the Greek Orthodox church, steeped in rituals and doctrine. My father would have had it no other way. He was a deeply spiritual man who had contemplated being a priest at one point in his life. Religion and spiritual inspiration was integral to his life, and he wanted the same for us. My father told me once that his perceived success in parenting was determined by his children’s spirituality. I am grateful for my spiritual formation as a result. Though I am strongly connected to this spirituality through the church’s chants, incense, elaborate altars, and icons, I sometimes question the church’s doctrines.

4.4 December 17th. Saturday: 3rd and last concert night

Prior to the concert, my brother called me, “Hi *habibti* (my dear), for the next few days, our parents are not staying at home; they will be with friends. If anyone asks, do not share this information. I will explain later.”

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\(^{14}\) Similar to the lute, meaning “the wood.” The *oud* has 11 strings and is considered one of the oldest instruments.
4.4.1 Silent night, holy night…

I do not remember anything about the concert that night. It flew by very quickly and I was unusually quiet, my thoughts swirling with a sense of urgency and eagerness to learn what was going on. As soon as I took my last bow, the space transformed into a slow silent movie: audience members approached to congratulate me, mouths moving and smiling; choir members laughed, hugged, talked and cried; the janitor began to clean up, and workers came in to pack and collect the Christmas trees placed behind the choristers—but amidst all the noise, I heard nothing. It was slow. It was silent. I just wanted to see my parents, so I rushed off quickly. As I entered *ammo*\(^{15}\) Faris’s house, I found my dad, mom, brother, Faris, and a man I did not recognize. I soon learned that he was the lawyer who had been entrusted to solve a disturbing but baseless case against my father.

4.4.2 All is calm?

Facts regarding my father’s case were vague, but what I understood was that my father had been accused of “The Common Right Case.” I did not know what this meant exactly, but I understood that in my dad’s case, the people of Amman were revolting against corruption, and the government had to find someone to “bring to justice” or to blame. My father was the target. Under Jordanian law, one is presumed innocent until proven guilty, and although there was no actual case or documentation to prove his case, my dad was accused. I could not understand why there was even a case in the first place.

With the falling of Egypt, Libya, and war in Syria in what was called the Arab Spring, Jordan’s government faced serious pressures for reform. The economy was deteriorating, and prices were rising. The class gap was growing, corruption was increasing, and many sensed anger and overall frustration amongst the people of Amman.

The lawyer explained that what was happening to my father was designed to divert attention away from the pressures the country faced; my father’s case was created as a distraction. The government had nothing concrete to convict my dad, and the lawyer reassured us several times that this was not a serious matter. I naïvely believed him. After all, the lawyer continued to

\(^{15}\) *ammo* is a common title one would use for an elderly man.
explain that my father was a good and trustworthy man with a solid reputation. Nothing could happen.

My attachment to my father is deep. My 74-year-old dad was considered one of the most successful Christian Palestinian businessmen in Jordan. Our family’s automotive business started with his father in Jaffa, Palestine, in the 1930s but moved to Jordan after the 1948 Nakba.¹⁶ It was through my dad’s ambition and vision that the business grew to be one of the pioneering companies in Jordan. But to me, my dad was the person whose intelligence I came to learn through endless sittings trying to teach me math, and his strength and strategy throughout our numerous tennis games. His accessibility to all peoples illuminated his humble, simple, and down to earth attitude and vision of life. Above all, his strong spirituality carried him through many dire circumstances throughout his life. He continuously saw the good and the positive in all humanity, and now, in this situation, I was sure his spirituality would surface.

4.5 December 18th, Sunday

I went to see my parents again. The lawyer was present, but this time I had an uncomfortable feeling about him. I leaned towards my brother whispering, “Something is not sitting right with this man. I don’t like him.” “Don’t worry, ḥabibtī,” he smiled, holding my hand. “This lawyer knows the ins and outs of such messed up situations. I know from working with my dad, that this type of corruption needs this type of man.” I have always loved and trusted my brother blindly. He and I were called twins when we were young. We inherited our similar dark skin, bushy eyebrows, and short hair from my father’s side. Many people mistook us for twins because we looked alike, and we were only 19 months apart in age. He, too, adored my father blindly, and I knew he had his best interest at heart. With all of this trust, I believed him.

Lawyer (to my dad): “So, according to what we have discussed, tomorrow we will go to the court and sort things out.”

¹⁶ Nakbā means catastrophe and refers to the violence leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, which saw the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages.
My father (in a worried tone): “You have recommended that I lay low for now, you have asked me to stay with my friend while you sort this out and not share my whereabouts. Why do you think it will be different tomorrow?”

Lawyer: “Trust me, Mr. George. I know what I am doing,” he confidently said.

My father hesitantly agreed.

4.6 December 19th, Monday

It must have been around 10:15 a.m. when my aunt, (my father’s sister) called me. “Is it true? Your dad is in prison?” she asked. “Of course not!” I said as I began to panic “He’s at the lawyers. Let me call him and get back to you.” I sat down and took a breath. I was hoping this was not true. I called Eyyad, one of dad’s most trusted and loyal employees. I knew he was with him. I asked him if it was true. “No.” he answered. “We are still waiting to enter the district attorney’s office.” I was relieved and for comfort, I called my aunt. I explained what Eyyad had said, but she was really confused. It was all over social media, she explained. My father had been arrested. This cannot be, I thought, as Eyyad would not lie unless he, too, was in shock, or social media knew before it happened. I called Eyyad and asked again. He was quiet and, chokingly, said, “yes.”

4.6.1 All is bright?

I was in shock! Silent! Numb! My father, a 74-year-old man whose business had served Jordan’s economy for the last 60 years, a man of God, an honest man, loved and respected by so many, was arrested with no real case, with no evidence, with nothing. Nothing!

My first disturbing image was whether or not he was handcuffed and/or transported in those criminal vans that had caged windows and wooden benches. Eyyad said, no, he was not cuffed but yes, he was transported. My heart sank. I couldn’t breathe. How was he feeling? Was he in a state of denial? I had hoped the latter. He was taken to Jweidah prison. I had heard stories about this prison. Most of them were disturbing. Did he have to take off his clothes and put on one of those blue jumpsuits? Eyyad said yes. My body started to tear up inside. He is such a gentle softhearted soul. I was breaking.
4.6.2 Round yon’ virgin, mother and child . . .

I left my 3-month-old baby girl at home with our caretaker and went to my parent’s house. My mother was in an unfamiliar state of anger: loud, vocal, and hysterical. We were all in disbelief. My older sister, a believer who spent most of her days in the church, held the rosary and quietly prayed.

I cannot remember much after that, but the house became like a busy market of people rushing in to support, to listen, to gossip, and just to get the news. My parent’s house became the popular household for the latest news in Amman. George was the subject to be talked about and discussed. Their distraction plan (as the lawyer had mentioned) was working! I did not know who to believe, what to do, or how to help. But the underlying truth was that I missed my dad and feared for his well-being. I could not stop my tears. I was in such unexplainable pain and like a brick home, I was breaking one brick at a time. It was physically difficult to calm myself down. My fear for the unknowns about his arrest and case was building.

Amongst the people present at our house was my mother’s aunt, who approached me and gently whispered in my ear, “Are you still breast feeding?” What weird timing for such a question, I thought. “Yes, of course.” I said. “With these tears, habibti, I fear your milk flow will stop. Please don’t cry.” She continued. What does my milk have to do with my tears, I thought? My tears were uncontrollable. But there was also a form of unexplainable physical pain that I discovered. I was breaking.

As the night became darker and the desert’s cold winter wind approached, I asked myself, “Did my father eat? Did he sleep? Was he cold? Does he have a blanket? What is he feeling? What is he thinking?” I was so worried about him. From that moment onwards, his calm face was etched in my mind and could not be erased or removed.

I went to see my daughter that evening. My baby was eagerly waiting for her mother and I for her. I missed her. With all the emotions that were running, I thought spending quiet time with my gentle tiny daughter would feed my spirit and calm my soul. I held her tightly towards my breast to feed her, but nothing came out. I changed my position several times and tried over and over again, but not a single drop came out. My milk flow had stopped and from that moment, I could not breast feed her again. I was heartbroken.
4.7 Holy infant so tender and mild... December 20th, Tuesday

I went to see my mother the next day before the “market” officially opened. My mother was in the garden. She loved her small but charming garden. In summer, flowers of all colors and types surrounded it, specifically pink and purple petunias, Azaleas and geraniums; but now in winter, there were no flowers, just large pine trees surrounding the pool and one huge fur tree in the corner, one which my brother had planted when he was a baby. We had built so many memories in this garden. One of my fondest recollections was the obstacle course that my dad created for us. Using household materials, and garden toys, he dared us to jump, play dress up, crawl, run (backwards, sideways, etc.) and just play while he watched us giggling, and sometimes he timed us. We would do it several times to see if we could beat our own time. It was one of the many ways in which he taught us to strive to be the best we could be—that nothing was impossible, and imagination was an important part of our growth.

As I watched her through the glass doors, I could see my brother walking towards her with a look that had aged him ten years and, just like a child, my 40-year-old brother dropped to his knees and asked her for forgiveness as he cried. My mom just held him tightly calming him down, with a silent strength that showed in her eyes. For in that moment, our beautiful garden disappeared, and all I could see was the cold of the winter and the gloomy, gray, cloudy sky.

In the following days, I learned that my dad had been transferred to a “better” prison. I learned that his upgraded prison status meant that he was actually staying within the prison premises, but in different quarters. This meant he was not sharing a cell with anyone. He had his own room with a bathroom.

My husband, my brother, my mother, and I went with Eyyad to visit my father early one morning. We had not seen him since the arrest, and we were all eager to be with him, even if it was only for a short visit. We drove an hour and a half south of Amman, towards the prison. The desert highway was barren, with very few trees along the way. My heart pounded, and my lips were dry like the desert seen from the window. We did not talk during the drive. I think many of us in the car, like me, were anxious. We had no idea how my father would be or how he felt. We finally reached the prison. The prison had a huge wall surrounding the land and had a gate and main door for people to enter. We parked outside the prison along with what must have been another 20 or so cars. I do not remember what the prison looked like, as my mind was not
focused on anything but seeing my dad. My mom and I were guided to a waiting area. It was an empty room with a long table in the middle. My mother and I were asked to sit at the inside end of the table, facing the door. In the meantime, my husband, brother, and Eyyad used their *wastah*\(^\text{17}\) skills, as they carried gifts to give to the director of the prison. This was their way of securing more visits and other possible requests we might have in the future. After a while, my brother came to join us on the table. My husband and Eyyad wanted to give us some family time, so they stayed out of the room. All three of us sat anxiously waiting for my father. A few minutes later, my dad walked in and sat on the opposite side of the table. He had cut himself shaving, his hair was long, and he, too, looked nervous. He was wearing a rugged training suit, and when mom asked him where he got it, he said that his old cellmate from the *Jwaideh* prison gave it to him. We all started to laugh. In my heart, I knew this was my father’s way of reassuring us that he was fine, but I knew better, as we all did; he had been altered by this experience.

### 4.7.1 Sleep in heavenly peace?

My brother was in meetings 24/7, trying to find ways to get my father released. We had no idea how long he would be held. I could not understand how everything could become so distorted. The case was not legal, and we had all the papers to prove it. As I had presumed, a lawyer friend confirmed that Jordan needed a distraction. My dad was the perfect candidate—a Christian and a Palestinian (which meant he was a minority and did not have the protection of a Jordanian tribe). He was also a quiet man who would not create havoc under such circumstances. The term *scapegoat* was used several times.

I lost faith in the system.

When I asked if there was anything I could do, a friend advised that a signed letter from the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem would serve well. It would state that my father was a faithful, strong supporter and community member of the church. It would help. As ridiculous as this case was, I ventured into the task of getting a paper from the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Again, naively, I thought that this would be an easy task. After all, my father has

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\(^\text{17}\) *Wastah* refers to a person’s network of connections and serves as the primary guideline for professional and social maneuvers in many Middle Eastern communities.
served the church in countless ways. They would not hesitate to help. I called our priest and requested that they acquire the document from the Patriarch in Jerusalem. He apologized for what had happened to my father. He told me that the church in Amman was not on good terms with the Patriarch in Jerusalem, to which I replied, “This is really not about you or your relationship with him. It is about standing up for your community and especially someone like my father who has given the church more than he has given to his own family. You and the church need to step up and help.” After conversing back and forth, I realized that my anger was not helpful, and his cowardly attitude was not about to budge. I asked him to give me the personal number of the Patriarch. I called his office, and someone answered the phone. I explained the situation, of which they were fully aware, and asked if the Patriarch could help. He asked me to hold on the line and in the background, I heard the Patriarch say that he would not bother with such a case. I hung up immediately. “This was not a man of God,” I thought.

I lost faith in the church.

One afternoon, I received a phone call from my husband. He told me that his friend, Fouad, knew someone who could help. He also warned me that if I chose to meet this person (who called himself Abdullah), Fouad would deny being the one who introduced us. In desperation, I agreed. I learned that Abdullah worked in the “secret service” of the American Embassy. I wondered why he would want to help. What would he gain? But again, the pain of this injustice was too overwhelming, and I was desperate. Abdullah came to our home that evening. He was a tall, dark man with short hair and glasses that sat comfortably over his slightly large, crooked nose. He said that he came from Irbid (the main city that lies north of Jordan). Although he looked like an Arab, he spoke with a broken accent, one that seemed diluted between English, Hebrew, and Arabic. As he talked, I had the impression that this person was detached from emotion. There was no arch in his monotonic voice, no facial expression, and no feature that revealed what he was feeling or thinking. It was as if he had lived in many places under different faces/characters. I was not sure if he knew which character he was in my home. He scared me. I do not remember the last time I felt so uncomfortable around such a presence. He scared me. I do not remember the last time I felt so uncomfortable around such a presence. He scared me. He said that he had important information. I was not sure what to think or feel, but I listened.

He told me that he worked at the American Embassy. He said that he had information and documents that could prove my father’s innocence. The document stated that there was a
conspiracy against my father, that my father was being used as a scapegoat to divert attention from the real issues and pressures that Jordan faced. He told me that he would share this document with me eventually; first, however, he would go to the judge who convicted my father and show him this document. I did not know what to think and what to believe. Did he want to threaten him? Did he have an ulterior motive? Who was this person? Why was he helping me? The story seemed a bit farfetched and a bit like a movie but again, I was desperate and willing to try anything.

Seconds after Abdullah left my home, I headed towards the mobile phone to call my brother (I felt a need to discuss this with him) when my home phone rang. It was my brother. He never called me at home. I was confused. “Shireen,” he asked, “Who is Abdullah?” Perplexed, shocked, shaken, and baffled . . . just a few words that came to my mind! “What?” Abdullah just left. How did my brother know? My brother informed me that some government officials just contacted him. They told him to tell me not to have any contact with Abdullah. How did they know? “Turn off your cellphone and put it in your bedroom, close the door, and call me back from your home phone. All our phones are tapped.”

I did as he said and went on to explain what happened earlier with Abdullah. I was nervous, frightened, and unclear about what to do next; however, my motivation was my sweet dad. I was still in disbelief. I thought this would surely make an incredible script for a movie one day. My brother asked to meet Abdullah. He, too, was desperate and looking for answers and ways to get my dad released. Honestly, I think both of us just wanted someone to give us hope. I called Abdullah and arranged to meet. This time, he requested a public venue, a busy café, so we agreed to meet.

4.7.2 Sleeping? Heavenly peace?

My sister dedicated a morning service to our father and asked us to invite as many as we could to pray for his release. She believed in the power of prayer. I did not, but again anxious, scared, and willing to try anything, I invited as many as I could. My feelings were a mixture of painful physical aches, desperation, sobs of disbelief, but mostly anger. The reality of what was happening was excruciatingly painful. I remember a recurring thought, “Death is easier than injustice.” There is always a sense of acceptance in death, but not in injustice. I was breaking.
Although our concerts were over, most of the choir members were aware of our situation. Supporting me, as their conductor, many joined the service that morning. Very few asked questions. Emma, an American older member of the choir, approached me after the service and suggested that the choir go to the prison doors with candles and sing “Silent Night” on Christmas Eve. “Maybe if we can draw enough media attention, there will be pressure to resolve this,” she added.

I did not know what to think. My mind was full of resentment, anger, and disgust! I did not know how to respond to Emma. I knew her intentions were pure, but I knew this was not a “Christmas Truce.” My anger could not be explained. I felt that I was living in a dysfunctional and ignorant environment, full of greed and personal agendas. I could not stand it anymore. My tears and emotions just became overbearing. Diplomatically and politely I told Emma that although this was a good idea, I did not think it would work. Internally, I believe that was the exact moment when my whole philosophy of music came crashing down as I thought, “Music? Who are we kidding? If I ever thought music could help, then I must be the most foolish person on the face of this earth. Music meant nothing! It had no value or importance. All this talk about ‘bringing people together, building tolerance, and creating understanding’ was ridiculous!”

I lost faith in music.

I didn’t need sympathy or empathy. I needed action. But nothing was happening! Nothing! People were full of words. Words meant nothing. Songs meant nothing. Music had no impact; it was purposeless. My anger was beyond explanation. I was mad. I was scared. I did not know how long my father would remain. Whoever did this cruel, unjust, inhumane, illegal and humiliating act, intentionally chose it during Christmas. I could not bear it.

I lost faith in Jordan.

Growing up, I learned about my father’s generous humble acts from random people. Strangers would walk up and say to me things like, “Did you know your father saved my life?” or “If it wasn’t for your dad, I would not be where I am.” I found out much later in life that many

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18 During World War I, around Christmas Day 1914, Pope Benedict XV suggested a temporary hiatus of the war for the celebration of Christmas. Many German and British troops sang Christmas carols to each other across the lines.
families had been supported by his generosity. He was responsible for educating many students. When asked to donate 1000 JDs.\textsuperscript{19} to a charity and thereby earn a plaque with his name engraved on it, he wrote a cheque for 999 JDs. He is a unique soul, and to watch him shaken like this was heartbreaking. I was breaking with his pain. I loved him, and I missed him. I know he missed us, too.

Dad seemed in a better state when we visited him the second time. We brought with us a cooked dish and a new training suit. With the Bible in his hand, it appeared that he was managing. After all, he was our family’s rock. He was also mine.

4.7.3 Silent night, holy night?

I had spent every Christmas with my family since I was born. This Christmas was different; he was not with us and I just wanted everything to pass quickly. It was painful. All I could think of was my father. What was he doing? How was he spending his time? Was he celebrating Christmas? This was not right. Jordan had failed him and our family.

After my brother and I met Abdullah and he explained the situation, my brother told me that he did not feel comfortable and asked that we not communicate with him again. He told me that some government officials would help and that we should trust them. But they were tapping our phones, I thought. This was confusing.

Though I trusted my brother, my instinct moved in another direction. I called Abdullah from my home phone and told him to go ahead with what we discussed. I asked him to take the document and go to the District Attorney. He accepted and told me that once he did that, he would confirm and give me the documents for my safekeeping.

I remember it was a Thursday afternoon when Abdullah called me. I was outside my aunt’s house, heading towards my car. He told me that he just walked out of the District Attorney’s office and assured me that my father would be released on Monday. Then he said, “I will bring you the books you asked for early next week.” Naively, I did not understand what he meant, and I said, “What books? Oh, you mean the document? Ok.” I hung up. A minute later, my brother

\textsuperscript{19} 1000 Jordan Dinars would be equal to 1200 Canadian Dollars
called. He told me that we should meet. I had forgotten that the phones were tapped. I was shaking with fear.

He came over and, as usual, we turned off our cell phones, put them in the rooms, closed the doors, and spoke ever so softly:

“Shireen,” he said, “some people want to send you a message (he did not want to tell me who). They have bluntly threatened to arrest you if you keep your communication with Abdullah. They have promised to help us if we don’t communicate with him. I thought we agreed that we were not talking to Abdullah?”

“But,” I said, “Dad will be released on Monday, habibi. Who are these people, and why are they involved anyway? What did they have to gain? Why are they afraid of Abdullah? If they were going to help, why haven’t they by now?”

My brother turned to me ever so gently and said, “Shireen, these people mean business, habibti; we don’t need another incident. I am worried about you. Please do not communicate with him.”

I could see the worry on his eyes, but I still was adamant about following through with Abdullah. I suggested that we cooperate with the government officials, as he suggested. We might figure out what was really going on or who was really to be trusted. We could play both sides and see who freed my father. With this suggestion, my brother seemed more comfortable.

The next day, a government official called me. They asked so many questions. To them, Abdullah was a ghost. Abdullah seemed like a very powerful character, and they were very afraid of him. I answered all their questions. They were very worried about this “document.” I also told them that if I received it, I would share it with them.

In the meantime, other ways of trying to free my dad were taking place. We got reports from doctors stating that my father was sick and needed medical attention. Six years prior, my dad had been diagnosed with bladder cancer, but he had been cancer free since his surgery. We tried playing that card, but to no avail. I was breaking.

I don’t know how the next few days passed, but Monday was approaching, and I was wondering and praying if what Abdullah said would actually happen.
4.8  Sleep in heavenly peace . . . January 7th, Monday.

With no actual case, no accusation, freedom was granted! Dad was released.

4.9  Discussion

*The more one is able to leave one’s cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.*

Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*

4.9.1 2019, Toronto

I wrote this story a year after it happened, almost three years ago. I remember weeping as I re-experienced the event. The memory was raw as I relived every sensation and feeling, I wept with sadness and anger. With every sentence and phrase, a form of unexplainable broken loss filled my body. During the two weeks of my dad’s imprisonment, my whole world was shattered. Up until that point, the inherent goodness in people, systems, and institutions prevailed, and music was the tool in which that goodness surfaced. I found my voice in melodies, phrasings, harmonies, and rhythms. Music was also where magic occurred; the impossible became possible, idealism was experienced as realism, and in performances, the possibilities came to life. Music was safe, and in its comfort, I naively marched invincibly, not allowing anything or anybody to stand in my way. Defining and defying the norms was my internal motto! There are many stories to share, but here are two to give an example:

*Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife.*

--Khalil Gibran (2016/1923)
4.9.2 Improbable but not impossible, Amman 2011

In April of 2010, Dozan wa Awtar Singers, in cooperation with the Higher Institute of Music Conservatory in Damascus, Syria, planned a joint performance of Mozart’s *Requiem*, one in Syria and the other in Amman. Both choirs and instrumentalists would meet, work together, collaborate, and exchange knowledge, ending with the performances of the masterwork. The Syrian choir would come to Jordan and a month after, we would reciprocate and perform the work in Syria. Excited about our collaboration, we had been rehearsing intensely. This was the second attempt at Mozart’s *Requiem*. We had previously performed this masterwork in 2004, which our 400 audience members enjoyed.

The war in Syria brought about serious concern for the region, and although the civil war had started, no one anticipated the border closure, which made travelling over land to and from Syria impossible. This happened two days before the scheduled concert in Amman. Around 400 tickets had already been sold, making redeeming the tickets or cancelling the concert very difficult. Along with our 50 singers and 20 musicians, we were anticipating another 72 Syrian musicians (singers, instrumentalists, and soloists). Transporting such a large number by plane was extremely expensive and finding the funds in a day was extremely difficult. We made every attempt to salvage the situation, contacting sponsors and connecting with embassies. The truth of the matter was that the political situation was intense, and funding such a concert would be the last item on anyone’s priority list or agenda. Within 12 hours, however, we received an anonymous call granting support for 50 musicians, instead of 70, but making our concert possible. Although Dozan wa Awtar had built a strong reputation, such an act of kindness was unexpected. It was truly a miracle. I am not sure if it was the fact that the Syrians were joining or something else, but within those two days, our ticket sales went up to 1200, making this performance probably the largest attended concert for Mozart’s *Requiem* in Jordan. I remember receiving calls from people begging to attend the concert, saying that they were willing to stand in the back if there were no chairs. The night of the concert, the church was packed. We carried extra chairs to place between the isles. It was a very emotional performance, and though I am sure many attendees had never heard Mozart’s *Requiem*, the solidarity in their presence was sensed, and their standing ovation deeply felt.
What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music: our mind and body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us, all that is beneath and around us, it is all music.
- Hazrat Inyat Khan (1996)

4.9.3 Defying the norms: An excerpt from Musica Sacra festival program notes, Germany, 2010

The Arab world is the cradle of three of the world’s great religions, with an enormous repertoire of sacred music used in liturgy, ritual, and devotional practice. The place of music is vastly different in these religions. The role of some of the choirs in the Arab world is varied; as a predominantly European form of musical organization that originated in the church, it finds more prevalence within Arab Christian churches of Byzantine, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, and other Christian denominations. Islam’s devotional practice and Muslim culture has a strong tradition of solo Quranic recitation and community singing based on sacred texts. Based on these two complementary cultures, Dozan wa Awtar represents its reality as an Arab choir based in Jordan that builds a new genre of repertoire which has very specific parameters. The textual and melodic material is all sacred, in the Arabic language, multi-religious, and representative of oral and written traditions. Shireen Abu Khader and André de Quadros lead the choir through an experimental process which encourages a highly creative and distinctive juxtaposition, arrangement, and overlaying to construct an imaginative and powerful soundscape of the regions’ spiritual music.

4.9.3.1 Adhān

This is the traditional call to prayer that is recited by the muezzin from the mosque five times a day. The text summarises the central beliefs of Islam. The Adhān is sung in different maqams,20 depending on the region. In Jordan, it is

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20 Arabic modes or scales.
traditionally sung in either *rast* or *hijāz*. We will perform the *Adhān* in *hijāz* *maqam.*

For this concert, I did not rearrange the *Adhān*; instead, it was notated exactly as it was recited in the mosques of Amman. Wanting to recreate the experience that I often heard in the dawn prayer when all is silent, Muezzins from several Mosques reciting the *Adhān* seconds apart created an incredible cacophony of sound. I asked the choir to recite the *Adhān* in unison, with two soloists coming in seconds after one another. It was truly magical for many of us, because this was a true representation of the sonic world in which we lived, but what was different was that Christians, Muslims, men, and women participated in the presentation. Even if this exploration did not happen outside our rehearsal doors, the choir community felt comfortable expressing themselves inside the rehearsal space. *Dozan wa Awtar* was known for their innovative explorations, and many choir members resonated with exploring and participating in this particular musical concept; however, as we rehearsed to perform the *Adhān*, many of our Muslim Jordanian community friends raised serious concerns:

1. They claimed that women were not allowed to recite the call to prayer, making our performance defy a deeply engrained doctrine.
2. The actual performance of the *Adhān* was taking place in a church, making the location again challenging.

After several conversations between the singers, *Dozan wa Awtar* singers felt strongly about performing it—Muslims, Christians, women, and men. Many conversations had taken place. The choir discussed whether or not women were allowed to recite it based on the Quran or whether it was more of a tradition that had been enforced throughout history. Some talked about how it gave them a strong sense of belonging and spirituality, and others talked about how the performance represented the ideal Jordan they wanted to see—women and men, Christians and Muslims, performing a Muslim recitation in a church. There were also others who just thought it
was a cool concept. The choir finally agreed that they were living together, and our environment outside the rehearsal room was sonically connected; this is what the choir represented; however, politically and religiously, it was challenging. Fear was surfacing, and as we prepared to practice-perform our program to our Jordanian audience before leaving for Germany, many of our Muslim women singers asked not to do the Adhān in Jordan. It was too controversial, and out of respect for their concerns, we did not.

But the performance in Germany was moving. After all the conversations that had taken place, the hesitancy and fear that surfaced, the choir sang with conviction and love. The choir that recited the Adhān in unison, stood in the centre of the church in a circle facing outwards, and the soloists were hidden in the corners of the church. Because they were in an outward circle, they could not see one another. They had to feel each other’s bodies and breaths to know specific entrances and phrasing of the lines. It was memorable to many, and for me a moment of defiance. After all that had been engrained by the society to enforce difference and separation, I felt we were recreating possibilities for a new togetherness and a better world. Many expressed their joyfulness after that specific performance.

Music is one part of a larger process by which people and societies make sense of the world, create and express themselves, and feel connected to others. It can be a particularly useful tool for people who have been hurt, who have had themselves or their social relationships damaged or destroyed. (Pilzer, 2012, p. 7)

This was the world in which I lived; things were not always easy. Jordan is a difficult place to find oneself. Bound by continuous political and social pressures, it is very difficult to navigate one’s own paths, but music making with Dozan wa Awtar had many powerful moments. I recall that some members shared that they “need Dozan wa Awtar,” or “I would not live in Amman if it wasn’t for Dozan wa Awtar.” In Dozan wa Awtar, goodness almost always prevailed, or this is what I naively wanted to believe. Dozan wa Awtar Singers was a chosen hybrid of curious singers who, in the safety of music making, somehow created a bubble of love, and I chose to live in it even when I was not making music.

_The reed is a comfort of all estranged lovers. Its music tears our veils away._ (Rumi, 2005, p.178)
Raging against the silence of my inability to help, the experience of my father was traumatizing. My decision to move to Canada stemmed from hopelessness and an inability to make sense of it all. It shattered the bubble into endless pieces, too minute to rebuild. For two years after the incident, I contemplated changing my music career because I felt so betrayed by it. Even my role as a director had shifted; I no longer felt that leading or embodying the music served anyone.

Today, not fooled by music, I continuously question: does music really cross barriers, bridge cultures, and is it really a universal language? Is it a solution to world problems? In my case, what has music solved? For me, I believe music has helped in allowing me to sense a form of freedom and expression. Sometimes it pushed the boundaries, raised questions, and maybe allowed “safe” conversations to happen, but it has not served to solve anything, particularly a difficult, unsafe matter like this one. The dominant and bias narrative among music educators is that music carries power, that it is the universal language that brings tolerance, understanding, and peace in the world (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2015). Sadly, “Silent Night” that week became silent. Even if I believed that there was power in music, the reality of the political power was overriding and surpassed any melody, harmony, or rhythm. “Silent Night’s” representation of new birth, true beginnings, truth, or justice, in that moment became utterly and completely silenced.

In 1991, the Baltic states gained independence through the The Power of Song.

Some have studied the movement’s nonviolent tactics and expanded the singing revolution’s history to include events that took place many decades or even a century earlier. Few, however, have gone to the heart of Baltic nonviolent political action in the late twentieth century: the songs and singing that gave the movement its name. (Šmidchens, 2013, p.15)

Although I appreciated the American choir member’s suggestion to sing in front of the prison, I highly doubt that such a tactic would have been successful in my father’s case. The Jordanian culture is very different from the American or the Baltic culture. I can imagine two possible outcomes if we had done that; we would either have been ridiculed or threatened. Although singing is present in Jordan, it is far from being implemented in the educational system, thus making its power unknown, unnoticed, and unfamiliar to many. Although singing is found in the folklore, pop art, classical music, jazz, churches and more, music for justice and resistance has
not been directed to the laws of the government. Fear prevails on so many levels, as I am reminded of a musician friend who once was banned from performing in one of Amman’s government-owned theaters because he made a joke about the lack of water in Jordan. He was also beaten physically after a performance, and although he continues to perform, I am sure he will never forget.

The meanings of home, place, and belonging have never been more highly contested than in these times of unprecedented migration, displacement, and exile, shifting national borders and identities, and multiple diasporas. As large scale and ubiquitous as these forces are, they are lived and experienced within deeply specific sociocultural relations and highly localized geospatial arrangements. Such specificity underscores the importance of a focus on place as a means to excavate possibility and interconnection. In local and global contexts, a reconsideration of loss and its provocations is critical to the objective of renewal—itself borne of loss. (Kelly, 2009, p.1)

Not much had changed when I visited Jordan again in Christmas 2018. Both the political and socio economical situations seemed the same, though some believe it has worsened. My father’s incident feels like a fleeting dream, a moment in history that no longer exists except in the reminiscence of my body. As I watch my father’s strong but aged body walk (he turns 80 this year) around the house, I am reminded of his years of rich experience, unshaken spirituality, and forgiveness. After advising me to leave Jordan, now, in his silence, I know he longs for my return.
Chapter 5 Winning Gold

**Event: World Choir Games**
Location: Sochi, Russia July 2016
Category: Spirit and Faith
**Choir:** Dozan wa Awtar Singers (25 community singers) and instrumentalists (piano, 2 percussionists, guitar, qanun, and cello)
Country represented: Jordan
**Duration:** 15 minutes (4 pieces)

## 5.1 The concert

The first *dum*\(^{23}\) echoed from the *tar*.\(^{24}\) With the depth of its first beat, I sank into a space of deep awareness where many narratives simultaneously spoke through one musical gesture on the drum. As the simple rhythm of the drum sounded its call, the cello entered in resonance with its first theme. Fadi was the cellist, a competent musician with technical mastery in both Western classical and Eastern sounds of our home, *bilād il Shām*. The ring of his first note on the cello moved me deeply. Was it because of the unity of two worlds in his musical expression? Was I alone in this feeling or did the others feel it too? Whatever it was, I, their conductor stood in front of the choir feeling very blessed to have just experienced this magical and powerful beginning.

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\(^{22}\) The World Choir Games is an international choir festival that takes place every two years on a different continent. The idea behind the World Choir Games is based on the personal experience of choir singers from all over the world, who pick up and pass on human ideals through song.

\(^{23}\) *dum* Arabic refers to a strong beat

\(^{24}\) *tar* is an ancient, single-headed frame drum.
5.1.1  *Abun D’Bashmayo (The Lord’s Prayer in Syriac)*

As I looked up towards the choir, it seemed that each singer was in their own unique state of being, yet somehow held together. Some had their eyes closed; others gazed into the gorgeous concert hall behind me, and others stared right at me. In that moment, I sensed that the scarves covering the choir’s heads gave them a look of humbleness. They seemed quiet in their spirit, but in their stillness, their energy felt powerful.

For many of us, it was a very special opportunity to perform in this Spirit and Faith category for an international audience. In preparation for this moment, we had spent countless hours discussing the importance of this performance, the crucial value and meaning it held for us, especially at this time in history, where faith is at the forefront of our region’s headline news. Singing spiritually-inspired music in one program was a unique opportunity to showcase our region’s many faiths—Syriac, Christian, Muslim, Maronite, and more. We opened our set with “*Abun D’Bashmayo*” (Lord's Prayer), a piece rooted in the Syriac musical tradition dating back to the birth of Christianity. For me, this meant grounding the music with the language of Christ, a language that stemmed from our region. Being a Christian with ancestral roots here, I felt proud. This 15-minute concert was already feeling special.

The performance space was magnificent! It had two levels of old crème-painted, highly embellished arches. A number of them stood in a row, and through them I could sense the depth of the space. Standing on the stage gave many of us a sense that we were part of that Sochi’s artistic history. As we sang, we were transformed to that time, and an expressive portrait came to life. As the music embodied my gestures, the choir eloquently responded. They sang expressively through the phrases and appeared to be in sync with every gesture, nuance, and dynamic in this generous acoustic.

The choir was connected—to this music, through this music, and with each other. I felt that as we started, a form of spiritual unity was present. We had finished the folkloric category a few days before, but something about this faith-based repertoire made the experience feel different for many of us. For me, this concert felt particularly moving and unexplainably powerful.
This was not the first time I had attended the World Choir Games. I was first introduced to the games in Xiamen, China, in 2008, where I was invited to become a council member representing Jordan, and then introduced again to the games in Latvia, 2014, where *Dozan wa Awtar Singers* participated in their first international competition. During this second visit, I was invited to attend the council meetings where deliberations on various choral related matters took place.

The council hall was a huge room inside an old majestic museum. The walls were covered with oil paintings, with tall windows on each side. I stood at the entrance of the room, observing the many flags and choral educators who inhabited the room; I felt I was part of the building’s history. My heart welled with pride as I felt the weight of the responsibility standing there at the entrance. I walked into the council hall searching for my nameplate and the Jordanian flag. There it was, on the far-right side amongst a row of flags, predictably in alphabetical order next to Japan. Jordan was the last chair on that row, and I remember thanking God the letter ‘I’ started on the other side of the room. Even though I would have been respectful if a member from the Israeli council sat beside me, I was relieved that I did not have to face such close encounters. I settled into my chair and looked at the flag with its bold red, green, black, and white colors gleaming at me—small, yet it fit the top part of the table delicately. I felt unsettled and pondered why I felt uncomfortable.

Although our choir was representing Jordan, it was clear to me that the heart of the choir’s identity was not solely a Jordanian one. Our choir was an amalgamation of many cultural identities and faiths—Muslims, Christians, atheists, Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese, Armenians, one Brit, and a Spaniard. It felt inadequate to be representing only one country. Was there anything I could do? The idealist in me contemplated asking the council whether representing the Levant as one whole region was an option. After all, it was just over 100 years ago that the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine) was a politically undivided region. I couldn’t muster up the courage to ask because I feared that I would not be taken seriously. Furthermore, the Levant as a region did not appear on the map, so to the council, it did not exist.
5.2 The concert

5.2.2 *Kratima* (Byzantine hymn)

Levon, one of the tenors who joined us from Syria, is a professional cantor who grew up in the Orthodox Syrian churches. We had two other musicians (pianist and guitarist) from Syria, who also took the role of arrangers of our 15-minute concert.

Levon stood up and started to recite a 12-phrase traditional byzantine hymn—a chant-like melody common to the Byzantine liturgical tradition—often involving participation of the congregation. In this case, the assembled choir and instrumental ensemble gathered together on this unique occasion and became the congregation. The chant was to be repeated four times, each repetition building on the other with textural choral and instrumental layers. The first phrase was simply introduced by Levon, supported by a simple drone for the second phrase; the men joined Levon, and the instruments added more depth as he moved towards the end of this phrase. For the third repetition, as the choir (men and altos) repeated the phrase, Levon improvised to the highest note in the phrase, lingering there as the choir continued with the theme in an affirming *forte* dynamic. The final repetition quickly came to an end as the choir, along with Levon, slowly found themselves at the end. For me, this third repetition was the most powerful. I remember having goosebumps and feeling emotionally captivated. Even two years later, as I re-hear the archival recording on my small phone speakers, I am immediately brought back to the feeling of that moment—a feeling that doesn’t seem to change over time. It’s a sound of home; untouched by the physical world. That feeling was and is unforgettable.

This was a very familiar sound to me, as I grew up in the Greek Orthodox tradition. Each repetition of the phrase seemed to slowly remove any hard layers that had built up over the past few years. For that moment, music managed to renew my faith and belief in the power of the human voice. This three-minute performance of *Kratima* awakened many other senses and triggered many memories. I recalled a particular scent of incense that was present every time my dad took my brother, sister, and me to church; I remembered joining the church choir where I learned many of our hymns; and I was taken back to memories of leaving the church service whenever we were bored to buy some *ka‘ek*, (a type of bread). The relationship I built with my siblings through these church traditions, and specifically a magical lighting of the candle with
my brother in Jerusalem one Easter, are cherished memories that were evoked in this musical moment in Sochi.

5.2.3 Interlude—Why this music?

The concept for this concert was created a year prior to attending the festival, in response to the region’s turmoil. Like others, I had spent many hours listening and observing the news. It was heart breaking. I cried for days, feeling helpless about the situation; the ISIS movement that emerged (which I do not believe in any way is representative of Islam) was killing many Christians and Muslims. The images on the media were uncensored and extremely disturbing. I saw everything from women being hanged, kids being shot, and countless tears; however, the most prominent and worst image of them all was a row of men (around 12) kneeling down with their heads being cut off one by one. The images were gruesome, brutal, and revealed the worse in humanity. Some of the earliest Christians’ faiths (Syriac, Chaldean, and other) and towns specifically in Iraq and Syria were being demolished—within days, the history of faiths was eradicated. Citizens of these areas fled, seeking refuge in other cities. Amman, Jordan was one of those cities. These faiths and peoples were being scattered across the region, and as a result, their oral traditions also became scattered, weakening their musical culture. I, along with a few colleagues, felt responsible.

After brainstorming concert ideas with our Syrian colleagues, we agreed that we had a responsibility to preserve the music and also to send a message that the people of our region were not what the media made us appear to be. Arabs are only Muslims, and the adjectives used in the media to describe our people interplayed between “terrorists, bloodthirsty, fundamentalists” and more. This region has been fertile soil for the earliest Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions—a region whose people have lived together for years.
5.3 Back to the concert

5.3.1 Malke Dar’aa

The choir continued the program with “Malke Dar’aa” (Salvation in the coming of Jesus) from the Chaldean tradition—among the oldest churches founded by St. Thomas, one of Jesus's twelve Apostles. The Chaldean tradition was based in Iraq but was recently demolished by the ISIS movement. The choir struggled with this piece in rehearsals. One of the main challenges in this arrangement was a soprano part written in a super high register, to be sung pp (very softly). The sopranos struggled to vocally support the sound and to produce the right color to meet the compositional intention. Pitch and intonation were a continuous challenge throughout the rehearsals. The musician, conductor and educator in me looked to find a solution—how to build the sopranos’ confidence and bring out the technical and stylistic desired sound? To produce the desired effect, I asked most of the women to eliminate the words (vowels are easier and may better support the tone) and asked a few others to sing the lyrics with stylistic ornamentation. There would be enough combined sound to produce a sound that resonated in the piece. This was a competition after all, and there was a need to produce a sound that met certain choral standards. Still, I struggled as a “Western trained” educator to hear such undefined lines sung amongst the few soloists; however, I soon realized there was a difference between the undefined line and the refined feel of the ornaments that brought out a new sonic experience. To the Arab, Christian, “Western trained” musician in me, this piece was “unjustifiably” divine! I also knew that the judges would mark us down on the “sound” criteria, but the powerful message of Malke Dar’aa was more important than the precise technicality of its execution.

5.3.2 Interlude (The A B C walk of the nations)

We were super excited to walk in the Nations’ Parade. More than 80 countries were represented as they walked proudly holding their flags in the streets of Sochi. All the choirs met in Teatralnaya Square in front of Sochi’s famous Winter Theater—a huge building surrounded by 88 Greek-like columns supporting its majestic structure. There must have been thousands of us standing there. All choirs representing their countries wore their “representative attire.” Some were in their elaborate traditional attire, while others—like our choir—were simple, with an added element to represent the country. Our choir wore casual white shirts and jeans and around their necks, the traditional red hatta (traditional Jordanian scarf) was placed.
As expected, representing Jordan, we stood in line alphabetically between two countries—Japan on one side and Israel on the other. As a Palestinian, I was uncomfortable but kept it to myself. Fear in such encounters (as un-interactive as they may be) is very familiar to me. My heart started to shiver, and I was unable to relax. I felt alone and defeated somehow. I noticed that our Syrian musicians and friends had left the group. They were sitting in the far-right corner of the building. “This is a serious matter,” expressed one musician. “If I am seen taking part in a festival that includes Israel, I will never be able to enter Syria again.” I agreed. We knew from past experiences that such political issues might arise, so to mitigate any risk, we had requested the organizers not to partake in any friendship concerts alongside Israel. We assumed we had thought this all through but had not predicted that the alphabetical order of the Nations’ walk would end up being problematic. After talking to the choir about the situation with our Syrian colleagues, we agreed that we came together as one group, and as one group we would stay together.

The choir started to walk away and stopped to stand next to Nigeria. A sweet young Russian volunteer carrying the Jordanian flag began to panic, saying that we are not allowed to do that. She soon enough realized that she was standing by herself and slowly made her way towards Nigeria. The group would now walk together as one entity. That felt right.

Because of the political tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, we have learned to be attentive to our choir’s (almost 70% Palestinians) needs in such events. As part of the games’ activities, the organizers at Sochi had scheduled two “friendship concerts” for us around the city. Although we had requested that we not participate alongside Israel, this request was disregarded. As we walked towards our scheduled performance space, we noticed the choir with the Israeli flag. The flag, to me, always strikes a painful space in my heart. It confirms to the world what I know is not true in my heart (it is not Israel, it is Palestine), and I am continuously angered by this claim. Instead of discussing why they disregarded our request, we just walked towards the organizers and apologized, saying we had a few singers who were not well, and we would not be able to participate. The next day, as we approached the second friendship concert, we noticed again the Israeli choir standing in line to perform, and we just walked by and kept walking away. We found a corner in a plaza close to the center of the town and stood and performed our repertoire. It must have been the alphabetical order again.
Plate 1. *Dozan wa Awtar Singers* in the town square, Sochi

5.4 Back to the concert

5.4.1 *Amin*

After a short instrumental transition, the choir started in unison, “*Amin, Amin, A . . .*” in the *Hijaz Maqam* (mode). In a 6/8 time-signature, a piece of music can have a playful feel; however, the
Hijaz mode here seemed to bring a certain depth—one that was definitely not playful, but I believe, profound.

As the music started building, one of the tenors took a step forward to improvise on a neutral “ah” vowel. He concluded on a high note, adding a beautiful color to the texture as the choir repeated the “Amin.” With this repetition, the choir was in harmony. This introduction set the tone for the final piece of our competition program. After this lyrical beginning, the instrumentalists introduced a rhythmical section: two eighth notes on the tar; dum dum, only to fool the listener again and again with a variation on the theme Amin. Imitating the instrumental rhythm, the men inserted the word Allah and repeated the rhythm. Like a Sufi zikr on each repetition, the music accelerated, ending in a climactic silence—the kind of silence believed to be the moment in which an individual soul connects to the divine in oneness.

From that point onward, the rhythm and emotional drive of the piece became more powerful and intense. The choir’s energy somehow felt elevated. I really cannot explain it. Two soloists musically conversed with and against one another. Unified by the subject of the Virgin Mary, Levon recited from the Bible while Yara recited from the Quran. Underscoring this dialogue, the word Allah was repeated (on the eighth notes). This time the musical acceleration of the repetitions reached a point where I could not move my hand as fast as the actual speed. Keeping that intensity, the choir dropped in dynamic to a pianissimo, and then with a declamatory crescendo finished their last phrase on a fff.

I remember keeping my hand up as the choir sang their last note. The energy of the choir was still ringing. It must have been only a few seconds of silence, but it felt much longer. As my hand slowly went down, the choir somehow could breathe again. I could breathe again. The applause was memorable. Although we did not receive a standing ovation, there was an unexplainable powerful energy that emitted from the audience as we took our bow and slowly walked off the stage.
5.4.2 Interlude

To see the evolution and adaptation of *Amin* was phenomenal. The vision for the piece was an adaptation of a famous North American spiritual, “Amen.” I had expressed a fondness for this simple tune. I appreciated how the piece was built on only four simple repeated phrase measures. Our adaptation highlighted commonalities and counterpoints of the Muslim and Christian faiths:

1) Amen in Arabic is pronounced Amin (Ameen) and is found in both Muslim and Christian faiths traditions; 2) Repetition was a conceptual musical idea found in both the Sufi tradition and in the Byzantine traditions familiar to me. Christians and Muslims have always lived together in peace, but the media has portrayed very different pictures of this historic relationship. For many of us living in the Levant, hearing the church bells alongside the Mosque’s call to prayer was a common daily happening, and for me a memory that I held very deep in my heart. *Amin* could be the piece that sonically united the two faiths as I have always remembered, and tonight, we chose to share.

5.5 Back to the event

As I followed the choir towards the exit doors that led outside, I remember feeling numb. The energy of the 15-minutes was faster and more intense than I had time to process. I was excited to share our concert experience with the choir. As I opened the door, I saw almost all of the choir and musicians crying. Some were sobbing uncontrollably, others hugging, some crying silently, and others like me, numb and quiet.

I have had many poignant moments during performances, but this performance was not like any other. I did not feel a typical emotional reaction. This was different. This was memorable and overwhelmingly resonant for many of us. To me, this concert experience was deep, moving, and extremely profound.
5.6 Discussion: Unpacking choir games

5.6.1 The fear of being a Palestinian (*Khawf il falastini*)

It is clear in the story that being a Christian Palestinian played a role in navigating the group’s movement; the Nations’ walk, friendship concerts, and the performance. As a Palestinian, I am very cautious towards my approach to festivals and other musical invitations, in particular international events that require participation alongside other choirs. We have had several experiences in which we witnessed Palestinian political conflict surfacing. Two incidents stand at the forefront of such situations.

5.6.1.1 *Aswatuna*: Arab Choral Festival, Petra, Jordan 2008

In the summer of 2008, I was the executive director of *Aswatuna*: Arab Choral Festival. This was the first festival of its kind: Arab choir participants, as well as Swedish choir members, met in the ancient city of Petra in Jordan to exchange and sing together in an event that lasted for 5 days. Jordan was the only country in the region that could host such an event. Regrettably, we were presented with a situation which put us in a vulnerable place and about which we had to make a difficult decision.

We had a significant budget from which to invite five choirs: Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Sweden. After the invitations were sent, the festival was opened to other choirs who wanted to participate. An Arab-Israeli choir interested in joining connected with us. This was exciting! However, after speaking to our Syrian and Lebanese choir directors, I learned that their security would be jeopardized if their government knew about their participation alongside an “Israeli choir.” Even though we all knew that their passports were a mere technicality, it would still be construed as Israeli participation. Syria was clear; they would not participate if the choir was present, and Lebanon showed strong hesitancy. In weighing the options of losing both Syria and Lebanon, I felt powerless; I had to make a decision that I regret to this day. I painfully asked the Arab-Israeli choir not to join. There were several conversations that took place between the

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25 Jordan is the only country in the Levant that has a peace treaty with Israel making it the possibility to hosting choirs from Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria
conductor and me. Although he understood, I knew he was deeply wounded. I have read articles and had several conversations in which Arab-Israelis were discriminated against by the Israeli government. Now I was no different.

5.6.1.2  Musica Sacra, Marktoberdorf, Germany 2011

The second story took place in Marktoberdorf, Germany, in 2011, when Dozan wa Awtar singers were invited to participate in a sacred festival, Musica Sacra. Our repertoire included several Christian and Muslim chants, as well as poetically inspired spiritual songs. We were aware of the several faiths represented—among them Jewish. Some of the choir members voiced their concern, believing that the Jewish participation would be politicized as an Israeli choir. I hesitantly assured them that this was not the case.

Every evening, the joining choirs were divided into two groups, and performances took place in two different venues. Although we knew from the beginning that we were singing in a synagogue after the Jewish choir, it started to feel uncomfortable when the organizers requested that we wear kippahs during the concerts. I knew that this would be a challenging task for many of us. It was extremely difficult for me. When I asked if we could wear anything else to cover, the coordinator refused. The organizer revealed there was an intentional move on his side to put countries in conflict together. As I think about this, two thoughts recur: we were not representing countries (this was about faiths), so why did it have to turn political? Secondly, if he genuinely wanted to put two countries in conflict together, why not do it in a neutral space? Why choose a synagogue, why not a non-traditional, balanced space that did not represent any of the faiths? But then, it would not be a Musica Sacra festival, would it?

This led to a meeting/confrontation with the Israeli conductor, the director of the festival, and two other colleagues from our choir. We asked to be relocated and to sing in a different venue, which they accommodated. One conversation that resonated at that time took place with the Israeli conductor. He expressed in empathy how difficult it was for him to enter Germany after so many years, even after an apology and continued redemption. My answer was along the lines of: “You found it difficult after 30 years of apologies. How do you expect me to feel when the Palestinian occupation exists as we speak?”
Although we are now better equipped to respond and to face encounters with Israel, incidents still occur. We are conscious during festivals to voice our concerns. Prior to traveling, we requested from Sochi’s organizers not to partake in the friendship concerts alongside Israel. Unfortunately, the request was completely disregarded.

I am sure there are several explanations for why such requests are overlooked; it is not a serious matter, too difficult to arrange (alphabetical order, too large to accommodate one choir, etc.), but a large number of our choir members are Palestinians. A large portion of Jordan’s population is Palestinian. Many do not understand how painful it is for the Palestinians at this time in history, and sadly, my Palestinian- hood is accompanied by fear.

As I read Pappé’s (2015) book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, I was overcome with a strange feeling of paralysis and numbness. I knew the content of the book to be true, but here I was holding a book that spoke of erasing me from the worlds’ history. In summarizing his book, Pappé (2015) says: “It is the simple but horrific story of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, a crime against humanity that Israel has wanted to deny and cause the world to forget” (p.17).

This information was not new to me. Growing up, I was submerged by repetitive historical stories, but reading this book was heartbreaking. Naively, I wanted to have hope and faith, and to believe that it was different. But realistically, it was horrific.

My Palestinian friend narrated a story of resistance, which began: “My land, Palestine, Filistine, ethnic cleansing 101… steal the land, murder its people, delete the language, erase the story, create a new story” (Annab, 2015). The phrase, “create a new story” redirects my fear. The “new story” is the creation of Israel, and the old story is the erasure of my Palestine. I am sure my fear stems from many deeply rooted issues related to culture, gender, environmental and more, but creating a “new story” carries a new level of fear. At this point in history, indigenous Palestinians are at a disadvantage, as the colonizing powers of the world are determining my Palestinian destiny.

Pappé talks about the systematic ethnic cleansing, abolition, and eradication of Palestine. Although I was not born in Palestine and did not witness the horrific uprootness of my parents, I connect with exiled Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki’s words:
The dramatic events that have occurred to the Palestinians, whether I was there or not to participate in them, are the indivisible part of my totality. Without them, my history, my name, the nuances of my self-definition and the geography of my soul would stand empty. (Turki, 1977, p. 71)

I grew up in a home that was full of repeated stories emphasizing my Palestinian roots and heritage. My parents wanted to make sure we never forgot our history, the “un-erased” version. I imagined and visualized the stories through the lens of a romantic movie-like picture—a black and white version. It was full of innocence, childhood, play, love, and joy, but then overnight, it turned to disbelief, sadness, and purely survival. It was a catastrophe Nākbā.

The repetitiveness of the stories was crucial to forming my identity. They were played over and over again and somehow became engraved in my own stories. These stories became part of my narratives as I carried them deep within me, to be told to my children. I was also taught that as a Palestinian, I have the right to return to my family’s ancestral home. At home, that was a truth I lived with every day.

Sadly, outside my home, there is a different narrative being told as I am faced with the brutality of the Zionist movement. Because of their prevailing power, I feel intimidated, and it haunts and scares me. I am weary (for myself and my children) of my surroundings, and careful when I am faced with a Jewish human being. The first internal question that occurs is, “I wonder if he/she is a Zionist?” The internal dialogue then becomes a discussion: “how would they react if I told them I am Palestinian? Will it create discomfort? Would they sympathize? Will he/she be able to have a conversation?” The thoughts are endless, so when I’m introducing myself, I am cautious. I am not always sure how to answer the generic question, “Where are you from?” When confronted with an Israeli, I fearfully claim my Jordanian- hood, because I do not want to deal with a possible confrontation for which I am not always prepared. At other times, I introduce myself as a Palestinian Jordanian; sometimes I will say I am a Torontonian. I weep as I write this; I do not know what to make of this truth that I just discovered. I just realized that this paralyzed feeling of fear in claiming my identity gives permission for the new story to be told, and therefore, I am a contributor to the erasure of Palestine.
I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation . . . Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

—Elie Wiesel (Nobel Prize acceptance speech, 1986)

But still, I dream of reclaiming my parent’s home one day. Until then, I would like to visit. The thought of not being allowed entry, which has already happened five times, scares me. I only had access to Palestine twice. Once, when I landed a job with the United Nations Development Project under a TOKETEN (Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals) project, an initiative designed to utilize the talents of successful expatriates in short-term homeland development projects. From 1989-2000, I was part of team who supported the musical growth of the Edward Said Music Conservatory in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. For two years, my U.N visa gave me generous access of mobility. After that, I was only able to travel once under a tourist visa. What is ironically sad is that I need Canadian citizenship to be able to go home. To be able to enter Palestine, I have to enter as a non-Palestinian. I find this excruciatingly painful and humanly corrupt!

5.6.2 Enacting the music talk: Tanneh u Ranneh

In drawing themes related to the performance in this story, the word resonance was at the forefront of this experience. The definition of resonance states that it is “prolongation of sound by reverberation”. The root is from the Latin resonare, “to sound again.” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d). As musicians, resonance is a huge part of our vocabulary. We refer to it as a physical space—“resonance cavities”—but also in the production of sound: resonance in harmony, in singers’ breath support and more. I recall using this word several times with my choir.

Arabic has complex and unusual methods of constructing words from the basic root. This means that a pattern of three letters of t-n-n or r-n-n will always be the foundation of words that have the semantic field of resonance, such as the words taneen and rāneen, both of which are derived from the word resonance in Arabic. Using the root system means that direct translation, particularly of poetic texts, is often difficult; the root of a word may contain a meaning that could
take a few sentences to translate. The beauty of this is that words can convey a depth of both meaning and emotion unmatched by many other languages.

I would like to draw on my language to identify the different meanings of resonance. I will use the root of the colloquial phrase ṭanneh ‘u rānneh, which I heard countless times growing up, often expressing celebrations. The word ṭanneh comes from the root of ṭnn. It is resonance, but resonance associated with loudness, climax, echo, grandness, and more. Ṳānneh is derived from the root word ṭnn—resonance associated with softness, grief, pain, and loud cries of sadness.26

Thinking about our 15-minute performance, I believe both words were present, whether in the actual singing or in the environment surrounding the performance. There were several powerful moments from which ṭanneh ‘u rānneh can be drawn. Some of the descriptions extracted from the story were “in stillness there was power,” “moved me deeply,” “stillness,” “powerful,” “moved expressively,” “connected,” “moving,” and many more. There were too many expressive words, but in some moments, they culminated in one gesture or note: the first dum, and the first note of the cello.

Right from the magical beginning of the concert, I believe both taneen and raneen were present. There were moments when the two terms were defined separately. They stood alone and were clear, but at other times, they were intertwined and interwoven. In reflecting on the performance, I believe there were some factors which lent to taneen and rāneen being at the heart of experience.

It all started with the taneen of the media. The story talks about the graphic images that were embedded daily in the media. There were moments when it was hard to breathe because of the impact of the images I saw. This affected me as an artist and resulted in a feeling of responsibility to respond musically. The power of taneen in the media led to a musical reaction that was close to home. There was a need for reviving spiritual chants that were being erased because of their oral tradition. The media also impacted many of the choir members; however, when we initially talked about performing this repertoire, the choir was resistant. These were old chants sung in languages that were unfamiliar to them, and they felt that the audience would not enjoy it. But after sharing the importance of the idea and where it stemmed from, the

26 From Ma’ani Dictionary
responsibility became a collective one, and the response became shared. This sense of solidarity within a community of singers played a major role in the outcome of the performance.

After graduating from university and moving back to Palestine, I realized early on that responding to ones’ social and political surroundings is key to a strong performance. Whether it was aficionados or non-concert goers that came to our concerts, it was crucial to ask the following three questions:

1. Why did I choose a specific program or repertoire? What is the social, political, cultural, or seasonal response?
2. How will the repertoire serve the singer’s growth and learning?
3. How will this repertoire impact, move, or shift our audience’s perception?

With that in mind, choice of repertoire was essential to this particular event. It was difficult to locate the music, as it fled with its cantors, keepers, and priests. We had to physically locate people who could share their music with us. Our colleagues in Syria identified a few singers just outside Damascus, as I did in Jordan. After accumulating the repertoire (recordings), we had to choose which were the best fits for the competition. The choice was based on the variety of faiths, but primarily on the old Christian religions. The most prominent were the chants of the Chaldean tradition, as their church in Iraq was demolished. All of the choices stemmed, too, from raneen; which pieces called (resonated) with us (me and the arrangers) the most? Without exception, they all resonated from a place of grief, a cry of sadness, but also a place of resistance.

Next was the choice of arrangement and arrangers. This was vital to the selection process. Not only were the musicians competent, but their knowledge and resonance to the region was crucial for this particular work. No one living outside the region would be able to understand or feel the depth of this music. Fortunately, both composers came from Syria. Syria was experiencing war, and they were subjected to atrocities. We were moved by it all. As the composers explained their compositional process to the choir, they talked about a state of numbness that was experienced. They described how they worked best in the evenings, explained that as they took breaks from writing, they would go to the balcony for a smoke, during which time missiles would be flying over them. Even as they described how the stars lit up the evening sky over the city of Damascus and how they followed the missiles with their eyes to see where they might land, they relived those moments. One could see it in their gaze even as they described it. They
talked about how in such moments, they experienced a form of numbness. They could not
synthesize what was happening; however, when they went back to the room, in the rāneen of
numbness, their musical arrangements found expression. I recognize the feeling of numbness; I
have encountered it several times. For me, it has always served as a form of self-protection, in
times when reality seemed too difficult to absorb. Just like my colleagues, music is where I
found my voice.

There were a number of considerations related to arranging the music. Since we had talked about
adding instruments, we asked how we might keep its a capella authenticity. How could we use
our instinct, intuition, and sensitivity to bring this music forth without compromising its
integrity? A lot of thought went into this. There were many conversations that took place about
the instrumentation, the sound, the color, the transition between pieces, and the overall mood of
the competition segment. After this “intellectual” conversation, I believe the composers used
their experiences and musicality, but I felt they also drew from their rāneen. It was the driving
factor in how the music appeared on paper, because it stemmed from a place of sadness.

Next came the performance itself, the quality of it all. I felt that the resonance was lifted by the
ability of the choir to sing the concert with an emotional connection and good musicianship.
Endless hours of rehearsals took place. All languages, pronunciation, accuracy of notes and
specific color, dynamics, phrasing, form, role of the singer versus the role of the instrumentalists
were discussed and rehearsed. Why were the phrases repeated? What was our job in delivering
them? How were we going to do that? How do we get to those climaxes and pianissimos? What
do they serve? There were several conversations and stories that were shared during our
numerous rehearsal hours. The choir’s faith was equally divided between Muslim and Christian,
and the repertoire was extremely important to them. One choir member had come down with a
cold and told me that she saved her voice by lip singing the first three pieces so she could sing
“Amin” because she loved the conversations between Yara and Levon and did not want to miss
being part of this moment. Another member shared,

I’m not necessarily a spiritual guy, but honestly I love seeing people who are
connected with this, I dunno, mighty power, and all the prayers in the faith
category, especially what Levon and Yara did with the improvisations was
absolutely incredible, because as we all know segregation is everywhere and
people use religion to separate humans from each other, and we did the exact opposite. After all, we're human beings before being Muslims, Christians, Buddhists . . . that's one of the reasons why I love Dozan Wa Awtar.

Another said,

The cello had a special effect, Levon's voice and I really loved Malka, and the very high notes; it had this amazing floating effect that was divine. The arrangements were unique, and the music was so powerful.

Yet another choir member offered, “Pure energy; honestly I can't explain what I felt—it was the first time I feel it.”

One of the key factors that played a role in our performance is how we rehearsed. I frequently told the choir that when it came time to practice, there was no room for leisure; they had to be focused, present, and take every direction, apply every instruction, and be ridiculously thorough; however, when it was time to perform, it was time to trust that everything they worked for would find its way to surface. It’s the idea of surrendering to the moment, letting go, playing, and just singing.

If I had to put it simply, I truly believe this is what happened: we sang! Everything came together to reveal an incredible experience to all of us in a short period of time—the response, the choice of repertoire, the instrumentalists’ and choir’s musicianship, and solidarity in music making. For 15 minutes, each singer seemed to be with his/her spiritual oneness, but together we shared a different oneness, and in our collectiveness, it was profound.
5.6.3 Resistance to erasure

Plate 2. Shireen, rehearsing in the theatre at Sochi

Being part of Sochi’s history, specifically during our performance, gave our performance further depth. To our singers and the artist in me, we felt the space’s heritage. The concert hall resonated with thousands of concerts that had taken place in its majestic space. One could almost draw a picture of the audiences’ attire, demeanor, and energy. That consciousness played a role in our performance, as if we brought our own history and experiences and shared it with the history of others. Our sharing was profound, but so was our duty.

I recall one of our singers sharing,

This was an important category because it was different; it is the music from our region in old ancient tongue. It says that this is who we are, and this connects us
to the past and also pushes us forward. It also says that we have roots here, and a rich culture that we should celebrate.

While we shared our heritage in a space that revealed our choir’s tradition, our performance carried an important message of pushing forward—pushing with resistance. The “new story” of our region that was portrayed by the international media was unjust. It told a story that was biased and untrue. To put it simply: Arabs were Muslim, and Muslims were terrorists. To the naïve, uninformed listener, this message was powerful, detrimental to the socio-economic and over all well-being of the region.

Our choir was a mixture of Arab Christians and Muslims; the repertoire revealed that the Christian faith has existed since the birth of Christ. The repertoire also showed that Muslims and Christians have lived together in peace for many years. Our message was powerful; we are here together, we don’t forget where we come from, we know that the media is portraying a different picture, and we stand together to showcase a different perspective bonded by our different ancestral faiths, united sonically through the music and connected to the divine in our Oneness. This was who we were. This is who we are.

Through our movement and performance (whether we were aware of our actions or not), we acted in resistance, and, I believe, contributed to the correction if not the elimination of those “misleading” stories, specifically those in the media. The silencing and negation of our story was being voiced and challenged. Even if we did not fully erase the misleading story, I do believe we presented a different narrative. To the choir, this presentation left them with sentences like:

Something about the experience eased open a door of emotion, and the weight behind that door then came pouring out.
It was powerfully beautiful, intense, and angelic at the same time.
Once in a lifetime!

I believe that our act of resistance played a major role in the reaction to the performance.

I would like to draw from my Arabic language as I describe our act of resistance in our movement and performance during our time in Sochi. Again, there are many words that describe resistance, but I will focus on two: مقاومة وصمود muqawameh and ṣumūd.
The word *muqawameh* comes from the verb *qawem*, which means to resist by one individual. I chose *muqawameh* because it refers to the act of resistance by a group of people: the choir. Although resistance is one of the translations of *muqawameh*, its meaning is accompanied by words like *defiance, opposition*, and *strength*. Our choir showed defiance in both our movement and performance. I believe we found our strength in the Nations Walk as well as the friendship concerts. We made decisions regardless of the events’ rules and guidelines. We defied the alphabetical expectations and did what was true to our hearts. It was powerful, divine, special, and being part of the *Dozan wa Awtar* family added the community feel that connected us all. Could we have jeopardized participation through our *muqawameh*? Maybe, but our togetherness and love for one another surfaced, and we did not allow our community to disintegrate.

*ṣumūd* falls between the action of resisting and standing, with an emotional meaning to withstand firmly and absorb the feelings of injustice. I feel wholeheartedly that in our performance, every member of the choir absorbed and withstood through the music. Every word they sang, every nuance of phrase, every dynamic had an intention, and in that intention, there was resistance that came through in our faith. Interestingly too, *ṣumūd* comes from the root of *ṣmd* — one of the 100 names of Allah in Islam.

To experience this event was life changing for many. It was as if we opened our hearts to one another, our lives, hopes, dreams, fears, and in 15 minutes poured it out to stranger. But in our togetherness, we found power, safety, and through our music we were able to channel divinity. I carry these 15 minutes deep in my heart. It has altered my perspective about what music can and cannot do. It has allowed me to grow positively and shift my views as a music educator. Music can play a part in the transferal of religious and global views. It is possible.

This story has revealed critical themes that played a role in understanding my identity as a Palestinian Jordanian musician. Drawing on my language has also shed light onto the different meanings and emotional contexts carried within the words. To my findings, this is crucial; as I think in Arabic but write in English. The 15-minute performance and the process of music making also brought forth discussions related to resonance, fear, and resistance to erasure. These

27 Ma’ani Dictionary
themes show that a deeper lens of music-making can carry powerful and political connotations, allowing us to build new contexts, connections, and understandings, specifically when performing.

Plate 3. *Dozan wa Awtar Singers* before the Sochi performance
Chapter 6 Reclaiming Silence

This story is about the pursuit for reclaiming silence—a story about identity, pride, and shock. I remember hearing a piece of music whose melody and universal messages of hope, peace, and unity touched me to the core. From that depth of my emotion emerged the inspiration to translate the song’s universal messages into a choral arrangement that I soon began to share with choirs around the world. The world came crashing down, however, when the director of a North American choir informed me that the piece was deemed too political by the board and would be removed from their program. I took this news very personally. After my initial shock and anger, I embarked on a journey to seek understanding and to learn how institutional processes in music work in order to bring light to our sometimes-naïve musical choices that distance politics from sound. The song is “Lao Rahal Soti.” The author of the text is Palestinian. The political entanglement is Israeli-Arab relations. The text speaks of a universal quest for peace, unity, and hope.

6.1 1998, Ramallah, Palestine

Abu Yacoub, a bald and bearded man, sat in his usual spot behind the front desk of the Edward Said Conservatory where I worked. As I walked into the conservatory that day, I greeted Abu Yacoub with my customary “Good afternoon,” but this time, there was something different about our encounter. Intuition told me he was eager to speak. He greeted me with a quiet, yet welcoming smile. In that fleeting moment I had a decision to make. Do I continue along on my day as I always did, or take his subtle cue to connect beyond our habitual greeting? I decided to approach him, asking if there was anything he needed. With a perceptibly low pitched, husky and worn out voice, he asked, “Would you like to attend a concert tonight?” I had just moved to Palestine, and this would be my first concert, so I excitedly accepted.
6.1.1 Palestine, Palestine, Palestine!

I could not believe that I had finally made it to Palestine. I carried many stories about this place in my heart—stories entangled in emotion, culture, politics, faith, struggle, and hope, and now I was here! Both of my parents’ families came from “my home.” My father’s family came from a fisherman’s town called Yafa. My mother’s family came from a smaller town called Ramleh. Along with 750,000 other Palestinians, my parents and their families escaped to Jordan in 1948 in what was called the Nakba (catastrophe). 50 years later, I was back in Palestine—"my home.” Here, I could even declare the word as much as I wanted: Palestine! Palestine! Palestine! What once could only be whispered in Jordan could now be shouted!

6.2 Back to the concert

I cannot remember the venue exactly, but the space was small. It may have been an auditorium in a public school. The venue was plain. Bare walls and wooden floors amplified echoes of our otherwise discreet footsteps. I remember an enthusiastic, and significantly, large audience seated on nondescript green plastic chairs, filling the room. An all too familiar musty aroma of fog, sweat, and dust drenched my senses. The house lights were turned up and the room was bright. With so many people in the hall, Abu-Yacoub expertly managed to find us two seats. I settled in mine, anxiously but quietly, waiting for the performance.

6.2.1 Interlude

I had just graduated with a masters’ degree in music from the University of Southern California. Working with and in choral music was my passion. While I loved working with Arabic songs and flowing melodies, I found a lot of joy, and quickly fell in love, with the works of Mozart, Brahms, Schubert, Verdi, and more. Melodies of the Romantics mesmerized me, piquing my curiosity about how the phrases of such beautiful melody lines moved through moments of dissonance and resolution. Choral music undeniably became the medium through which I ventured into writing my first arrangement of Arabic music, under the guidance of Morten Lauridsen and my aunt, a life-long music teacher, Samia Ghannoum.
6.3 Back to the concert

I waited eagerly in my seat for what was to come. Much to my surprise, Abu Yacoub walked proudly to the stage and settled himself comfortably on a brown wooden stool. He held a daf in his hand and brought the microphone close to his mouth. Accompanied by a few musicians, he started to sing. His husky, rough, tired voice echoed in the hall. To my recently “Western choral polished” ear, neither his gruff, rasping voice nor his energetic daf playing sounded very pleasant. Be that as it may, Abu Yacoub sang passionately. The atmosphere he created compelled the audience to rise to their feet and join ardently in singing the lyrics. Abu Yacoub sang the first chorus and almost everyone in the hall sang along. The song was undoubtedly familiar to this crowd, but it was the first time I had heard it. It was clearly a song that spoke deeply to many, expressing messages of a united Palestinian struggle. I learned later that a Syrian composer wrote the song, as many other artists from the Levant had composed and sang for Palestine. Halfway through the song, Abu Yacoub modified the song by inserting and naming all the villages that had been destroyed by the occupation. The audience at that point enthusiastically repeated the names of the villages after him, with fervent claps that amplified their intensity. That night, in that concert, I heard a new form of togetherness. To my “choral” ears it was by no means a beautiful blend of sound, but to the ear of my heart, it was a powerful one! This was a protest song, accompanied by heavy drumming on the daf. The tempo was rushed and fast but with a march-like feel. At the same time, the first line of the song (melody and lyrics) invoked in me a sense of humility and compassion. The simple melody moved through four notes, and through this restraint, I was deeply moved.

If my voice departs, your throats (i.e voices) will not...

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28 The text underneath the score employs IPA.
I was moved by the effortlessness of his modest melody. Its uncomplicated, stepwise motion provoked powerful emotions. In contrast to the feverish tempo of the performance, my mind registered this melody as quiet, calm, and somehow meditative. The composer in me found in this poignant melody a voice to express my emotional “Palestinian moment.” I wanted to drown in the deep-seated feelings that began to flow, to immerse myself in something so simple, and yet to my ears, so very beautiful. The composer in my mind and Palestinian in my heart heard a vocal layering to this melody. Later that year, an SATB version for this piece was created.

6.3.1 Sometime after the turn of the century… 2000s, Amman, Jordan

Several artists from the region have performed and recorded “Lao Rahal Soti” since my move to Jordan in 2000. The song was performed in Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon. A few years after, Introducing Dozan29 (a cd produced in 2008) was released, and before I knew it, “Lao Rahal Soti” was downloaded on YouTube with around 25,000 views. It must have resonated with others.

6.4 Spring 2017, Toronto, Canada

A Canadian choir asked me to suggest an Arabic piece that could work under the themes of hope, struggle, and peace. “Lao Rahal Soti” seemed a good fit. I could rewrite the SATB piece for SSAA voicing, rework the transliteration and synopsis, and insert a dedication that read: I

29 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1xWwh5fxNE
dedicate this piece to the Palestinian people in recognition of their ongoing struggle for freedom and dignity.

Once the rework was completed, the conductor invited me to introduce the piece to the choir. I walked into the rehearsal space, ready to introduce the piece. As I entered, the conductor pulled me to the side, asking me to give context to the piece. I introduced the song, shared my Abu Yacoub story and the inspiration behind it. I felt that the children responded beautifully. I sang the solo introduction, which the conductor asked me to repeat while he recorded the melody. Then, with excitement he stood up and told me that he had an epiphany: he knew exactly where he wanted to place the song in the program. Overall, I felt that the piece resonated positively with many choir members that evening—except one. According to the conductor, it was the big $P$ (*Palestine*) word that seemed to shift this chorister’s demeanor in rehearsal. I felt it but said nothing.

If the singer goes (dies), the songs will remain...

6.4.1 A few days later . . . Day 1: Text of silencing

We had an extremely heated debate in the board meeting last night, and while I fought for justice, for hope, and for peace, the board went against the performance of this piece. This has far-reaching implications on so many levels—it shuts out our voices and gives voice to politics and blackmail. Sadly, the political dedication was the motivation behind the whole decision. *(Director, personal communication, Feb. 2019)*
As I read the first sentence, my tears found themselves pouring uncontrollably. I knew where this was heading. Nonetheless, I could not think logically. I was completely shocked and shaken. I did not think this could happen in Canada. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of loss of something or someone. I did not think I was going to feel like this again, not in Canada. I had thought my “broken days” were over. I was clearly mistaken. It felt like a part of my heart was ripped out.

(As the story unfolded, I learned that Mr. Z, the father of one chorister, had influenced the board’s decision.)

6.4.2 Day 2: Emptiness

There were no more tears to beshed. I felt empty. But many questions kept running through my head—not in order, not in a logical manner, but many. How can one man on the board have the power to erase my Palestinian-hood? When will things change? Should I not have dedicated this piece to my roots, my family, and my experience? Aren’t many of the pieces (if not all) performed creations of composers? Aren’t they responses to their surroundings, their ideas, and their narratives? Isn’t that what music is supposed to do—to give one (or many) a voice, especially when it has been silenced? What was the fear? How can one man determine the path of a whole organization?

6.4.3 Day 3: I want to go home…

I want to go home . . . back to my mother’s womb . . . curled up . . . warm . . . safe . . .

I want to go home . . . morning coffee with dad . . . playing tennis . . . and letting me win sometimes . . .

I want to go home . . . even if I am not comfortable walking in the streets with a sleeveless shirt, it’s familiar, it’s known, and expectations are clear . . . I don’t like them . . . but they are clear . . .

I wanted to be unknown and unfamiliar when I came to Toronto, but now I want to go to where everyone knows me and I know them . . . like them or not . . . I know them . . . they know me . . .
I just want to go home . . .

\[ \text{tuj-mæs li’lu bil mæk-su-ra wil bit-sæ-ni} \]

bringing together the broken and suffering heart...

6.4.4 Day 4: The un-silenced conductor

The conductor of the choir was determined to resolve this issue. He wanted to re-program the piece and decided to face the board. He asked me to send a letter so he could present it to the board. My letter read,

As I told the choir during rehearsal last Friday, “Lao Rahal Soti” resonated with me during my work in Palestine. It is written by Samih Shqueir, who is a Syrian composer. It is not a martyr’s song [1st assumption]. The full version is a protest song (not only directed to the Israeli government but many leaders in the region, including Arab leaders, who have betrayed the people). The first part of the song contains a beautiful melody and calls for the right to be heard.

I identify myself as an Arab, a woman, a Palestinian, a Christian, and a musician, but I was raised in a post-colonial, male-dominated, Muslim and Jordanian culture—needless to say, a very complex culture in which I had to work very hard to navigate, discover and learn about who I am, i.e., my identity. In this complex setting, many dis-abling feelings were instilled within me, the foremost feeling was fear—fear to express, fear to be my fullest self, fear to cross barriers of difference and more. In my cultural context, fear was instilled in us as human beings regardless of ethnicity, faith, gender, or political standing. Arranging music gives me permission to understand better my own pain and our shared human struggles, and to get past my fear so I could again feel fully human.
A few months ago, I was invited to workshop the SATB version of “Lao Rahal Soti” in Portland. The conductor requested I add a dedication in the score, and that I dedicate this piece to his choir. After going back and forth about the matter, I told him that if I had to dedicate this piece to anyone, I would dedicate it to the Palestinian people, my family, neighbors of all faiths and communities that are impacted by the crises in the area. The dedication appears in the score to honor my roots, my past; it appears in the score as a call for hope, and as a dream for people to come together in a shared humanity.

The discomfort that arose when introducing this piece to [the choir] came to me as a surprise. I understand that [this choir] is an inclusive space, one in which singers work together for a common musical goal, learn about each other, and gain respect for each other regardless of our differences. I uprooted my family and came to this beautiful country because I believe in my heart that in Toronto, the most cosmopolitan city in Canada—a country recognized as a model for pluralism across the world—I would be able to co-exist with others and exchange stories without judgment. Canada is place where we can make it possible for each other to be heard and be full human beings. Like many pieces of music we perform, my intention and hope for “Lao Rahal Soti” is that while situated in the local, the piece will resonate with shared, universal human struggles, enable comfort and inspire hope for a peaceful future.

Sincerely, Shireen Abu-Khader

If my voice departs…

6.4.5 Unresolved anger and more . . .

If I had to be rational, this technically was not my battle. This was the director’s fight. How was this incident going to affect the journey, the vision and mission of the choir? At the end of the day, other choirs could sing this piece. But this was not the issue. My anger went beyond which choir sang it. It really did not matter. I wanted to understand why I was struggling with this so much. Yes, I was a victim of an abusive prejudice, but if I was strong and confident in my Palestinian-hood, why did this affect me so severely? Why was I so angry? Where did these feelings stem from and most importantly, how can I grow as an educator, a musician, a mother,
and as a human being? My feelings fluctuated between numbness, empowerment, fear, idealism, and reality.

In my journal I wrote to the board member who denied the piece:

Dear Mr. Z,

I am a woman, and to some, my womanhood is a threat . . .

I am an Arab and to many unfortunately these days that is a threat . . .

I am a Christian and to other faiths, that too seems like a threat . . .

I am a Levantine and though many will not know where that is, the unknown is a threat . . .

I am a Palestinian and to many that's just another place, but to you I see is a definite threat . . .

I am a victim of an occupied land, quite powerless and unable, but surprisingly I still pose a threat . . .

Do not be afraid. I believe we have more in common than you think:

Do you love the shades of Autumn as I do?

My favorite is the day before all the yellow leaves fall . . . they are ready but as if they hug the tree one last time before they depart . . . a vulnerability that is stunningly beautiful.

Do you enjoy coffee or tea in the morning?

Mine has always been coffee, but I have read and been told that tea might be the healthier option . . . "The Spice is Right" is my favorite flavor these days!

What is your preferred season?

Oh . . . Summer for me! Especially when I hide my feet under the sand and the warmth of the sun embraces them with the exact temperature needed.
Do you love your children? I am sure you do, but do you love them so much that you would do anything for them or say anything to them? Will you allow them to see your vulnerability, your own fears, and dilemmas? What about mistakes? Will you let them see your tears, apologize for wrongdoing, and let them know that through an open heart, vulnerability, weakness, and courage to admit where you have failed, they become stronger?

Thinking about this, I fear, that we are different after all . . .

There were ample opportunities to solve this issue, but it was very clear to me that Mr. Z would not. First, there was the assumption that this was a martyr’s song, and then it was about the dedication. He also claimed it was too political. As an educator, I knew there was so much to be gained by resolving this, specifically for the students and the organization as a whole; however, all suggestions presented to solve this situation were received with strong resistance. No matter what, it was clear that the piece would not be performed.

“Shireen, what would happen if you randomly ran into Mr. Z? Would you approach him and have a conversation? Do you think things would change?” my friend asked.

“I don’t know! I replied.

I know that the universe had presented an opportunity for me to connect, meet and/or talk to Mr. Z, but I just could not. I saw him a few times at concerts, and I thought deeply of my friend’s question. Maybe I should find the courage to approach him? Maybe if he looked at me, he would realize that I am also a human being. But the biggest question that followed was, why did I seek validation from someone who was challenged by my very existence? I saw him more than once, but all I did was walk past him with eyes looking away. I constantly felt unsettled, and a part of me almost felt at fault in all of this!

Why couldn’t I feel confident, walk past him with head held high and strong? Why couldn’t I see him as the one who was limited in his thoughts? I gave him permission to make me feel somehow unworthy. One limited, discriminatory man was able to have power over my existence! How could that be? I knew better. In music we understood better—or is it because the
Palestinians have felt defeated for so long (over 70 years now) that one more confrontation could have validated that loss and made me feel worse?

6.5 Summer 2018, Toronto, Canada

The director and I maintained a positive, strong relationship. In him, I found a friend and colleague whose heart was passionate about educating and music making. In an email where he expressed moving forward, I shared my hesitancy, saying that although I held no ill feeling towards him personally, I could not work with the organization. The issue was not resolved and therefore, my vision and that of the organization was not aligned.

Before I knew it, I received an email from the conductor arranging a time and a place to meet with him and the head of the board. A part of me was happy that this was finally happening, but I was also in a different space emotionally, and I was not sure how I would respond. I recall feeling numb, and in a way, indifferent.

It was now two years later, and I was no longer angry or held any resentment. Maybe that was good, as it gave me clarity and perspective; my conversation would not stem from an emotional place. I practiced different scenarios out loud at home. It’s something I do often: play out the situation, creating different possibilities for conversations and questions. Whether preparing for a class or a presentation, practicing at home helps me articulate sentences, build my confidence, and hear my voice. Even though I rarely remember what I practiced, I have faith that it’s stored somewhere in my brain and, depending on the circumstances or environment, it will unveil as it should.

We agreed to meet for breakfast early one morning. They both made the accommodation to meet close to my home, so that I did not have to drive downtown. I have been with my family to this restaurant numerous times. It was a familiar space. But as I walked into the restaurant, I felt nervous. For a moment and only a moment, I was intensely overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and fear. I walked in; the director was already there. I was relieved that the head of the Board hadn’t arrived yet. I had time to collect my feelings and calm down. I had seen the Board chair several times during rehearsals, but we never spoke. We only greeted each other in passing with a smile or a nod. The conductor and I sat and spoke for a while until he arrived. As he
walked over, both the director and I stood to say hello. I walked over and gave him a hug. I was thankful that this was finally happening.

Across from me sat the director, and the Board chair sat beside me. After some small chitchat, the director started recapping what happened and as he spoke, the Board Chair nodded in agreement. After this, both the director and the Board Chair apologized for what had happened. My emotions surfaced once again. My eyes watered, and for a moment my heart ached again; however, I did not hold any kind of animosity towards anyone or anything. I was surprised by how all the anger that once surrounded my feelings was no longer present.

After acknowledging the apology and thanking them, the educator in me surfaced. We talked about how such incidents might be avoided in the future, and how we could turn them into learning opportunities. This was exciting, and I was happy to talk about possibilities and solutions; however, throughout our breakfast, I had the impression that being in this meeting was not easy for the Board Chair. I admired his courage for showing up, as I am sure he too was faced with pressures regarding this issue. When he went to the washroom, I said to the conductor, “I feel his coming here was hard for him.” The conductor looked at me and smiled. As the Board Chair sat back into his chair, I asked him how he was with all of this. He reiterated what the director said. He also shared that after he told Mr. Z about re-programing the piece, his response was that as long as his family did not sing it, that was fine.

I ached…

Mr. Z robbed my voice from being heard, and I also feel that he cheated the children of the opportunity to sing “Lao Rahal Soti,” which ironically fit the title of the initial program. I was saddened to face his reality; why refuse a conversation? Was he too afraid? How do we reconcile? How do we acknowledge what happened, and how do we move forward? Although I had hoped for a different outcome, what came next was much more powerful.

In agreement with the board, the director decided to shed light on many other lost voices. He decided to program a full concert for many voices (including mine) that have been silenced and show support through the music. Not only was this about a concert, but this move gave an opportunity for the organization to make space for those silenced voices, and now it stands as an exemplary model for other organizations to follow. There was joy in this!
6.6 Discussion

6.6.1 Identity in musical interpretations

Singing boosts a feeling of self-esteem. That’s what music therapy research tells us and self-esteem gives a person courage. When the person carries no weapons but songs into a violent political struggle, he needs lots of courage. (Šmidchens, 2013, 3.44’)

6.6.1.2 Becoming the music

For me, creating or recreating pieces of music is inspired by my interaction with the world. When I draw themes about my own musical interpretations, they are almost always drawn from a place of resonance. “Lao Rahal Soti” stands as a loud protest song. I was drawn to the simplicity of its melody; its lyrics resonated as I was in my “home,” Palestine, for the first time, and the performance carried a powerful energy that triggered an intensified emotion. That experience took shape and was translated into the music; I wanted to explore how a simple melody might give me permission to feel the loss of Palestine, and at the same time carry the energy of hope with it. The choice of repeating the lyrics four times was intentional: to stand in resistance to those who think and feel differently.

Delving deeper and perhaps more universally, when I heard the song, I absorbed the message, the atmosphere, and in its resonance; the tune entered my heart/body. As it engulfed me, I was able to re-hear or re-sound it in my choral ear. I heard a new possibility for harmonizing, so that the loud protest song was no longer loud. Through the music, I created a new possibility for harmonizing, so that the words did not stand alone against (through its protest), but they stood amidst, and they stood within. In that choral version, I believed more people would hear and feel God’s light in my heart and soul calling for justice.

Understanding that Arabic words carry not only meanings but emotions, I looked deeply into my cultural Arabic language. The scale or mode (maqam) of “Lao Rahal Soti” is in major (‘ājam). In Arabic, the word maqam carries several meanings; it refers to the location or position of the starting note, its resting place, and in my case, where peace may stand. The maqam is
constructed by fragmenting its notes into sections (ajnas). The first section of ‘ājam is divided into 5 notes, focusing on what we know in the west as the tonic and the fifth. A [maqam] scale is made up of a sequence of specific notes; these notes produce melodies that evoke emotions and feelings. Because “Lao Rahal Soti’s” text revolves around the five melody notes, I concluded that it is compositionally associated with the Arabic form ‘ājam. The emotion of maqam ‘ājam carries similar connotations to the western major scale—namely, an association with happy emotions, “bright, happy, majestic, pride, loftiness, national anthem, strength and seriousness” (Powers, 2005, par.4).

In Arabic, the word ‘ājam means foreigner. A person who is not from the region is considered “‘ājam.” This discovery makes me wonder if the “foreignness” of the mode played a role in giving voice to my own silence. Even as I identify strongly with my Levantine identity, I cannot deny my journey in the west. Besides having English as a strong second language in school, I studied for about 10 years in the United States, between my bachelors’ and masters’ degrees, and my musical education was also embedded in Western sounds and tonalities. This “foreignness” met both my Western learning and Eastern heart and brought about a culmination of my Hawiyeh—Shireen’s identity.

As I ponder on all these points, I wonder if this arrangement was inspired by something higher than myself—a spiritual calling, if you will. It is as if at the point of experiencing the performance, the original song’s musical, cultural, linguistic, theoretical, and emotional context was fragmented into the universe, and the divinity of all its pieces retranslated into a new representation (arrangement) of myself, bringing deeper understanding or feeling to my identity. The music becomes me and I the music.

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another . . . every internal experience ends up on the boundary . . . “To be” means to communicate . . . “To be” means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary. (Bahktin, 1981, p. 287)

Sharing the music with the choir was a way of revealing myself to the world in order to become myself. In their singing and with the acceptance and help of the choir, it gave me a voice and a
place in the world. The unfortunate incident of Mr. Z’s negation of the music became a negation of me and my place in the world.

6.6.2 Silencing and fear

Ajayi says, “Being yourself can be a revolutionary act” (Ajayi, 2017, 9:21). I might go a step further to say that my being in and through “Lao Rahal Soti” was somehow a revolutionary act for Mr. Z; for the Board to make such a drastic decision with an unwillingness to logically consider, balance, or listen to the other side, was difficult to understand.

I worked for two years in the Edward Said Music Conservatory in Ramallah (1998-2000), a conservatory that privileges the silent voice of Palestinians. I commuted between Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, teaching children’s choirs, youth orchestras, refugee camps, college students, and several other projects. I do not think I have ever enjoyed teaching as much as I did during those two years. I thrived in my teaching, but I was also passionate about being in Palestine. I felt I belonged. I was anchored emotionally in a way I had not experienced before. I heard stories of my Palestinian-thood from both sides of my family. My father talked to me about fishing in Yafa, his uncle’s amazing soccer skills, his father’s self-made auto-parts business. One strong recollection was the joy my father expressed when his father built their new home—only to leave it 9 months after living in it—because of the Nakba. My mother’s stories, on the other hand, dwelled around her mother, who came from a family of nine children in a small town, Ramleh. She shared her grandfather’s jewellery making skills and how her father was madly smitten with her mother when he first saw her. He handed her secret love letters every time he saw her. As these narratives played out in my mind, for many years I pondered about what it would mean to return to “my real home” one day. Regardless of what home means (or does not) in my head, the first time I stood on the beach in Yafa looking at the horizon, with a scent of the ocean breezing through my breath, I felt a sense of belonging I had not experienced before. I was “home.”

30 Nakba means catastrophe and refers to the violence leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, which saw the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages.
When Daniel Barenboim approached the conservatory and asked for cooperation in providing Palestinian musicians to join the Divan\textsuperscript{31} orchestra, the conservatory refused. Until a just solution is given to the Palestinian people, music making cannot change the reality on the ground. No matter how musicians of opposing political views can get along in “music making,” the reality is that after the music making, nothing on the ground changes, making coming together for a rehearsal a momentary getaway from the Palestinians’ reality. The stance taken by the Edward Said Conservatory served as a form of resistance in refusing the cooperation. Barenboim responded after the Gaza bombing in 2013: “In the [\textit{Divan}] orchestra you have what you don’t have on the ground, and that is complete equality . . . that’s not the case on the ground” (Marr, 2013, 22:00).

Until the institution in Canada censored the piece, I had disagreed with the Conservatory’s decision because I genuinely believed that music can and should be able to cross barriers, build bridges. In reading how the “Singing Revolution”\textsuperscript{32} gained independence, a political and just solution through music seemed possible; however, through my story, I was able to see things not only through a music educator’s lens but also through the lens of the victim, and now I understand fully the conservatory’s decision.

On a larger scale, I believe that the choir incident in Canada became more about shattering a universal hope rather than a Palestinian one. My whole identity was wrapped up in this composition, including my effort as a composer. It was as if I went to war, made peace as peacemaker, and created a peaceful product—a metaphor for a peaceful society. So, when Mr. Z said “no,” it rocked the very core of my belief in harmonizing society. We have given so much power to words that the words become isolated from the sonic power of revolution. In the Arab context, poetry was historically highly esteemed, and it was accompanied with sound. Reciting the piece summoned up for me justice and hope and brought back the messages of an ethical call

\textsuperscript{31} In 1999, Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said founded the West-Eastern Divan as a workshop for Israeli, Palestinian and other Arab musicians. Within the workshop, individuals who had only interacted with each other through the prism of war found themselves living and working together as equals. As they listened to each other during rehearsals and discussions, they traversed deep political and ideological divides.

\textsuperscript{32} The Singing Revolution (1987 -1991), a period which was important to the nations of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia in achieving independence. During the singing revolution period, songs were widely used as a way to preserve national identity and mobilize independent movements in the three countries (Sawe, 2017).
to peace, oneness, and unity. The choral sound, with its metaphorical layers, allows for bringing the message of unity. I heard this song, I received it; it summoned up something more profound, calling for peace, justice, and heart.

Edward Said stated,

We can break out of the confinement . . . to use the phrase from Foucault . . . and enter a community where we are as the others are. The important thing is to overcome separation. . . . Separation is an instrument of power designed to keep the inferior inferior, and I want to overcome that as much as possible, through music, through literature, and personal experience. (Njoenka, 2012, 33:00)

Two reasons were shared with me as to why this piece was problematic. The first was the claim that this was a martyr’s song, and the second was the political dedication. Even though I felt uncomfortable removing the dedication, I challenged the board and said that I would remove it if that would mean performing it, but there was no response. I also requested a meeting to converse with the board; unfortunately, it never happened.

After verifying that the piece was not a martyr’s song, I started to feel that the issues that were raised as problematic were excuses to avoid dealing with the problem that stood at the heart of it all. The director called it the “P word,” referring to Palestine. I wonder if having a conversation with me might have meant that I existed, and that humanizing a Palestinian would have gone against many doctrines that he had possibly believed throughout his life. I knew nothing about Mr. Z, but I assumed that he had a Zionist worldview. For him to struggle with this song, threaten the organization (in writing to the director), and refuse any conversation regarding this matter showed that he, too, struggled, but did not open the door for what might challenge his

33 Zionism, created by Theodor Herzl, centered on the belief that all Jews belong to a single nation, and that they should establish a sovereign state to return to. The first World Zionist Congress occurred in 1897 to discuss homeland options; such as Alaska and Uganda, but Jerusalem, in Palestine was the area that held the most significance for Jews. Although Zionism has given a homeland to a long-oppressed community, it has also flared territorial tempers in the Middle East, and contributed to the current Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
belief system. Why else would there be such resistance? To my Palestinian mind, there was no other explanation.

Zionist thinkers claimed the biblical territory and recreated, indeed reinvented it as the cradle of their new nationalist movement . . . For many Zionists Palestine was not even an “occupied” land when they first arrived there in 1882, but rather an “empty” one: the native Palestinians who lived there were largely invisible to them . . . Nothing, neither rocks nor Palestinians, was to stand in the way of the national “redemption” of the land the Zionist movement coveted. (Pappé, 2015, p.11)

This history of recreating and reinventing has undoubtedly been successful. I wonder if Mr. Z is the product of this philosophy.

Anxious about what is happening to Israelis, Gideon Levy, columnist for the daily Haaretz explains, “. . . the Israeli society is by far today too brainwashed . . . it’s a society which lives in denial totally disconnected with reality . . . because people who lose connections with reality might be very dangerous either to themselves or society . . .“ (National Screen Conference, 2015, 8:12).

He goes on to say that three principles enable Israelis to live in peace with the Palestinian occupation,

A . . . most Israelis, if not all of them deeply believe that we are the chosen people and if we are the chosen people, we have the right to do whatever we want. B . . . there never in history of an occupation where the occupier presented himself as the victim. Not only the victim but the ONLY victim around. This allows them to live in peace because they are the victims . . . the third . . . the most crucial one and the worst one . . . dangerous . . . is the systematic dehumanization of the Palestinians which enables us Israelis to live in peace . . . because if they are not human beings like us then there is not really a question of human rights. (Levy, 2015, 15:03).

Be it the continuous ethnic cleansing for a “religious demographic majority . . . apartheid” (Komando, 2018, 3:49), dehumanization of Palestinians, or presenting themselves as the only
victims, it was clear that a conversation with Mr. Z was not an option. I also questioned why initially the organization took a dormant role in this. What was the underlying issue?

_The enemy is fear. We think it is hate; but it is really fear._ -Ghandi

I genuinely believe that the crux of our prejudice lies within our fears. I struggle to find definitions that box fear within a specific category. Fear is powerful, and its multi-directional effects are fragmented into endless spaces—towards oneself and towards the “other.” Whether it is fear of the other, fear of the self, fear of all that could shake one’s belief system or institution and so much more, fear can paralyze one’s thoughts and actions. We as human beings are very fragile, and much courage is needed to walk through one’s fear. What was Mr. Z going to lose if his daughter sang the song? What was the danger for him and why such resistance in allowing musical expression? As an educator, I longed and wished for a different outcome, but maybe his fear was too powerful; however, I would like to think that had the Board refuted his threats, especially in Toronto, a city that promotes pluralism, a conversation could have taken place, and regardless of the outcome, would have been a step in the right direction. If Mr. Z’s son sang the piece, he could have made his own choice about how he felt. As an educator and promoter of peace, I was eager and hopeful— I believed if his son sang the piece, this could have shifted his thinking. Sadly, his negation of the piece became a negation of his son’s own decision-making and independence, as well as the decision-making and independence of the other singers.

I, too, am familiar with fear. I have lived most of my life in a culture that promoted that feeling through its policies, environment, government, and religion. Although I consider my upbringing to be liberal, as a woman I was affected by society’s male dominance and influence. I had to find a balance between rehearsing with men, working late night rehearsals with men, and leading men, which at times caused distress.

I remember years ago I was conducting the National Music Conservatory Orchestra in a “Night at the Opera” program in Amman’s outdoors historical Citadel. In addition to _Dozan wa Awtar_

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choir, the soprano and baritone guest soloists, there was a large orchestra comprised mostly of men, fewer women, and some students, all of whom lived in Jordan. This was not the first time I had conducted the orchestra, but this was a difficult program. We had two dress rehearsals, and the orchestra had struggled with some of the pieces. Upon the advice of the director, recorded CDs were provided for all of the music, in the hope that the musicians would listen to the repertoire to aid their performance. I placed the CDs on the stands, and as we finished the rehearsal, I spoke (with a lot of diplomacy) about the time issue, requesting for some to listen in order for the performance to run smoothly. After I finished, the first male violist stood up, took the CD, lifted it up, and with an angry voice said, “If you think that I am stupid enough to listen to this, you must be out of your mind!”

He then threw the CD on the ground and walked away. Whether he meant to act as a role model or not, what followed was hurtful, as I watched most of the men in the room, one by one, hold the CD and throw it on the ground. I was crushed by this incident. I was still young and inexperienced at the time and did not know how to respond. I just remember finding the washroom, locking myself in, sitting on the floor, and quietly breaking down with tears.

Those types of incidents were a constant reminder of the environment in which I lived and by which I was challenged. I was continuously being pushed to question whether what I was doing (i.e. being a musician) was the “right thing.” Having a “normal” 8-to-5 job was an easier career, but for me, it was in being a musician that I felt freedom and was able to have a voice. It was the space where I could be who and what I wanted to be without fear. The fact that I was amongst the very few in the country with a masters’ degree in this “specialized field” of choral music meant that I could speak from a place of knowledge and leadership. It was also the space where I could be a Palestinian unapologetically. The choir’s demographic included a number of

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35 **Citadel** sits on the highest hill in Amman, Jordan - Jebel Al Qala’a (about 850m above sea level), and is the site of ancient Rabbath-Ammon. Occupied since the Bronze Age, it's surrounded by a 1700m-long wall, which was rebuilt many times during the Bronze and Iron Ages, as well as the Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad periods. Amongst the Citadel’s striking sights are the Temple of Hercules and the Ummayad Palace.
Palestinians, and through our programs, we were able to show solidarity with Palestine in numerous fundraising concerts.

To presume that music and politics are not connected would be naïve. For my identity, they are forever intertwined. Growing up, in our schools we were required to sing a lot of songs about unity, peace, freedom, and justice as often as folklore, sacred, and even secular, pop, or contemporary. Anyone growing up in the region could attest to the media’s graphic and uncensored images of war, death, and more. It was a frequent happening; more so because I was a Palestinian, and the Palestinian’s struggle was my struggle. To separate the two would be unreasonable, akin to censoring an African American singer from experiencing a Negro Spiritual amongst numerous pieces written in dedication to something. To think that living in Jordan, surrounded by an occupation from the west (Palestinian / Israeli), invasion from the east (Iraq), civil war from the north (Lebanon), and war from the northeast (Syria) and not have music that spoke of justice, peace, unity, freedom, and more would be naïve if not ridiculous. For Mr. Z, or the organization, to deny the reality in which I lived was unfair and unjust. Although my dedication was personal, the lyrics were universal. I also believed that the lyrics genuinely carried a sincere intention of hope. “Music is imbued … carries politics —because the history of people—carries the narratives, oppression, victimhood, in an implicit way, it can be a trigger for fear” (Massad, 2003 p. 47).

I do not believe I was looking for acknowledgement or recognition in sharing this song, but I would be lying if I said that I did not want to be heard. Silencing me crushed my spirit momentarily. The opportunity to explore my indigenous identity as a Palestinian would have given me an “equal place” in the world, even if it was for a mere three minutes. For three minutes it could have “disrupted the grand [Israeli] narrative of power and subjugation, it would have made visible [Palestinian] history, and it could have given cultural reclamation and recognition to [Palestine]” (adapted from Dolloff, 2019).

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36 I recently asked a question on Facebook to name pieces dedicated to something and the list was around 50 pieces. Examples included Prayer for the Children dedicated to the children affected by the ethnic cleansing that took place during the Bosnian War, Inscription of Hope, and Gorecki’s Syphony of Sorrowful Songs for the Holocaust, Beneath the African Sky written for survivors of Rwandan refugee camps, and Aurora for the Aurora Theater shooting.
Moving forward from this, how do we represent the “other” in music, and who has the power to decide whose stories get told or which music gets to be heard? These are important questions, and I believe it is our job as educators to live through the path of music, absorbing its value internally, regardless of our own personal biases.

6.6.3 Reclaiming of voice in music education

I realize that my story tells only one narrative of political history. This is not the first time that readers will hear a story of prejudices, and it would be naïve for me to assume that my story stands out as a special case. But sharing my story, I hope “allows us to story a future marked by compassion, by solidarity and communion, by change and justice and by hope” (Ellis, 2013, p. 686)

*The most important qualification [for a conductor] may well be called “keeping the faith of one’s calling.”.*

– Lara Hoggard (Hoggard cited in Webb et al., 1993, p.110)

I would like to believe that the vision of any institution is a sacred one. If an organization claims a commitment “to diversity and inclusivity in all its work,” then to whom is it accountable if it breaks that commitment? “A great teacher and devoted musician can successfully cause everyone to try a little harder and achieve a little more” (Webb et al., 1993, p.111) Initially, I feel that the conductor was in shock over what had happened and struggled to understand this unjust action. But the conductor’s relentless quest for understanding and justice was apparent, and it is in his true calling and heart for equal, just, and inclusive music education that the story unfolded with hope.

Greene (1995) advocates for the “relevance of art in overcoming the inability to see others” (p. 136). I believe that music education “can open spaces for difficult discussion” (Dolloff, 2019). Toronto is not Palestine. Because Canada is a secular country, it can provide equality on the ground; it is a city where equality for all is protected. If the board had refuted Mr.Z’s threats from the beginning, a conversation might have taken a place. There were two possible scenarios for this: Mr. Z might have pulled his son from the choir or allowed her to stay in. The first option would have not affected anyone except his daughter; the latter option might have brought a different understanding about the situation.
I have the privilege of teaching a “Music of the Levant” module at the University of Toronto. In this module, I use musical examples and stories of the Levant (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine). Through the introduction of several genres of music—classical, religious, to contemporary and political, students learn about the region from a Levantine perspective. My first year teaching this module presented a few challenges for me. The primary one was dealing with my fear as a Palestinian. In presenting music from Palestine, I was bound to introduce songs of freedom and justice. I remember feeling nervous about presenting a musical video showing uncensored images of Palestinian children living under occupation. This was important, as it was intended to bring a completely new perspective to the media’s narrative; however, I was scared.

After receiving the permission and support of my teacher, I gathered my courage and asked a close friend to be in class with me during the showing of the song. There were a number of Jewish students, including a student from Israel in the class. After the showing, one Jewish student came up to me and said, “I just want to thank you and tell you that after this I think I need to have a different conversation with my father.” I remember feeling overjoyed and thinking, yes! This is what needs to happen! If we as educators are looking for ways to “open the spaces for difficult discussion,” (Dolloff, 2019) then this experience represents one such way.

Ruben Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) suggests, “educators are called upon to play a central role in constructing the conditions for a different kind of encounter, an encounter that both opposes ongoing colonization and that seeks to heal the social, cultural, and spiritual ravages of colonial history” (p. 42).

Music education can be a powerful medium for both separation and inclusivity. For two years after the incident, this story of music education played a role of separation, both physical and emotional; it separated Mr. Z, his son, the choir, and the organization from the composer. I struggled to feel comfortable in the organization’s premises. Whether or not it was about walking in the organization’s premises or attending their concerts, it was difficult. I also think that this incident separated the choir from Mr. Z’s son. Mr. Z’s son left the choir after that season, as it was his last year, leaving him without a chance for the conversation to occur. Nonetheless, the ending of the story was about inclusivity. The conductor’s continuous pursuit for justice and inclusivity was present. He designed a whole concert to give voice to those who have been silenced. I was nervous about rehearsing the piece with the same singers again. I was still not sure how the story would end; but as I opened my email today, I read a message sent by the
conductor that contained the following sentence: “I also wanted to talk about your piece—and whether you would want to come in to work on it with the kids! I want to do this and do hope you do too!! I am what I do!!’ (Director, personal communication, Feb 2019.)

As I read his words, my eyes watered; I sensed a warm release of emotions and comfort. Even *lao rahal soti* (if my voice departed), *their throats* (voices) *did not*...
Chapter 7 Summary, Discussion, and Implications

Throughout this dissertation, I have told my stories immersed in music, through music, and beyond music. I chose stories that deeply resonated and lived within the shadows of my memory for many years—some shared in fragments, others in bigger portions, but at one time unshared, lived in silence and fear. The telling of these stories opened a door of insights, healing, knowledge, and growth, but the most important was the door of courage through and with writing; I was able to narrate and unleash all that was eager to be written and ultimately find tremendous joy in the writing and reflecting. Initially, courage was scarce, but it unfolded during the process of writing. “What” to include, “how” to include, and “if” to include questions continually directed my story telling, and within the guidance and safety of the academic environment, I was able to push my boundaries through the narration of my stories.

The process of writing and reflecting was at the heart of all three stories. The initial recounting of “When Silent Night was No Longer the Narrative” brought tears, healing, and understanding. The difficulties of living in my native society had resulted in a complete geographical uprooting of my family. The story was painful, traumatic, and shook a complete belief system that lay within the power of music making. Music became meaningless and powerless. As a Jordanian Palestinian already struggling with my identity and my thoughts of home, the move to Canada transported the notion of home bringing about a new existence, still undefined; but what once was called home now lies in a different space, one that is ungrounded, unanchored. It floats untouched, moving amongst the clouds, breathing and free. “Winning Gold” stemmed from a different but exciting resonance. I was eager to understand why the concert stirred powerful emotions to many of the singers. Having conducted several moving events, singing this particular repertoire in Sochi brought about a deeper connection to one another and music—it was different; it was special. More importantly, I began to wonder how I might learn from this knowledge and apply it to other concerts. Not only was the concert itself special, but the mere movement during the events proved to be challenging. This had not been anticipated, but it proved crucial in the growth of this Levantine choir. Lastly was “Reclaiming Silence,” an incident that motivated and inspired the writing. Unlike the other two stories that were pulled from memory, this story was written as it occurred. For a piece to be denied from performance...
because of a dedication was an appalling matter to me. The realization that politics and censorship is found in music regardless of location, again opened my eyes to the reality of how the world functions. This story challenged an organization and their director to rethink and reassess their vision and what it truly means to be an inclusive group of singers.

With time and introspective reflection, the stories gave balance to my understanding of life. For a long time, the stories were unknown, lived within and judged accordingly. I was the retainer, the seeker, and the sole entity in the realization of the stories. Without the writing and reading process, the ego was the sole representative. Autoethnography made space for “unpretentious” reflection, bringing forward the elements of empathy and love. For a long time during the “Reclaiming Silence” experience, I was angry and resentful. I could not understand the prejudicial act that had occurred. The writing gave me time and depth into the understanding; it supported my reconciliation of the matter. The same applied to “When Silent Night was No Longer the Narrative.” My anger towards the country and the system that carried out this horrific act towards my family came to a quiet place after reading and re-reading the stories. By pulling apart the story and reflecting on the injustice that had occurred, I have built a deeper understanding, supported and more knowledgeable. Now that I understand how the power of writing can bring such depth and empathy to one’s knowledge, growth, and reconciliation, I believe that the act of story telling should be a part of everyone’s life journey.

My research was guided by the following queries:

1. How does music function in socio-political global contexts as a means for understanding ourselves in local contexts?
2. How has music played a role in reconciling multiple identities and connecting people of disparate backgrounds and experience?
3. How has music played a role in disconnecting people (including myself) through the socio-political forces that at times may have been too strong?

In this chapter, I return to my questions, seeking insight:
7.1 How does music function in socio-political global contexts as a means of understanding ourselves in local contexts?

*Our humanity is realized in the sounds we make and hear*  
(Street, 2012, p.144).

To be able to answer this question with respect to the stories, it is important to look at what local and global mean. Inquiring from both a Western and Eastern perspective, it becomes significant to draw this answer from an Arab musician standpoint. As an initial instinct, I looked at these words from a geographical perspective. Does a geographical frame of body determine the local or global socio-political context? How do they differ from one region to the other? Are global and local really different, especially in the context of this question?

According to the Merriam-Webster (2019) dictionary, *local* is “characterized by or relating to position in space: having a definite spatial form” (Merriam-Webster, 2019), and “Local from the Late Latin *localis* ‘pertaining to a place’ and from Latin *locus* (place or spot)” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). *Global*, on the other hand, relates to “involving the entire world” and “Worldwide” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). It is "spherical," from *globe* + -al., meaning "worldwide, universal, pertaining to the whole globe of the earth" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). In looking at what sets the meanings apart, the difference lies simply in the geographical size: local consists of a definite spatial form, making it smaller than global; however, looking at locality from a universal perspective or globally to locality can be relative, a matter of perception. As a musician, my stance in music making embraces togetherness, unity, energy, expressivity, bridging of gaps, and is unbounded. It carries a universal ideology or in this definition, a spherical one with no fixed form; however, locality to the Arab musician comes with dynamic political, environmental, and sociological cultural meanings, deeply rooted in the day-to-day continuously unpredictable events of the region.

In Arabic music, the word *maqam* (mode) means place, location, or position. In this case, it is particular to the note on which a piece starts or rests. Each note has a name, and the note upon which it rests or begins is reflective and determines the mood or emotion of that particular *maqam*. For example, the location of *Bayat* (a name of a mode) rests on the note D (*Dokah*), and the mode reflects celebration, folksongs, and others vernacular music. At the same time, the location of *Saba* rests on the note E (*Sigah*) and portrays extreme sadness, loss, nostalgia, and
similar emotions. For the Arab and musician in me, location and emotion are linked, related, and interconnected. It is from this lens that I choose to answer the first question.

For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the aesthetics of music was intimately linked to ethical judgment and social order. Although he echoed Plato and Aristotle in viewing music in moral terms and according it social importance, what he added was a “sense of music’s relationship to identity and emotion, and their place in the formation of human society” (Street, 2012, p.144). Similar to the maqam’s provocation of emotion, for Rousseau, music also articulates emotions: “melody expresses plaints, cries of suffering or of joy, threats, moans” (Rousseau, 1997 p. 287). Through this lens, I found emotion and location to be very connected. Whether or not one chooses to look at the words global and local as two distinctly different locations, music and its power directly generate feelings making “the world present” (Dugan & Strong, 2001, p. 349), thus making it difficult to see them as two separate “locations” but rather as one differing in size and emotion. In looking at music making specifically with a choir, I am not sure that the actual geographical location plays a part in music’s power as much as does the actual community singing together, regardless of location. It is true that every local place, e.g. Canada, Jordan, Palestine, often associate music making with its immediate community of singers, environment, seasons, and their specific socio-political contexts, but if teaching a universal ideology, then how does one deny the universal context of the world in the locality of teaching? I feel that this is where music educators may fall short, because it is a difficult task. It is in acquiring knowledge, having difficult conversations, and putting ego to the side that universality in one’s locality or locality in universality is possible.

Location may play a part in freedom of expression. I believe that in the presence of intense political and socio-political struggle, location may play a role in the ease, clarity, and safety of expression. Having a safe space to express oneself freely may contribute to a better, or maybe faster, understanding of oneself and the “other.”

One may draw on sameness of identity (i.e., the collective and wider reaching, possibly global) to the personal identity (i.e., local). There may be similarity in the creation of dynamics of ebbs and flows. All stories in this dissertation were drawn from specific socio-political situations (i.e., a collective), and all three resonated in understanding oneself (i.e., local). On the other hand, all stories were drawn from a personal understanding of identity (local), and all three resulted in
understanding the context in which music educators are where we globally stand. This means one always needs the other in order to build understanding; projection of personal identity (i.e., again local) and its perception by others are two sides of the same coin, intertwined because it is hard to have one without the other. In regard to the stories, whether or not it was the choice of repertoire, movement of the choir, the Palestinian identity found within a piece of music, or a traumatic experience forced by the government that led to abandon music altogether, politics lay at the heart of all stories.

Two of the stories specifically took place outside Jordan (my local context): “Winning Gold” and “Reclaiming Silence.” Both incidents occurred outside the Jordanian local context. “Winning Gold” took place in Russia and “Reclaiming Silence” in Canada. I draw on both Canada and the European choral organization which hosted the festival in Sochi, as they both stem from a Western framework of thinking.

7.1.1 Hearing the world as I sound

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible (Attali, 1985, p. 3).

Writing these stories has opened my eyes to what it meant to be a “Palestinian” in this time of history. I naively did not think I had to walk differently because I was Palestinian. If I carried a degree from the West, lived amongst the West, spoke the language fluently or even wrote in an academically acceptable manner, I would be treated as an equal—but the truth is, this is not always the case. The dominant narrative of the West still prevails, and what it omits towards the East carries powerful negativity.

Illuminating in Attali’s quote are the cultural translation issues evident in how the West chooses to hear the East. Coming from a place of power, it is not only in the way the West chooses to “hear,” but also how the West represents the East, especially in the media. Of course, this is a generalization, but I believe it is present. Cultural translation for me lies in the way one chooses to “be” in the world rather than “do,” or “listen” to the world rather than “hear” it, “connecting the chaos” rather than “separating it” in order to see matters clearly. Be it local or global, for the
musician in me, emotional connections to music making stem from the universal local position of my heart—from love or hawa (one of the roots of identity).

Although in both stories there were claims of inclusivity, opening the festival to all choirs around the world, or including a Palestinian piece in a repertoire, it seemed that there was a lack of both knowledge of and compassion for the politics of the region, which created situations that were detrimental, uncomfortable, and unsafe. Whether or not the alphabetical order in “Winning Gold” was overlooked because of the magnitude of the festival, the choir’s political requests were completely ignored. This made the “act” of music making and movement of the choir difficult, uncomfortable, and unsafe for the choir. It was clear that our politics did not matter, and the compassion and empathy of the music-making event did not surface. This lack of compliance with our request strongly jeopardized the safety of our Syrian partners. For “Reclaiming Silence,” this occurred not only in “falsely” claiming that the song’s dedication was political, but also in the stance of denying the song that the organization took—an act of prejudice that was dehumanizing for the composer.

7.1.2 Locating the world we hear

*Stories of censorship tell a familiar tale. They speak of an authoritarian regime whose ruthlessness is exemplified by its treatment of music*  
(Street, 2012, p. 10).

“Reclaiming Silence” reaffirmed that political conflicts are not exclusive to a particular region; they are present anywhere and everywhere. This specific story trampled on my Palestinian identity in a Canadian territory. One might think the global context of presenting this piece in a Canadian culture should have brought about a different outcome, but in this particular case, it did not. Did location and emotion connect in this case? Did the director of the Canadian choir deny the universal context of the world in the locality of teaching “Lao Rahal Soti,” or did some outside factor determine the outcome? In this case, the factor of power was represented by the “authoritative regime” of Mr. Z, which had the power to shift and change a board’s decision.

“Reclaiming Silence” brought a stronger understanding to my Palestinian “location” according to some people in the world, but in this awareness, I grew stronger and closer to my Palestinian identity. The act of prejudice in the story exposed my fears and shook my confidence, but it
brought deeper understanding and love for my language, culture, and music. It was also an incident that brought my naivety (thinking that such situations could not occur in Canada) to the forefront, allowing me to remember that regardless of local or global, such stories can happen anywhere. Eventually, I became unsure of how much the location played a role. The locality of all of these stories stood in the music making and specifically in “Reclaiming Silence.” In this case, the piece shook the grounds of its location, as it was not a “vehicle of political expression, it was the expression” (Steeles, 2012, p. 1), and it is in this emotional expression that my *maqam* stood.

Both stories brought a deeper understanding and reaffirmation to not only where I stand as a conductor, but also to the choir. They are about re-affirming our *maqam* or location. “Winning Gold” gave the choir an avenue for expressing their faith, unity, and resistance. By moving together as a group, our stance was located strongly within our identity and each other. Whether we walked alongside Nigeria or did not partake in the friendship concerts, the choir confirmed its position in its solidarity with one another, bringing a deeper understanding of who we are and where we come from.

Could *local* and *global* represent two words that simply live within us, and that what we bring to our music making is our *ṣawt* or sounding, representing how we choose to be, hear, or connect in the world? The *maqam* of our identity then is our *ṣawt* (voice), referring to our internal center, through which we enact an ethical life. Thus, the music which we perform and present is also a part of that ethничal, political, and spiritual life we locate within the world.

### 7.2 How has music played a role in reconciling multiple identities and connecting people of disparate backgrounds and experience?

Although the choir in Sochi represented Jordan, the members in fact were a mélange of multiple identities from different parts of the Levant: Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, as well as Spain and the U.K. The choir also came from different belief systems: Christians (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Armenians, and more) and Muslims. The reaction after the concert was one that I will never forget. The choir’s release of tears and hugs brought about a new dynamic to their
connection to one another, making their relationships stronger. No matter our identities, regional affiliation, or faith, there were unifying elements. I think that Levant region music, regardless of the mix, has a role in reconciliation because of the history and heritage one carries growing up. The music of the land(s) within which people are located and that they make “home” is an important part, if not the integral part, of that reconciliation.

Since moving to Canada, I have sensed that there is a continuous quest for strengthening unity. Several conversations with colleagues and friends suggest that Canada recognizes incredible diversity but has a lack of inclusivity. Could this be because the music of Canada is not from the “land” (the indigenous land) but is somehow imported? Could it be that the sound and music when exported or imported through the bodies that are positioned in a certain location, maqam, carry the experience of that land?

7.2.1 Hearing reconciliation

Give to me the reed [Nai\textsuperscript{37}] and sing thou!

For Song is Immortality,

And the plaint of reed [Nai] remaineth

After the joy and misery

Khalil Gibran (1958).

The choice of repertoire for Sochi’s performance and the fact that it took place outside Jordan played a role in the ease and clarity of the choir’s multiple identities. The movement of the choir outside the concert was also important. Both of these examples bring light to this particular question.

7.2.2 The choice of repertoire

Music, it is argued, should not be viewed just as a footnote to, or appendage of, political thought and action, but rather as an integral feature of them

(Street, 2007, p.321).

\textsuperscript{37} An Arab wind instrument made from bamboo or reed.
A few reasons played a role in the choice of repertoire. The first is that this music stemmed from the region that most called “home.” The repertoire was drawn from the region’s faiths, cultures, and many rich and old languages, at a time in history when our region was in pain, vulnerable, and portrayed negatively in the media. The rich languages in the program served not only a different narrative but provided a way to express our sawt through our passions and feelings. This is why “singing evokes the passions through the way it accents sound” (Rousseau, 1997, p. 255). Singing this repertoire connected the choir and provided them with knowledge with which many amongst the Jury and audience were unfamiliar. Singing in old, traditional dialects and tongues amplified the languages, revealing new knowledge to the singers which drew them closer. I believe this awareness embraced the choir and gave them a sense of pride, of self, and of a united community amongst themselves. The repertoire and languages were new to the choir. It took a lot of work to learn the pronunciation and understand the history, which caused the singers to hear their “home” more deeply in that their sawt and their unity were discovered. This repertoire was not sung much out of the context of the region, making it unfamiliar for many jurors and audience, and it is in this unfamiliarity paired with the negative narrative about the region that I believe the singers found their strength.

These reasons played a role in the reconciliations of various members; however, what embraced the reconciliation was intent. There was also an intention with which the choir sang. The objective or “message” was important, and after many conversations and rehearsals, the choir was intent on presenting music that went against the world’s dominant narrative of our region. The message was of unity and resistance. It was political, and it carried courage and pride.

7.2.3 Location of the performance

I believe that performing this repertoire in a “neutral” ground like Sochi (rather than the Levant) brought about a sense of freedom and ease to our music making. Although singing for a cause with resistance and unity was an integral part of our message, being in Sochi gave the choir freedom of expression without the fear of being judged. Upon our return to Amman with a Gold medal, we performed our repertoire in Jordan. During the concert, I had to turn towards the audience several times and explain what we sang, why we chose this particular repertoire, and our intention behind it. Clarity in the description was important to avoid being misunderstood or judged for being a purely “religious” choir, which may have brought new barriers for the choir. I
believe that singing songs drawn from faiths, culture, and older languages in Sochi brought forth a different feeling of comfort. The choir experienced nervousness prior to walking on stage, but it was the usual butterflies one felt before a performance. Their sound was freer, released and shared. We were away from being “judged,” and therefore the elements of fear, shame, or doing something forbidden were eliminated, allowing the singers to express themselves in a way they might have not been able to do otherwise. In conclusion, the intention of resistance was in part integral to the performance, along with the spiritual inspiration and unity drawn from a place of openness, freedom, breath, and “home.”

7.2.4 Driving reconciliation

*In a world with no musical language for politics, no one can hear*

(Street, 2012, p.145).

As far as I know, the choir was unaware of the incident described in “Reclaiming Silence,” so in terms of any connection or reconciliation, it was between the director, the institution, and me. There was no connection or reconciliation between Mr. Z and me. I believe that when strong fear is powerfully evident, such connections are extremely difficult, if not impossible.

As the quote above suggests, the piece of music presented to the choir brought about a different kind of “hearing” in this case. The story of censorship pushed the director and institution to rehear themselves, how they chose to be in envisioning their mission. It drove them to revisit teaching philosophies and to ask questions they probably would not have had it not been for this incident of negation. In a way, they had to rehear their “location” and the institution’s sawt, maqam, to know where their center was and how from that center, their actions flowed, creating a new kind of order. Although the board may not yet be part of that, the conductor exercised an authoritarian kind of order against all that was deafening, allowing the change to occur.

The director had programmed “Lao Rahal” in the season as a way to communicate a different culture, language, and story to the choir; however, the negation of the piece brought about a new form of communication, approach, and action for the director. Whether or not he knew it, I believe the director indirectly implemented a form of political order. The piece was no longer “a tool for reflecting upon and arguing about such an order; it [was] also entailed in the creation of that order” (Street, 2012, p. 146). The action of the conductor did, in fact, reconcile the multiple
identities in the organization, creating a new order, a new thought, and a new understanding through and in music making.

7.2.5 Deafening reconciliation

*When you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music. Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent, when all else sings together in unison?*

Khalil Gibran (2016/1923)

Music, in “When Silent Night was No Longer the Narrative,” did not play a role in connecting or reconciling multiple identities. In fact, the role was complete abandonment of music. When the political forces were so strong, the role of music vanished. It was meaningless. If music is an integral feature of political action, then how did it play a role of complete separation in this particular context? Also, if our humanity is bound in how we make and hear one another, then our humanity was also lost in this situation, because there was no musical language for the politics in which we could hear. We became deaf to our humanity because music was not present. Might it be that the case of censorship in “Reclaiming Silence” was triggered to avoid the possibility of knowing our humanity in this situation? It is truly heartbreaking to realize that in the struggle for power and politics, one might even entertain this thought—that one might deliberately jeopardizes one’s own humanity and thus the humanity of all.

7.3 How has music played a role in disconnecting people (including myself) through socio-political forces that at times may have been too strong?

*I thought poetry [or music] could change everything, could change history and could humanize, and I think that the illusion is very necessary to push poets [musicians] to be involved and to believe, but now I think that poetry [music] changes only the poet [musician].*

Mahmoud Darwish (in Handlar, 1994)

Substituting the word *music* for *poetry* in Darwish’s poem provides a simple answer to this question. The power of music is one that we (music educators) speak of; we live by it, and some spend their careers proving its benefits. We hold on to the belief that music can play a role in changing history, humanizing and making a difference in the world. True, many music educators
have been in numerous situations where music connected people, built bridges, understanding, and tolerance, and it also provided a form of identity expression; however, we rarely discuss our faith in music making, our musical belief system, and the risks we take by trusting in it so much.

As the subject of my stories, I obviously come from a place of “being in” and “knowing of” the narratives, as well as their resonances and dissonances. All three stories shared resonance through and with music making. Music served to connect singers through the act of gesture and embodiment of music. It built a deeper knowledge and understanding of one another. Music brought unity to a group of community singers through repertoire choices, resistance, and solidarity with their history and home. We (the choir) also witnessed how music negation allowed an institution to revisit its vision. All of these are strong and powerful reasons for music making, but the stories also showed how disconnection from music could occur. I speak purely from the resonances and forces to which I was led to unfold my answer.

The power of the politics in “Silent Night” allowed me to revisit, rethink, and reassess the importance of music and its value. While music educators’ dominant narratives predominantly show the positive effects of music, it is evident in this story that what sometimes may be perceived as music’s powerful effects, in other settings has no meaning at all.

I think I experienced a leap in maturity with the story of “Silent Night.” Prior to that, I believe I had been sheltered, trusting that good always prevailed even if it took time. The music educator in me was emotionally connected to the maqam’s claim of universality. What some construed as ideal, I believed to be real. My husband challenged my idealism in music making. He would often say things such as “you are idealistic, and you are living in a non-idealistic world.” My answer to him never changed: “what is ideal to you, is real to me.” For me, idealism was reflected in the music. Beautifully resolved melodies mirrored the world around me. How dissonances and consonances of harmonies within a melody moved with and against each other presented a deeper knowledge, love, and attachment to music. In this love, the magic of music lived—in the belief that we [musicians] see the world differently and therefore function in it from a different perspective, always striving to make it better through our sound and in the sound. This was where my identity stood; to shake that belief was like removing a vital organ, disrupting all the natural flows of my body.
When my father was targeted and my safety was jeopardized, however, my belief disappeared, vanished, and music had no meaning. This happened within seconds. How could something that was embedded so powerfully in my life vanish (or be taken away?) so quickly? The shock of the story removed all the layers that might have supported my family through this crisis: the system, the church, and the country as a whole. Through this devastation, music came to an utter halt; it became completely insignificant and powerless.

When I first heard the news of my dad’s imprisonment, there was an immediate shift in my role and the control that I naively thought I had over my life. Prior to that, I was the conductor who spoke from a place of knowledge and leadership. I had been building a life in Amman for music making and for my family. I knew things were not perfect in Jordan, I knew they were difficult, but somehow, I was removed from the reality because my musical life was my “ideal” space and because up until then, no one in my family had been threatened. I find it interesting how musical worlds can put music educators in an “ideal” space, removed from the reality of the real threats in the world. Music connects us as people, but its function in life may not have a role. This begs the question about music education and how music might function as a source of knowledge, forced to actually address issues, beyond the words of resistance or the songs of love and faith. When music is part of life itself, and its function is part of life, we harness its power to bring people together, to spiritually enlighten and shape our ethical being—how we be, do, and hear ourselves in the world. We all can participate in that sounding, perhaps then making our humanity known.

7.4 Discussion

It is not enough to embrace the mystery of difference. It is not enough to let the embrace of sound surround. It is necessary to move beyond the position of intergenerational bystanders. It is necessary to acknowledge the privilege and power that we hold within our artistic and working communities, and then find ways to give over such power that move beyond forms of inclusion. (Robinson, 2012, p. 306)
I would like to draw some of my discussion and future implications from *My Voice is my Weapon* by David McDonald (2013). This book weaves together historical, ethnographic, and musical sources, offering a rich tapestry of tales of struggle, pride, humor, despair and hope for the Palestinian crisis. McDonald is thorough in his portrayal of history, not only as a background and timeline to what happens, but also as a way for creating a framework for understanding how music and politics are intertwined. The book gives a deep understanding of the multiple and even contradictory motivations for song but embraces the humanity of the musicians and their audiences in a time where Palestinian voices are increasingly censored.

As a Jordanian Palestinian, i.e., non-Westerner, writing to a Western academic audience, this dissertation has proven more difficult than expected. In a space where writing has to be systematic, clear, separated, and chronological, my life has been anything but that. My environment growing up cultivated looking into how things function from a chaotic perspective rather than an always systematic one. Everything is intertwined, and while it is easy to pull things apart, the stories that resonate most clearly are a pool of actions, emotions, thoughts, and music embedded in politics of the region; it is in their connection that my entity lies—the identity of a Palestinian one who grew up in Jordan, settled in Canada, and visited Palestine a few times. This in itself is problematic and difficult to negotiate:

> Each Palestinian community must struggle to maintain its identity on at least two levels: first, as Palestinian, with regard to the historical encounter with Zionism and the precipitous loss of a homeland; second, as Palestinian in the existential setting of day-to-day life responding to the pressure in the state of residence. (Said, 1992, p.17)

Even though Jordan has been able to constitute the heart of the Palestinian diaspora, understanding one’s Palestinian-thood in this context is difficult. Being and imagining Palestine on a day-to-day basis carves a way of living and being. Dreaming of the day that one day we will return “home” comes packed with all kinds of dilemmas and issues. I lived and still live with a “cause” embedded in my being. I carry the responsibility of my ancestors and their right of return; I instill it in my daughters as well and pray that justice for Palestine prevails. Being a musician, I carry Palestine, our story, and our stance in music:
Palestinian resistance music may best be defined as the conscious use of any music in the service of the larger project of Palestinian self-determination. This functional-processual definition decouples style and sentiment and precludes the likelihood of essentializing “resistance” based on musical style alone. From this definition rural folk song, militarized marches, classical art music, and urban hip-hop may all be equally defined as resistance music. (McDonald, 2012, p. 5-6)

The identity of who I am and how I presented my stories is embedded in me as the writer. My first language is Arabic, and my thinking and being is affected by the Levantine environmental cultural and political upbringing. My Western education combined with my Eastern upbringing pulled out the thematic threads found in the stories, and it is this duality that I explore in this section.

7.4.1 The duality of the title: My Voice is my Weapon

7.4.1.1 Voice and sound

The book’s title, *My Voice is my Weapon*, is a powerful one, and by looking at it from both Eastern and Western lenses, other meanings may be drawn. The word voice is defined as “sound produced by the human mouth” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). When referring to a person’s voice, one usually means his/her speaking or singing voice; however, in Arabic the word sawt (voice) translates as sound, which could be the sound (or noise) of a human, animal, or thing. In this discussion, I focus on the sound of humans. As musicians we have been taught the anatomy of the voice, how the body is actively involved in the making of sound involving the diaphragm, the vocal chords, or the body in general. Spiritually, however, the Sufi believe that sound cannot be uttered without a thought, and the thought cannot occur without a feeling (Khan, 1996, p.21). This leads to the conclusion that in order to sound something, humans sound out feelings. The recipients of sound, then, receive the vibrations of the sawt hear them and also feel them. I recently discovered that sawt is considered one of the Arabs’ ancient and greatest Gods—one that was worshiped by those who lived by the river Furat (in Iraq), extending to the Nile (in Egypt) and passing by *Bilād il šām* (Levant) (Salim, 1989, p.80). This adds a spiritual connection to the word sawt, which allows the word to morph into another dimension.
These findings are exciting in that they do not restrict the meaning to one thing. Sound takes a life of its own, embodied by emotion, thought, environment, music, spirituality, and more. All of these words resonate as true, and therefore, as I move in my discussion, I refer to my sounding in the world, embracing all these meanings not only in mind but also how I chose to narrate, disclose, share, and simply tell my stories; are all ignited by resonances flamed through my life sound.

7.4.1.2 Weapon and gender

Words can have power. Their effects can be to inform, persuade, hurt, ease pain, end war, or start war. *Weapon* comes with negative connotations. Although it can be used to refer to resistance and defense, the word is usually associated with a negative action: fighting, shooting, or killing. Although weaponry conveys negativity, the title in the book did not resonate from a negative space. *Weapon* in McDonald’s (2019) case resonated with resistance as well as protest. Did weaponry play a role in my stories? Where did weaponry stem from? Was it a place of anger, resistance, knowledge, and ignorance, or possibly love?

As I looked at the word *weapon*’s etymology, I was surprised that that the origin of the word was unknown, but in Old English, *waepen* was “an instrument of fighting and defense, sword” (Online Etymology Diction, n.d.), the definition commonly understood today. Interestingly, in Proto-Germanic, *wēipna* means “penis,” giving the word a very specific gender role. Even in thinking about most weapons’ shape, i.e, gun, pistol, sword, or even a canon, suggests the male sex organ.

In Arabic, the root of the word *Silah* (weapon), is *salaḥ* which has several meanings revolving around what we know as weapon, fighting, wars, and so forth, but an interesting discovery was that the root of the word also is related to feces, the removal of solid waste from the body. Metaphorically, the removal of waste from one’s body relieves and brings about a feeling of relaxation and maybe even a liberating feeling. This knowledge views the word from two different perspectives: freeing versus confinement, relaxing versus aggression, and enduring versus attacking.

How does understanding of these meanings change or transform (positively or negatively) the title of the book? How does one interpret the significance or feeling of the title? For example,
would *My Voice is My Weapon* mean the same as *My Sound is My Endurance, Resistance* or even *Gender*? Is this duality incorporated within the meaning, or does it implicate further understandings and knowledge?

### 7.4.2 Reclaiming silence

Musical performance has been especially important in the formation of cultural meanings in two distinct ways: first by providing a forum for the expression of subaltern/nationalist ideologies from within dominant host nations, ad second, by facilitating performative interaction and belonging between diaspora communities. It is this lateral awareness, the hallmark of diasporic signification and identification, that has enabled and encouraged Palestinians through Bilad Al-Sham (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine) to collectively experience the pains of occupation: as national pride, hope and shame. (McDonald, 2012, p.39)

When the conductor from “Reclaiming Silence” asked for a piece that spoke of struggle, hope, and peace, “Lao Rahal” seemed the best option. Although the song stemmed from a personal Levantine protest song, the lyrics were universal, accessible, and fitting to the specific request. The conductor agreed. The negation of the piece arose from an individual’s claim that it had a political dedication:

*I dedicate this piece to the Palestinians for their ongoing struggle for freedom and dignity.*

Being new to the Canadian scene, I doubted myself; I remember thinking, “yes, maybe it was political.” I reached out via Facebook and asked the question: “Name pieces in which dedication to struggle and freedom may be found.” Within days, the post had received several names of pieces composed for all kinds of situations. The dedication ranged from freedom from slavery pertaining to all Negro Spirituals, to songs that were dedicated to 9/11, the Holocaust, Rwandan refugees, Asian Tsunami, Victims of the Oklahoma City bombing, Montreal shooting, and earthquakes. The common factor in all these pieces is that they all stemmed from horrific situations and they were all (with no exceptions) written for victims who have suffered from injustice and/or loss. As a product of a Palestinian living in exile, there was no justification for this censorship, as I, too, identify myself as a victim of the ongoing Palestinian unjust occupation and loss.
The composition of the piece also stemmed from the resonance of loss, longing, and injustice. Specifically, in the layered composition of the choral music, I was able to re-hear myself in the loss, but in the choice of tempo and harmonies, the universal message of peace stood. Resonances may stem from absolutely anything: a feeling, a thought, a picture, a poem, a conversation, a folksong, and so forth, and they are crucial (I believe) to any work of art. In the case of this piece, the musical representation was unable to stand true to who I am, what I feel, think, and most importantly, believe. There was no logical reasoning or justification for why the piece was not permitted to be performed, except that the piece acted as resistance and threatened Mr. Z. The reaction of silencing me (through the music) came from a place of pure prejudice, racism, and fear.

From a gender perspective, it may be interpreted that Mr. Z exerted his “weapon” and through it, had the power to shut the song down. His fear of performing the piece brought about his anger, forced it onto the choir, threatening and attacking the organization. In retrospect, is it possible my dedication also acted as a weapon of resistance and endurance? Was my presence in the dedication acting as a form of sounding my weapon in the world? I am a Palestinian, I am a musician, I am here; was the choir singing “Lao Rahaf” a stamp confirming my existence?

7.4.3 When silent night was no longer the narrative

I believe there were two directional forms of weaponry projected in my fathers’ story. One weapon stemmed from love and despair and was directed toward solving the situation; the other stemmed from indifference and was directed to threaten and instill fear.

Weaponry stemming from love and despair played a threatening role in my father’s story. The conspiracy against my dad put our family in a position of despair. There was no way of knowing how the story would unfold and whether my father would ever be released. My brother and I were determined to find a solution. We looked in all directions and spoke to anyone who gave us the slightest hope. Even when my life was threatened because of my connection with the informant, there was, as they say, no turning back. Our maqam did not change; we were adamant about finding a solution and that was not going to change.

In thinking specifically about my negotiations, pleas, and interactions with parties throughout this story, I realized that my communication was solely with men. From the church priests,
Patriarch, lawyers, prison guards, doctors, government officials, and Abdullah the informant, all parties concerned with my father’s release were men. Weaponry from a gender perspective may shed light.

Gaps in Jordanian laws fail to provide protections for women's rights and equality. While much room for progress remains, Jordanian women enjoy equal rights with respect to their entitlement to health care, education, political participation, and employment. Nevertheless, women in Jordan continue to be denied equal nationality and citizenship rights with men. Women also face gender-based discrimination in Jordan's family laws and in provision of government pensions and social security benefits. Violence against women remains a serious problem in Jordan, and protection mechanisms for women victims of violence are inadequate . . . Family-based violence against women in the name of family “honor” is a serious problem in Jordan, and men and women receive different legal and social treatment based on their gender. (Abu-Hassan, 2015, para.12)

Although I witnessed discrimination or a sense of belittling growing up, I learned to function within it, sometimes de-synthesizing it or even normalizing it, and music provided a form to release many residual feelings. I remember going to the bank when my daughter was born and learning that as a woman, I could not open a bank account for her. I also was not aware that I needed written permission from my husband to travel with my daughters alone. He did not need one from me, but I needed one from him. Even though I learned to function in this particular culture, there was an underlying knowledge about my place as a woman and in my interactions within the society. This subtleness underlined fear.

In my father’s case, however, fear played a different role. It was not present and many times was pushed to the side. There was one goal, and that was to find a way for my father’s release. In all my interactions, fear was pushed to the side. My well-being and safety were not a concern. Even when governmental officials projected their weaponry and threatened me, the despair and love for my father quieted my fear, creating a safety barrier. This act of un-noticed courage brought a new perspective and built a new layer of freedom.
Weaponry and male dominance in this context are two words with the same meaning. The government officials threatened me and demanded I stop communication with Abdullah. Had I chosen not to cooperate, the story likely would have had a different ending. In contrast, Mr. Z’s threats were not life frightening; they were painful and shook my confidence. Both stories are similar, however, in that they both imposed what “must” and “should” be done. This imposition or bullying was presented with no regard to another’s thoughts or opinions. Only one opinion mattered, and the rest should follow. Culturally and within Jordan’s context, I understood this, but in Canada’s context, I was shocked.

7.4.4 Winning gold

I believe in “Winning Gold,” the choir’s sound acted as a form of weaponry. Through our choice of repertoire and the camaraderie demonstrated in our movement, the choir’s form of resistance and solidarity with one another was brought to light. We have

developed a very powerful means of both acting on and enduring feelings of dislocation and dispossession. Music was our platform, and voice was our weapon for fighting against the state powers responsible for our forced exile and the occupation of our homeland (McDonald, 2012, p. 227)

With many choral members having Levantine ancestral roots, our solidarity with the oldest form of injustice in our region, Palestine was at the forefront. The collective identity of the choir was crucial in both the concert and the movement for standing with one another.

When the choir in the Nations Walk decided to move away from the alphabetical order of Jordan next to Israel, as their conductor, I remember feeling very proud. Their decision to move away and stand next to Nigeria showed that the choir loved one another and would not leave anyone behind. I do not think the organizers realized what we did, but in this case, I believe WE realized what we did, and the relationship of the choir rose to a different level; their solidarity with one another brought a new form of togetherness. We were stronger because of it.

The sacredness of the repertoire united the choir one more way; its faith. Recognizing the Christian faiths of the region and performing a piece using Christian and Muslim texts brought about a new form of togetherness. We spoke against the negative dominant narrative of the region, and through beautiful music making, our message was clear.” Christians and Muslims
have lived together for centuries in the region. Our repertoire was our proof, our voices were our weapon, and our harmony transformed the battlefield to a field of *daḥnum*.38

In a meeting with a professor to discuss my thesis, she said, “We do not talk about politics enough in music education.” If I had to name one thing that came out of this dissertation, it would be to confirm the statement above. Music educators need to talk about music and politics more. We need to know that music is not always safe, powerful, and unifying; it can also be powerless, dangerous, and separating. Empathy and courage represent key elements for taking the necessary steps toward humanizing differences. This is truly a goal for many nations, and the power of music—if used with those elements—could change the course of music education’s power.

In my region, we live, breathe, and transform history, for better or for worse. What may seem abstract and intangible at a distance is part of the fabric of our Levant everyday lives. Unfortunately, at this time in history, “when people in the West hear the words *Arab*, *Muslim*, or *Middle East*, they think of terrorism, suicide bombers, and wild-eyed fanatics hiding in caves” (King Abdullah, 2012, p. xxiii). At this time, the call or mission of a person from my region is to challenge, shake, and transform this narrative. What lies at the heart of the problem is intensely connected in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Many in the West, when they look at our region, view it as a series of separate challenges: Iranian expansionism, radical terrorism, sectarian tensions in Iraq and Lebanon, and a long-fostering conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. But the truth is that all of these are interconnected. The thread that links them is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (King Abdullah of Jordan, 2012 p. xvi)

This was a deeply rooted concept—one with which I grew up—and although Jordan opened its arms to the Palestinians and over time constituted the heart of the Palestinian diaspora, outlining its physical and imaginative properties, it was still a difficult concept to negotiate, understand, and live by. Politics were embedded in my daily life. I breathed politics. The daily news of the region’s situation was inseparable from my identity. Whether it was the paper, television, social

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38 *Daḥnum* is a poppy seed flower and in the spring, blankets of red flowers cover Jordan’s landscape.
media, or a simple gathering of family or friends, politics were at the heart of all conversations. Politics were reported and considered within every event-taking place. In solidarity, resistance, or in mourning, festivities in Jordan were sometimes postponed or even cancelled depending on the severity of the situation. Fundraising events were frequent, and the overall mood of the country was continuously (to this day) affected by the politics of the region.

Palestinian Jordanians fashioned new means of “resisting” the occupation in a displaced fashion, performing resistance onstage as a means of active identification and belonging. The essence of resistance in these performances reflects a cultural liminality, a perpetual drive to connect to a homeland under siege and occupation. (McDonald, 2012, p.229)

As I navigated understanding my place in Jordan, it was through music and singing about Palestine that the weaponry of my identity came through. Palestinian music-making was my contribution to keeping the Palestinian story alive.

Having affinity for my Western education and my Eastern upbringing was not only about performing Palestinian music, but also in being a Palestinian woman conductor, composer, and musician that I can have an impact on the Palestinian story. My strength lies in being able to speak in the language of the West, knowing the European and North American repertoire, presenting my culture, food, and music, communicating with non-Arabs, and my ability to write this dissertation.

In Our Last Best Chance, His Majesty King Abdullah (2012) shared his concern for peace in the region. He stated that he believes there is still a chance to achieve peace, but the window is rapidly closing. With trust completely vanishing between the two sides (Israel and Palestine), it may prove impossible to build. “I don’t think most Americans and Europeans recognize the urgency of the situation” (p.xxii)

I feel this urgency, I breathe its intensity, and it consumes a big part of my thinking and being. This is important to understand in context of the thesis. Three stories, thousands of phrases, sentences, and words, what to include or not include, Arabic words, descriptions, politics, emotions, fears, shame, and the forbidden were all choices that I made to present my sound in the writing, driven by the socio-political context of the region. The narratives’ resonances moved my
pen and wrote them, but the emotions that carried them came from my heart: *hawa* (root of *Hawiyeh*; identity). *ṣawti* (my sound) was present in all three stories. The thread of my sounding in all stories resulted in a form of a *weapon*. My sound (even my mere existence) acted as a form of resistance, threat, and danger. These stories did not comprise cases of music diversity or inclusivity; they were stories of politics in music, through music, and beyond music. The politics of the music negotiated my identity, my movement, and my belief system. To assume otherwise would be to shy away from one of the crux matters of how music functions in the world. Music is political.

### 7.5 Suggestions for further research

- Collecting natively drawn stories of several other societies; investigating the transfer of musical experiences that may be unique to their culture and/or socioeconomic environment, with the purpose of understanding the complexities of identity to the human experience and its expansion, its universality, and even threats within the community.

- Collecting stories of other Levantine musicians, conductors, and music educators. Looking into expression of music and its identity formation within the context of that specific environment. Bring about more knowledge of the region’s sociopolitical diversity, its movement, shifts and transformations, and its effects on personal and collective identity.

- How has the sociopolitical conflict of the First Nations shaped or transformed Canada’s indigenous population? Researching how vocal “sounds” and musical expressions of identity have evolved in Canada’s indigenous community through the political changes.

- Further research in understanding the factors or circumstances that lie within the power of music bringing people together or pulling them apart. Insightful analysis not only in the positive power of music but in the negative’ effects of music. Gathering stories in which music played a negative or a damaging role, caused separation or even destruction.
7.6 Conclusions

It is challenging to relocate to a different locale, especially to adjust to the political, social, and cultural values. While politics is reported in Canada, the intensity for me is not as poignant. I recall watching the news upon my arrival in Toronto and not being sure how I felt when I did not hear continuous news of death numbers, bombs going off, or more villages and homes being demolished. In contrast, CTV shared the story of an owl and a fox staring at one another; it is hard to fathom the tame and mundane scope in the context of my background. The idea of positive news being part of the Canadian narrative was new to me, and for a while, perhaps uncomfortable. As time passed, I realized how over-conditioned I was to all that was happening back home and how Canada had a more balanced view in reporting its news.

As I built a life in Canada, I strived to balance my Amman Eastern way of being and my new Canadian way of living. While there is a lot to admire about being in Canada, I have sensed a different kind of struggle: to be immersed in a society that claims its pluralism while at times I question its inclusivity.

A new term I learned when I came to Canada was PC (politically correct). I was advised not to share how I felt or thought because it was not PC. PC meant I was being sympathetic, caring, and respectful. There was confusion at times, as the two terms were almost used interchangeably—PC and respect; however, I have witnessed how respect may be coated with a lack of honesty and fear of not being politically correct.

For example, I recently learned that the TDSB of Ontario decided to remove sacred music from the public schools’ music programs. Wanting to be politically correct and removing the sacred repertoire meant that they were respecting other faiths; instead of learning from all of the different faiths, starting with the First Nations’ faiths, it was better to remove religion altogether. As an outsider, I consider this to be a drastic move, one that will cause more separation in a society that claims to be pluralistic. Many musicians agree that choral music was developed in the church, and some of the most incredible choral works came from the church. How can we teach choral music and not touch on spiritual music? This is a huge missed opportunity for learning. Instead of removing all sacred music, the school board might consider including several pieces stemming from other faiths and spirituality. Might a director look at the demography of the classroom and create a repertoire that is meaningful, spiritual, and close to home to those
particular students? Spirituality lies at the heart of all cultures and opening the door to sharing music that is close to their hearts welcomes students who are diverse; the rehearsal room then becomes a space of inclusivity, perhaps a step closer to the ideals of pluralistic Canada.

What happens the next time a student does not want to sing a Palestinian or an Israeli song? Do we remove all songs with dedications? When does it stop? Growing up in Jordan, I was not able to sing a Jewish piece of music because I would have been considered a traitor to my Palestinian cause. I find it difficult and to this day. I struggle and internally refuse to sing anything in Hebrew, but had that been included in my repertoire growing up, I might have built a stronger understanding of the culture and come closer to learning about their struggles of non-acceptance of “the other” (i.e. Palestinian). In the neutral space of Canada, my daughter has been able to do that. This is an incredible strength and privilege that Canada has accomplished. It removed the obstacles to making such political and difficult conversations possible, but fear is a powerful engine that accompanies such conversations, and to delve into the unknown, ask questions, find information, and learn from another—especially if one was brought up to think otherwise—requires courage. Regardless of the outcome, I believe a conversation with Mr. Z may have humanized the situation and brought a closer understanding of what Canada represents. If music is removed from the school system every time we “respect” a culture, how can one feel a sense of belonging to the texture of Canada’s pluralism?

Bauman (2010) argued, we need to learn “the art of living with difference” (p.151) and how to navigate in a world in which cultural diversity exists within the borders of locality. The latter requires a willingness by the teacher to “move between cultures” (MacPherson, 2010), more so than recognizing or disseminating “historical assumptions of cultural and linguistic hierarchies” (p.272).

Taking Toyosaki and Conway’s (2015) proposal on autoethnography and apply it to MacPherson’s “moving between” cultures, I propose we do: move between cultures by getting to know others, observe them, listen to them (even in their silences), and taste their cultural flavors. Next, we can come to know moving between cultures: by being proactive—asking questions, responding to questions, allowing time to learn from one another. Evaluate moving between cultures by reflecting on our own and other cultures, understanding how each comes with a wealth of knowledge and realizing that learning from one another is an opportunity to
grow and build strength. *Become* moving between cultures fully and emotionally by building empathy and compassion for one another. Acknowledging the humanity in others is key in “becoming culture,” but I believe this is where the element of fear may also appear. Finally, *doing* between culture refers to putting one’s ego to the side, finding the courage needed to apply what one learns, regardless of the difference. Only then can one fully move into an inclusive society.

It is in this duality of perspective that I bring light to this research. Music is political and can be difficult to negotiate in the rehearsal room. It can pull people apart, create dissonance, and be abandoned altogether; however, music can be a bridge to bring people together. It can offer a place of acceptance and togetherness. It can provide a space for solidarity and love. The key and most difficult elements are empathy and courage. Empathizing with someone with whom we profoundly disagree does not compromise our own deeply held beliefs or endorse someone else’s beliefs. Empathizing with someone simply means acknowledging the humanity of someone who was raised to think differently.

Courage and fear are interrelated. In order to have courage, fear needs to be overcome. When music educators are presented with situations that may be difficult to resolve, such as dissonances between people and disagreements about repertoires, the situations test the educator’s own stance in music making; fear can stir them to action. This is where courage comes into play, and its importance is crucial for changing the course or/and stirring the path of change. If Mr. Z was able to have a conversation with me, the result might have been different. Regardless of the outcome, his courage to face his fears may have planted the seed for inclusivity. I firmly believe that building true empathy toward one another, combined with courage to face our fears and grow from the unknown, gives Canada a stronger chance for embracing inclusivity, and thus undoubtedly making Canada the tapestry that threads all of our colorful fabrics with one another.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Transliteration of Arabic words in this dissertation has followed the system used by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. Most of the proper names or colloquial words were kept as is. Words and meanings were taken from the Ma’ani Dictionary or scholars from the region.

The following Table indicates the Arabic words used in the dissertation and their English meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘ājam</td>
<td>The name of an Arab mode (similar to major)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ā’jam</td>
<td>A foreigner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adhān</td>
<td>The call to prayer in the Muslim faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>āl khāṣa’is āl Muṭlaqa</td>
<td>The Absolute Traits</td>
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<tr>
<td>āl Māghreb āl Arabi</td>
<td>The Moroccan Arab: The area that covers north West of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>āl- Khālij āl Arabi</td>
<td>The Gulf Arab: The area that covers the east of the Levant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>āl-Māshrek āl Arabi</td>
<td>The Eastern Arab: The area that covers the Levant, north east of Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-file-manager/file/57d83390f6ea5a022234b400/TransChart.pdf
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Word</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meaning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Allah</em></td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aswatuna</em></td>
<td>Name of a choral festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bālādnā</em></td>
<td>Our land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bayat, Saba, maqam</em></td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bilād il Shām</em></td>
<td>The Levant (The area encompassing Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>dābke</em></td>
<td>A group dance that requires the stamping of feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dozan wa Awtar</em></td>
<td>Name of a music establishment in Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>filastīn rāḥ biżāl taḥt aqdāmnā.</em></td>
<td>Palestine will always remain under our stamping feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ḥābibti / ḥābibi</em></td>
<td>My dear (female/ male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ḥaqiqat āl shāy</em></td>
<td>The essence of the self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ḥaṭṭa</em></td>
<td>Traditional scarf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ḥāwā</em></td>
<td>Root of <em>ḥāwiyeḥ</em> and means love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ḥāwiyeḥ</em></td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>huwa</em></td>
<td>Root of <em>ḥāwiyeḥ</em> meaning; he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ir ḥamni ya allah</em></td>
<td>Lord, have mercy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jwāideh</em></td>
<td>Name of prison in Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kālimāt</em></td>
<td>Lyrics, or words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khawf il Fālāṣṭīnī</td>
<td>The fear of being a Palestinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khof, ‘eib and ḥaram</td>
<td>Fear, shame, and forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lāhn</td>
<td>Melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māqam</td>
<td>Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muqawāmeh</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nākba</td>
<td>Catastrophe: referring to the 1948 war and expulsion of Palestinians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nāksā</td>
<td>Set back: referring to the 1967 war and expulsion of Palestinians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rast, ḥijāz, Bāyāt, Saba</td>
<td>Names of Arabic modes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṣawt</td>
<td>Sound and sounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silāh</td>
<td>Weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṣmād</td>
<td>Root of ṣumād: one of the names of God in the Holy book of Muslim Quran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṣumād</td>
<td>Endurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṭaneen u rāneen</td>
<td>Loud resonance and soft resonance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṭanneh u rānneh</td>
<td>A colloquial term for celebration and weddings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṭar</td>
<td>A type of Arabic drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turāthnā</td>
<td>Our heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wastah</td>
<td>Refers to a person’s network of connections and serves as the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primary guideline for professional and social maneuvers in many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Eastern communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wiḥdit athat</td>
<td>Unity of the self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: *Læw raḥal ṣoti* (Song found in Chapter 6)

læw raḥal ṣoti mæb tr ḥæl ḥæ næ ẓirkom

If my voice departs, your throats (i.e. voices) will not...

ʕjuni ṣælæ bokraw ṭælbi maškom

I see tomorrow and my heart is with you . . .

læw raḥ il muɣænni bitdallīl ‘æ ɣæni

If the singer goes (dies), the songs will remain . . .

trʒ maʃ ɪt’ lubil mæk sura wɪl bit ñæni

bringing together the broken and suffering heart...