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## Bang drums until the cement softens<sup>1</sup>

### *International music collaboration in Palestine*

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**ABSTRACT** There are many possible readings of a music project taking place in a territory under occupation. By paying attention to the context, values and interests of actors involved in the Music Collaboration between Palestine and Norway (2002–2017), this chapter uses Boltanski and Thévenot’s framework of justification to examine possible narratives of the project. Three main narratives stand out, namely, a civic, inspirational and (development) industry one, all of which are tightly interwoven.

**KEYWORDS** Palestine | music | multi-agency collaboration | legitimacy | international development

**SAMMENDRAG** Det finnes mange nyanser og mulige tolkninger av et musikkprosjekt som foregår på okkupert territorium. I dette kapitlet brukes Boltanski og Thévenots legitimeringsteori for å analysere musikk samarbeidet mellom Palestina og Norge (2002–2017). Tre fremtredende narrativer, som alle er sterkt sammenvevde, diskuteres i teksten: musikk som palestinsk motstand, musikk som inspirasjon og musikk som et verktøy i internasjonal bistand.

**NØKKEWORD** Palestina | musikk | flerpartsamarbeid | legitimitet | internasjonal bistand

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1. Hind Shoufani, in Habjouqa, 2015, p. 11.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the role of international music collaboration in a territory under occupation. The scope of my research is at the intersection of art practice, activism, and international aid and politics.

Art can be a strategy for survival in zones of conflict. It can serve as a coping mechanism and can renew lost hope; it can support resistance and rebellion (Urbain, 2008; Naidu-Silverman, 2015; Howell, 2016 and 2017). With constant oscillation between history and tradition, innovation and change, power and resistance, and individual expression and the interests of the collective (Kanaaneh, Thorsén, Bursheh & McDonald, 2013), there are many possible readings of an art project taking place in a territory under occupation. In this chapter, I present a study of a Norwegian state-funded music collaboration between Palestine and Norway (2002–2017, hereafter the Music Collaboration) where two organizations, Sabreen<sup>2</sup> and Concerts Norway (CN),<sup>3</sup> have spent more than 6.6 million USD<sup>4</sup> from the development and regional allocation budget of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to provide music training to Palestinian teachers, concert opportunities for children and youth, and artistic development for local artists.

The main objective of the chapter is to map out how the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, international development strategies and the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people impact the organizational, educational and artistic content of this Music Collaboration. By paying attention to the context, values and interests of actors involved in the project, the study relies on ethnographic methods to examine and discuss possible narratives of the Music Collaboration. When considered through the analytical lens of Boltanski and Thévenot's framework of justification ([1991] 2006), three main narratives of the project emerge: The discernible music as resistance narrative is set against narratives of inspirational partnerships and arts in foreign (aid) policy. These narratives, tightly interwoven, impact the Music Collaboration in very distinct ways. The project offers opportunities for identity work and activism in Palestinian primary schools, and artistic partnerships as well as strategic organizational and civic development. Yet, this study shows that many tensions remain and, in the absence of a permanent political solution in Palestine, there is reason to question whether such projects *really*

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2. Sabreen is a Jerusalem-registered NGO conducting non-profit musical activities related to community building and education.
  3. Concerts Norway (1968–2016) is a Norwegian governmental organization whose main task was to provide live music to schoolchildren.
  4. NOK at rate 8.5 to USD.

make a profound difference. This reality notwithstanding, the redemption – the soothing – provided by musical training and practice should not be underestimated in this context, nor should the stimulated relationship between Palestinian children and their heritage.

## METHODOLOGY

I have approached my research question primarily from an ethnographic point of view. I have done fieldwork and conducted semi-structured interviews in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nablus and Ramallah on two occasions,<sup>5</sup> and I have interacted with musicians and administrative representatives of Sabreen who have toured in Norway.<sup>6</sup> As a previous employee of CN's international department, I have also followed this project closely through colleagues in the period 2008–2016, yet I have never been involved in project development or management myself. Before writing this book chapter, I have consulted all project documents, reports and external evaluations of the Music Collaboration.

## A REFLEXIVE PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

My professional background from the music and development field has provided me with useful insights, but also created biases and blind spots in dealing with the mentioned material (Mosse, 2005; Halvorsen, Johnsen & Repstad, 2009). I am furthermore conscious that my gaze upon this project and understanding of its mechanisms can never be entirely free from the (colonial) images that we nourish about this region in the West (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994). I can never escape from my white, Norwegian middle-class background that puts me in the position of being a potential coloniser; not in the physical sense of the word, but because of the conceptions on which I am basing my datacollection and analysis. In order to remedy this, I have exchanged drafts of this chapter with Palestinian colleagues prior to publication, and I am grateful for corrections and nuances received from them. Karl Weick's tool and theories of "sensemaking"

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5. I spent two weeks in Palestine in February and March 2017 and two weeks in September 2018 with the sole objective of conducting fieldwork for my PhD. I have previously visited the area as an employee of CN, where I attended the *Saama* international conference for music education in Bethlehem in December 2014.

6. My main body of informants consists of twenty-three people with various links to the project. Nine of these are cited in the current text; see list at the end of the chapter.

(Weick, 1995) have also been of great use to me. Sensemaking emphasizes the *actor's own* creation of narrative – the way people *themselves* make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves. By giving space to the voice of Sabreen, to other Palestinian cultural actors around this group and also to their Norwegian partners, I aim to highlight the complexity of this music project in a state of conflict.

## THE CONTEXT

Palestine has been under Israeli occupation for more than seventy years. This shall not be regarded as mere context for the musical project, but rather, as suggested by Georgina Born (2012, in Boeskov, 2017, p. 1), the “context is folded into the musical experience”. The context encompasses both the physical and intellectual landscape in which the project takes place, and establishing this landscape is the aim of this section.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1948, the majority of Palestinians were forced to leave their territory. This is referred to as *Al-Nakba* – literally, “the catastrophe” (Tuastad, 2014). The Nakba was followed by other defeats, and increased frustrations lead to riots, attacks and suicide bombings during the first Intifada from 1987 to 1993. After years of violent clashes, strikes and boycotts, the two parties met for negotiations. The Oslo Accords<sup>7</sup> seeded hope on both sides. Yet, unable to resolve some key issues, it became clear that lasting peace was not in sight. A second Intifada was launched from 2000 to 2005. The hopeless situation not only occurred because of the Israel-Palestine conflict, but was also caused by lack of unity between Palestinians themselves (Tuastad, 2014, pp. 70–84): The malfunctioning of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and divisions between the Hamas-led Gaza and Fatah-led West Bank constituted a deadlock to unity. Separate Palestinian governments are the reality even today, and Gaza is still physically closed off from the rest of the territory. The PA is regularly accused of corruption, and several of my informants complained about the confusion of whose interests they actually represent. This position is also reflected in Jakobsen (2010, p. 71), where the view is stretched to the extreme: “The next intifada will not be against Israel, but the PA”. Tuastad (2014) largely attributes the explanation of this to the failure of the Palestinian Liberation Organ-

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7. Oslo I was signed in 1993, Oslo II in 1995.

isation (PLO) and how, supposedly, they never managed the transition from being a resistance movement to becoming nation-builders. Building society takes a different mentality and different skills than fighting against the oppressor.

Hence, Palestinians have suffered under external occupation from Israel, but have also seen great divisions among themselves. These divisions are political, as well as economic, social and cultural. Additionally, they are divided by their attitudes toward the international community, who have played a significant role in the conflict since its inception.

### **NGO-IZATION OF SOCIETY AND DOMINANCE OF FOREIGN AID TO PALESTINE**

Since the Oslo Accords, there has been a significant “NGO-ization” of the Palestinian society (Jad, 2007). The Music Collaboration must be read in this aid context, even though the Norwegian partner, CN, does not have the traditional features of an international NGO (Lewis, 2014). In the Palestinian territory, however, CN has taken roles and responsibilities similar to those of an international NGO, notably because project management and funding have been carried out within a *development* framework. The term “development” has traditionally been understood and measured in economic and structural terms (Schuurman, 2000; Escobar, 2001), yet the UNESCO report “Our Creative Diversity” (1996) offered fundamentally new perspectives in development thinking. It not only emphasized how culture conditions all human activity, but it also moved culture to the centre stage when meeting societal challenges of the post-Cold War era. As a direct consequence of this report and an increased focus on culture and development in international policy, UNESCO adapted in 2001 a Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. This document was followed by a binding legal instrument from UNESCO (2005) in which it was stated that “Parties shall endeavour to integrate culture in their development policies at all levels for the creation of conditions conducive to sustainable development”. In this framework, culture is understood both as a means and a goal in itself. The Music Collaboration between Palestine and Norway incorporates both these perspectives, and later in the text, I will return to the weighting of them.

### **FOREIGN AID: DESTRUCTIVE TO LOCAL IDEALISM?**

Western powers have been particularly supportive towards cultural development in Palestine since the second Intifada. I will later explore potential strategies behind this investment and different ways of interpreting it, yet to give the reader

an idea about the amount of money put into the cultural development of Palestine from 2006 to 2010, Norway alone has granted 10 million USD to diverse cultural and sports-related projects (NORAD, 2011, p. xi). I have been unable to confirm the total sums of cultural assistance to Palestine from other Western countries, yet Jakobsen (2010, p. 94) states that “there are very few projects that are not in some way or another in collaboration with foreign NGOs or state departments [...] It is my impression that there isn’t much going on, at least in the cultural sphere, which is truly independent and locally controlled”.

This needs to be understood in relation to a wider context of Palestine as one of the most donor-supported societies in the world. Much activity, i.e. provision of public services as well as social movements and civic life, is built on the support of foreign aid. At first glimpse, the proliferation of NGOs and inflow of foreign money may seem positive, yet Jad (2007) takes a different position and argues the contrary. According to her, the proliferation of NGOs and foreign support to Palestine possibly leads to a lower genuine civic engagement, an argument she illustrates by the progressive de-politicisation of the women’s movement in Palestine: After the peace process in the 1990s, “the dual dynamics of statebuilding and NGO-ization led to more fragmentation and demobilisation of all social movements” (Jad 2007, p. 623). The post-Oslo agenda brought with it new structures, development discourses, projects and networks, all making Palestine more “donor-driven, reflecting a Western agenda and representing elite” (Jad 2007, p. 623). Looking to the field of music, this observation is confirmed by Moslih Kanaaneh in *Palestinian Music and Song* (2013, p. 7), who speaks about the “long-term negative impact on culture and socio-political situation of this shift in policy of Western aid to Palestinians” (see also El-Ghadban and Strohm, in Kanaaneh et al., 2013, pp. 175–200). A similar view is held by one of my informants, the director of a Palestinian NGO that works to improve teaching and learning in twenty public schools in greater Jerusalem:

No one wants to give unless they are paid for it [...] The consequence of this is possibly worse in the artistic field than other fields since the arts ideally should be the last stronghold of our [the Palestinian] people. Our culture shall not be dictated or paid for by foreigners. (Conversation in Ramallah, February 2017)

However, in spite of the Music Collaboration possibly being interpreted as destructive to local idealism, several informants add that funding for the arts is much needed in a context where the Palestinian government does not provide

huge finances in this field. They are hence positive to the support to artists and cultural infrastructure, but sceptical to the often-accompanying agendas of the funds.

### MAPPING VALUES: INTRODUCING A FRAMEWORK OF WORTH

Where is Sabreen and its collaboration with CN situated in this landscape? To address this question, I find it useful to place the actions and discourses of the two partners into “orders of worth”, a framework of justification established by the French pragmatic sociologists Boltanski and Thévenot ([1991] 2006). By employing six distinct categories, six “common worlds”, namely, the *civic*, *inspirational*, *fame*, *industrial*, *domestic* and *market* worlds, I will discuss the partners’ similarities and discrepancies in their way of apprehending the Music Collaboration and its value(s).<sup>8</sup>

### SABREEN PLACED IN A FRAMEWORK OF WORTH

Sabreen started in the 1970s as an informal hub for musical artists and other creative individuals. It developed into Sabreen Association for Artistic Development, a Jerusalem-registered NGO from 1987 with the stated goals of conducting non-profit musical activities related to community building and education. In addition to widespread artistic collaborations and performances, Sabreen conducts instrumental teaching and workshops and is involved in several educational projects in Jerusalem and the West Bank in collaboration with the Palestinian authorities and international partners. Their adapted logo, “music and change”, states the two orders where their discourse and activities are mainly rooted, namely, music belonging to the *inspirational* order, and societal change to the *civic* one. In all of Sabreen’s endeavours, including the Music Collaboration with Norway, they have defined highly idealistic goals of how music activities can contribute to change in individuals and in society:

*Learning by Music* will increase the cultural literacy of children in schools, an objective towards realizing greater personal identity development, character building, and creating platforms for free expression, all which contribute to the development of a learned, cultured and diversified generation who contributes to the building of the Palestinian nation, practices freedom and democracy. (Sabreen, 2016, p. 1)

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8. This framework can serve either as a structure for mapping values or as a theory where the different forms of worth are set up against each other. In the current chapter, I rely on the former function.

Even though these claims are difficult to measure and might appear somewhat overly romantic, they find justification in academic literature (Catterall, 2009; Bamford, 2017) and in an external evaluation of the programme: “the project is relevant to the national priorities as stated in the MoE [the Palestinian Educational Ministry] strategy [...] particularly promoting national identity and citizenship”, a conclusion Millard (2015, p. ii) reached after in-depth interviews with teachers and educational supervisors in Palestine.

In addition to the mentioned justifications from the inspirational and civic worlds, there are also other values and interests in play: Sabreen needs to brand their organization, build a strong network (*fame* order) and engage with many donors in order to survive financially (*market*). The PA provides no state support to cultural NGOs; hence, Sabreen has to compete with similar organizations in the broader NGO landscape of Palestine. Some precision is, however, needed: Even though NGOs in general are “not for profit”, it is not without a hint of truth that several informants (outside Sabreen) speak about “NGO-shops” (Palestinian NGO-leader; Palestinian social anthropologist, interviewed in Ramallah, February 2017). This relates not only to the high competition of funds, but also to the salaries of employees in the NGO sector. This includes the managerial team of Sabreen, where salaries are high compared to the general level of income in Palestine (Sabreen, 2016). The (development) *industry* order is also of great importance for Sabreen, as – in order to access Western project funds – they have to draft their projects according to the rules and policies of the development industry. It is key for them to master development discourse and the very specific concepts in use.<sup>9</sup> To assure balance and sufficient attention given to the different orders of worth, the organization has put in place a shared leadership structure: To handle the market and industry orders, they have a strong administrative director, George. He has been in this position since 1993 and holds expertise in dealing with large bureaucracies and international funding agencies. To assure legitimacy within the orders of inspiration and fame, they have a charismatic artistic leader, Said, who enjoys a high level of recognition among artists and musical institutions in Palestine (Palestinian social anthropologist; Palestinian actress and cultural activist, conversation in Jerusalem, March 2017). Said was until recently an appointed member of the Palestinian Cultural Fund, operating under the PA-run Ministry of Culture (MoC) in Ramallah. Additionally, both George and Said relate their activities to the civic order, yet from different angles.

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9. See for example Cornwall and Eade (2010).



## CONCERTS NORWAY AND THE MUSIC COLLABORATION PLACED IN A FRAMEWORK OF WORTH

In which “common world” did Sabreen and CN meet, and how did they go about drafting the Music Collaboration?

As a governmental organization promoting live music in Norway, CN was established in 1968 to serve the country’s cultural rebuilding process after World War 2. At its core, it had a rights-based, dynamic and democratic view of music: By offering school concerts, public concerts and festivals all over Norway, “all who could crawl and walk in Norway would be exposed to live music. The goal was to strengthen national culture and unity through joint experiences and access to high quality music” (former director of international collaboration in CN, interviewed in Oslo, November 2016). The concerts organized by CN aimed at reflecting the culture of Norwegian society, and with the arrival of numerous immigrants during the 1970s and 1980s, the repertoire was expanded with musical expressions from Asia, Africa and South America. In order to build knowledge about these musical cultures, a team from CN travelled widely to countries in (what is now termed as) the global South in order to collect musical material, to network and to invite musicians to collaborative projects in Norway. In 1992, CN established a multicultural music centre in Oslo (*Norsk Flerkulturelt Musikksenter*), and around the same time, they established the first World Music Festival of Scandinavia, *Verden i Norden*,<sup>10</sup> in 1994. CN had good connections to the educational world: From 1989 to 1992, a three-year musical research project was conducted in collaboration with Oslo University, the *Resonant Community*. Based on exposure to various music cultures, they found significant results in identity formation and the activity level of immigrant pupils in the Norwegian school system (Skylstad, in Urbain, 2008, p. 181). Launching around nine thousand concerts per year, CN had solid expertise in production and distribution of various concert formats, with a specific focus on children as the main target group. They furthermore enjoyed large networks in the arts and in education that were of interest to Sabreen. Hence, when the first project proposal was jointly drafted in 2002 after a visit by CN’s director to Palestine, both parties expressed that this was done with the goal to mutually enrich each other in an inspirational “art world”. The art world is defined by Becker ([1982] 2008, p. x) as “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce(s) the kind of art works that art world is noted for”. This perspective offered an opportunity for acting as equals in development, or rather

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10. This festival exists as an independent foundation today under the name *Oslo World*.

“lifting the collaboration out of development” (administrative head of Sabreen, conversation in Bethlehem, February 2017), as the partners had mutual interest in artistic exchanges, education and civic dialogue. They were, of course, constrained by their respective contexts, stereotypes and the different positions in the MFA/development system, one being the “expert organization from the North” and “agent of the West”, the other “a struggling art organization in an occupied territory” (administrative head of Sabreen), yet the joint values they saw in musical activities and music education and the expertise they possessed in the art world stood out as superior to their respective roles in the development system. Anchoring the project primarily in the art world, and not in the narrow framework of development, opened up a range of alternative doors for the collaboration, a perspective that coincides with what Stupples argues (2011, p. i):

[T]he critical agency of art in the South lies in its ability to stand as an alternative imaginative space to development, one not reduced to development’s crises and deficiencies, and one from which alternative cultural imaginings can be constructed by those usually framed as the “subjects of development”.

In interviews, employees from Sabreen and CN have shared that they perceive music as a path to human flourishing and a tool to form and negotiate identities. Throughout the collaboration, the partners have been curious about each other and what music could mean in different (North and South and conflictual) contexts. They emphasize “music as a tool for positive change” (CN project leader of the Music Collaboration with Palestine, interviewed in Oslo, November 2017), yet exactly *what* this change may look like or *how* “musical systems offer the same rules for everyone” (administrative head of Sabreen) remains unspecified. At the risk of revealing cleavages between the partners, they stick to a general and somewhat romantic language of music as an ultimate tool for creativity and unity. They seem to avoid speaking about music as resistance (see below), and highlight this art form as an aesthetic resource, a psychological, educational and relational tool. Sabreen and CN seem to make no distinction between high and low culture as propagated by, for example, Bourdieu (1984), and were open to include *any* musical genre in the Music Collaboration. The emphasis has nevertheless been on traditional Arabic music and folklore. I will come back to this choice in the last part of this chapter, yet my main purpose of bringing it up in this paragraph is to show that there seems to have been no agenda from CN’s side to impose a musical agenda of the West, no specific “missionary strategy” (Beckles-Willson, 2013, p. 371) where musical forms of the West prevail against local forms of music.

## THE VALUES OF PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL RELATIONS

In 2017, CN ended its engagement in Palestine due to a new mandate from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture (Kulturtanken, 2017). However, in spite of the organizational commitment ending, regular contact still occurs between individuals in the two organizations. Friendships and loyalties beyond the project parameters have been forged. The image of CN employees as faithful partners with “a strong heart for [their] friends in Palestine” (former director of international collaboration in CN; CN project leader of the Music Collaboration) is recurrent, both among project coordinators who have been involved over many years and among short-term staff who have either been on shorter professional trips to Palestine or worked with artists from Sabreen in Norway. There seem to be a strong sense of solidarity, in which no one – including myself after two fieldwork experiences in Palestine – is left unmarked by the situation. This corresponds with the highest good in the “domestic world”, where loyalty and mutual respect are key values. CN’s international director retired in 2016 but has remained in an unpaid advisory position to Sabreen. Here he explains the reason:

Once you have been in those areas and seen the conditions under which the population live and make music, it is difficult to look at this as merely a job. I have seen the hopelessness of our partners and their families. I have seen how much great talent and huge potential that lay enclosed behind this big wall. I have seen their good and hard work [...] I say to myself, whatever I can do to continue my support, I will do it. (former director of international collaboration in CN)

He further emphasizes that working with Sabreen, for him, is not a matter of looking at them as “underdeveloped”. For the former director and other informants in CN, the real issue is to “relieve pressure [...] showing that someone out there cares about their conditions” and, of course, as mentioned earlier, “to develop artistically interesting and relevant partnerships” (former director of international collaboration in CN).

It derives from this that, rather than being subjects of development (and development’s crises and deficiencies), Sabreen and CN have established a relationship marked by respect, equality and recognition for each other’s competencies in the art world. There is strong solidarity between the partners. Through the Music Collaboration, Sabreen has had access to CN’s toolkit of skills and networks. CN gained valuable access to high-quality Arabic musicians who have toured Norwegian schools and participated in CN programs abroad since 2002. The “paternalism of partnerships” (Baaz, 2005), observed in varying degrees in most develop-

ment projects, is subverted by the reciprocity of the partners and the way the stakeholders of the Music Collaboration perceive each other and work “hands-on” together. More than a one-way experience where expertise is transmitted from the North to the South, the Music Collaboration appears as an exploration of human relationships, of musics (yes, in plural!), and can in this way be seen as an alternative and valuable addition to traditional narratives of development.

## MUSIC AND THE CONFLICT(S)

Returning to Georgina Born’s statement about the context being “folded into the musical experience” (in Boeskov 2017, p. 1), this next section will focus on the musical content of the programme, i.e., artistic considerations and genre choices of the Music Collaboration, as well as their intersection with political dilemmas faced in this specific context: How strong is the conception of “music as resistance” compared to the already mentioned narratives about inspirational partnership and art as a strategy for international development?

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE AN ACTIVIST?

Prior to the collaboration with Norway and other Western donors, Sabreen functioned as an independent artist collective with one leg in the West Bank and one in East Jerusalem from the early 1980s. It was started during a decade marked by much disappointment among Palestinians. Lost hope and revolutionary spirit characterized their first CD release, “Smoke of Volcanoes” (1984). When the first Intifada started, Said, artistic director of Sabreen, was in his studio and immediately started to compose music. The turmoil eventually led to the release of a second album, “Death of the Prophet”, in 1987. Their third album, “Here Come the Doves” (1994), was coloured by high hopes after the Oslo Accords. With the lack of political follow-up, however, a period of disillusion followed, and “Where to?” was released in 2000. After that, Said talks about “paralysis”, both in musical sound and style: “When you are paralysed, you cannot do anything. This is why it was particularly good to start the collaboration with Concerts Norway in that period. We got new inspiration and musical friends” (artistic manager of Sabreen, interviewed in Jerusalem, March 2017).

Throughout their history, Sabreen has both delivered explicit political musical work against occupation and conducted educational and community music activities without explicit political content. Is it possible, then, to divide Sabreen’s music into one strand that deals with resistance and another strand dealing with community music and education? To determine this, we need to take a closer look

at how resistance is understood and defined. For Karen Abi-Ezzi, “resistance addresses fixed, dominant structures, which through their hegemony constitute the status quo” (in Urbain, 2008, p. 99). Occupation has been the status quo of the Palestinian people for more than sixty years. For Omar Barghouti, a well-known choreographer from Ramallah, “resistance to occupation is the very mode of resistance of people under occupation, shaping and determining all aspects of their lives and all components of their culture” (in Kanaaneh et al., 2013, p. 9). Moslih Kanaaneh argues further in this direction and proposes that the life of an occupied population is inherently comprised of two interrelated components: Subjugation to occupation and resistance to it. “Resistance can be direct and active, or indirect and passive” (Kanaaneh et al., 2013, p. 8). This broad perspective implies that there must be a range of possible forms of resistance. Physically violent demonstrations, strikes, boycotts and refusals to pay taxes are the most visible ones, yet culture in general, and music in particular, are also seen by many as a powerful and symbolic means to stand up against the external oppressor. The following excerpts from the song “Ow Baaden” (which translates as “Now What?”<sup>11</sup>) exemplifies a musical work by Sabreen where they ask explicit political questions:

You closed off the streets by the hundreds / you sprayed the youth with water  
 You killed one thousand, two thousand and more / then what?  
 You filled the land with walls, with settlements and arrested children, young  
 men and women / every day new collusions, decisions, conspiracies / and then  
 what? [...]  
 You are God’s chosen people, you portray us as people who ride donkeys  
 Oh donkey, help them understand we will not leave this land / and then what?  
 We were a people at peace with ourselves / no one among us used to be rude [...]  
 The story carries on from one generation to the other / It’s almost as if you were  
 watching a movie / The same one, for one hundred years a hundred times a day  
 [...] And then what?  
 (Sabreen, 2015)

The performance and use of this kind of activist music is, however, something that does not fall under the mandate of the Music Collaboration with Norway: “If this musical material was used in music education and spread in schools”, says a CN project leader, “we would be taking a political role we do not wish to have. As a state-sponsored Norwegian project, we cannot be activists”.

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11. English subtitles are available in the video on YouTube (Sabreen, 2015).

This statement is interesting for several reasons, the main one being the distinction between the political and the non-political in this context. If we are to follow Barghouti and Kanaaneh's definition of resistance, there can be no such distinction as "music produced under occupation is inevitably music of resistance" (Kanaaneh et al., 2013, p. 9). Perhaps this is more about the fact that, as Beckles-Willson (2013, p. 254) suggests, the "political" in the Palestinian context has negative connotations, whereas "unpolitical" is seen as positive from a Western partner's point of view? Since the Norwegians have expressed their solidarity with the Palestinians on many other occasions, and officially support a two-state solution (Solberg et al., 2018), it seems surprising to write off the political aspect in the musical activities in schools, yet it is understandable if seen as a "product of a context in which anything political has become negatively loaded to the extreme" (Beckles-Willson, 2013, p. 254).

#### IDENTITY BUILDING AND MUSICAL SKILL TRAINING IN SCHOOLS

Identity-work (Stokes, 1997; Small, 1998; Biddle & Knights, 2007) and music education as skill enhancement (Catterall, 2009; Bamford, 2017), on the other hand, seem more palatable than politics, and eventually this is what is most emphasized by the Music Collaboration: "Palestine has a rich cultural heritage and Palestinian arts and culture play a significant part as markers of national identity. In the Palestinian people's struggle towards self-government and independence, a cultural expression plays an important role" (Sabreen, 2007). How is this translated, musically, to the Music Collaboration's activities in Palestinian schools? Let me share one example from a school concert I attended in Bethlehem in 2017.<sup>12</sup>

There are three musicians in a room filled with about forty girls and their female teachers. They are around eight years old and radiate expectations through their shy smiles. On the wall there is a large portrait of former PLO leader and Palestinian hero Yasser Arafat, there are letters and artwork that the pupils themselves have made. Shafeek (qanon), Mundiir (vocalist) and John (percussion) from Sabreen ask for silence. The girls are obedient. The musicians start by showing their instruments. John, for example, states that the dharbuka is rectangular, not round. The children laugh and scream to tell him that he is wrong. The musicians then ask the kids whether they know what various traditional instruments are called.

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12. I attended two concerts with the same three musicians. NG, assistant administrative director of Sabreen, was also present, in addition to AM from Concerts Norway and myself.

According to the new curriculum in Palestinian schools, the one the Music Collaboration has contributed towards making, there are certain traditional instruments that the pupils shall know how to name. The humorous exchange between John and the children serves as a test of whether they have learned what they were supposed to. The performance then continues:

The musicians open the concert with a folk tune, telling the story of a “Girl waking up in the morning / rubbing her eyes / birds singing / she has to go to school / now, we are going to sing / handsome boy”. It seems to resonate familiar images in the pupil’s heads. The next song is about the olive trees of Palestine, also a traditional song. Everybody knows it. In addition to the forty girls in the classroom, there are now about forty more standing in the door, all joining the song. The teachers participate actively with the kids. Then follows a range of songs in the same genre, before “Ami Ba Masoud” (My uncle Masoud) closes off the session. This is a song that also involves physical exercise: “My uncle Masoud has a big stomach / He eats a lot, but will never get full / 50 eggs, 12 marmalades ...” While the song continues, the pupils participate with movements, touching their stomachs, heads and so on.

This school concert reflects an effort to touch the pupils by presenting children’s songs mixed with nostalgic images of family, daily life and nature in Palestine. Recognizing the ways in which musical practices are imbricated with social dynamics (Hesmondhalgh, 2014, p. 4) is a key to understand the logics behind the music class conducted by the three musicians from Sabreen. This is community and identity building in practice: Within the frames of national education, these musicians maintain tradition, and they pass on the Palestinian musical legacy to younger generations. However, things are not that simple. In the group of teachers and pupils, there are Palestinians of various backgrounds. Palestinians are, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, not a unified group. Not socially, not economically, not religiously or culturally. In spite of the common experience of being under Israeli occupation, their sense of identity differs, an experience that Boeskov (2017) accounts for in his writings about music education in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon:

It is a clearly formulated goal for the Palestinian organisation running the music program that the Palestinian children through music and dance are taught what it means to be Palestinian, that they learn to be proud of their national and cultural identity and to identify with the fight for the return to

the lost homeland. The musical practice contributes in this way to the reinforcement of certain ideas, values and attitudes towards important social and cultural issues. However, to an outsider at least, it seems that the musical practice also indicates rather narrow boundaries to what feelings and versions of Palestinian identity that can be legitimately expressed. (Boeskov, 2017, p. 2)

Against the backdrop of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Palestinians have again and again had to emphasize their unity: “there was no such thing as Palestinians ... They did not exist” (Golda Meir, Israeli prime minister from 1969 to 1974, cited by Alajaji, in Kanaanah et al., 2013, p. 98). Yet, unless complexity is accounted for and integrated into musical activities, there seems to be a missed opportunity to capture nuances and integrate them into a future peaceful coexistence.

On the other hand, skill training in music, i.e., educational training happening in parallel to the identity work, provides concrete (yet very basic) competencies that can be used for many purposes. Mastering an instrument or reading notes are competencies that students and teachers can use to express their own creativity, manage emotional stress or enhance social interactions with others. These are tools that they, in their turn, can use to either align with the proposed version of what it means to be Palestinian or invent new versions that resonate better with how they feel about themselves and their community. By giving them skills to enjoy and create just *any* music, I argue, music education in this context builds the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, in Rao & Walton, 2004, pp. 59–84).

#### **“YOUR CULTURAL RIGHTS ARE FULFILLED – YOU ARE FREE?”**

The notion of sharing creative tools and providing the freedom to express oneself musically is the last point I wish to touch briefly upon in this chapter. There is something paradoxical (and slightly schizophrenic?) about this form of music intervention in the Palestinian society, paid by foreign aid. In spite of the notion of partner equality and all the benefits music education seems to bring to individuals and the community, one uncomfortable question remains: “Through cultural interventions and sponsorships, the Westerners tell us: Your cultural rights are fulfilled, you are free. They want to tranquilize us by supporting cultural movements [...] drive youth into culture so that they don’t protest or do politics” (Palestinian NGO leader).<sup>13</sup> Is this so?

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13. Similar views are also expressed by two other informants: a Palestinian social anthropologist and a Palestinian filmmaker and producer.



This statement can be interpreted as an extension of the idea of development aid as an anti-politics machine (Ferguson, 1990), where the focus is shifted from development *per se* to the motives behind development: Who does it? On which grounds? Whom does it really benefit? A former NORAD<sup>14</sup> representative, who worked for Norway in Palestine when the Music Collaboration was launched in 2002, highlights that their main intention to support this project was to nourish contacts between Palestinian and international cultural actors. Building cultural competence, infrastructure and networks was considered an important part of Palestinian state building and for the two-state solution supported by Norway. She nevertheless acknowledges that the current criticism from the Palestinian cultural community has a certain validity, even though she does not recognize herself or the Norwegian MFA intentions in this: “Sadly, with the lack of a permanent political solution, possibly the best we can do is to work towards the fulfilment of Palestinian cultural rights. I consider the collaboration between Sabreen and CN successful in this manner” (former NORAD representative to Palestine, conversation in Oslo, February 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The annexation wall surrounding the Palestinian territories is not only a geographical condition; it also “occupies a symbolic function inside people’s heads” (administrative head of Sabreen). An international Music Collaboration in this context appears as a strategy for (*civic*) relief and resistance: By focusing on Palestinian identities and musical legacies passed on to the young generation, the Music Collaboration has contributed to resisting the external occupier. By teaching musical skills and building the capacity to aspire, the project has provided teachers and students with tools to address walls inside their minds.

A second narrative is rooted in an (*inspirational*) art world in which likeminded artists and organizations meet. Their motivations and justifications are primarily artistic in the sense that passion and musical professionalism are what unite them. Palestinian and Norwegian partners make cooperative efforts towards cultural production and are bound primarily by artistic excellency and opportunities, not primarily for activist purposes.

This stands both in contrast to and together with the third narrative, namely, a (*development*) industrial narrative where the Music Collaboration takes place in and is conditioned by an international aid context and a bigger picture of Western foreign policy.

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14. Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

I argue that these narratives are tightly interwoven: Music and music education in Palestine cannot be disconnected from resistance, and even though activism was never CN's main intention, the collaboration has nevertheless fostered solidarity and political engagement. Framed by a Norwegian development aid policy, the project has aimed to fulfil Palestinian cultural rights. Yet, in the absence of a permanent political solution in Palestine, it is difficult to see how this project can *really* make a difference. The cement will probably not soften, and the wall will not fall even if drums are played day and night in Palestine. This reality notwithstanding, the redemption – the soothing – provided by musical training and practice should not be underestimated in this context, nor should the connection between Palestinian children and their heritage. The democratic state the Palestinians hope to build relies on an educated population, and using music in this regard offers education and skills that make this dream more possible (see also Millard, 2015, p. 29). In this perspective, for all its ambiguities, music appears to be a useful strategy.

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## LIST OF CITED INFORMANTS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE IN TEXT)

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- Palestinian social anthropologist at Birzeit University.
- Palestinian cultural activist and actress from Jerusalem.
- Former director of international collaboration in CN (1993–2016).
- Administrative head of Sabreen.
- CN project leader in charge of the Music Collaboration with Palestine from 2016.
- Artistic manager of Sabreen.
- Palestinian filmmaker and producer.
- NORAD representative who worked in Palestine when the Music Collaboration was launched in 2002. Current job as MFA envoy to an African country.