

Resonating Voices

Waves of Sound and Spirit in a Palestinian Musician's Quest for Identity and Freedom

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This text has primarily been developed through transcriptions of my own journaling, interviews, literature readings, and video materials. While the majority of the content reflects my personal reflections and research, I used AI tools, specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT, to assist with grammar checks and vocabulary refinement. The use of AI has been limited to improving some aspects of language expression while the core ideas, structure, and content remain my own.

Abstract

This thesis emerges as an exploration of the multifaceted nature of music, identity, and the enduring spirit of a people living through profound challenges. Based on autoethnographic reflection, it provides an introspective exploration of how sound becomes a vessel for presence, a mirror for resilience, and a space for transformation. Through music, this inquiry seeks not merely to articulate personal narratives but to connect them with the common pulse of a collective memory—a memory that is influenced by the persistent realities of displacement and the yearning for freedom that Palestinians, no matter where they are in the world, experience.

At the heart of this research lie three case studies that illuminate the potential of music: *Sonic Exile*, where traditional Arabic modalities and experimental soundscapes dissolve into a single, resonating voice; *Echoes from Bethlehem*, an improvisational encounter with Palestinian Nay master Faris Ishaq that brings forth a meditative state of being wholly present in sound and spirit; and the work of the Amwaj Choir, where human voice rises above cultural and physical confines, embodying a living, enduring presence.

The findings suggest that music is not a static act but a living practice—an unfolding dialogue between tradition and innovation, self and other, silence and sound. Improvisation, as a way of being, becomes a method of both reflection and resistance, enabling a deeper connection to the present moment while engaging with the complexity of the past.

The research reveals music's profound capacity to heal, to resist, and to imagine new pathways for freedom and belonging. Rather than offering definitive conclusions, this thesis extends invitations: to listen, to witness, and to remain open to the spaces where sound and silence meet, where identity and memory evolve, and where the human spirit, despite all, continues to create and endure.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Artistic Autoethnography, Palestinian Identity, Artistic Expression and Liberation, Cultural Survival, Musical Healing and Trauma, Improvisational Music, Collective Memory, Qanun, Sound, Global Collaborations, Spirituality and Creativity, Diaspora Artistry, Reclaiming Voice through Music, Palestinian Art, Human Voice.

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To my collaborator Jano Doe, whose inspiring presence in the Sonic Exile project has pushed forward the boundaries of this artistic exploration, I am deeply grateful. Our shared journey, unfolding traditional Palestinian music with experimental soundscapes, has created a powerful space for mutual vulnerability and creative discovery.

I would also like to acknowledge the Amwaj Choir, whose collective voice and dedication to preserving cultural pulses through music have had a significant impact on this research. The choir's ability to transcend boundaries and connect people, stories, and emotions through song is a vivid reflection of the enduring strength of humanity.

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Lastly, my sincere appreciation is extended to all Palestinians who are still suffering immensely as a result of systemic injustice. Our culture of life, generosity, love, and unity inspires me to continue on this journey of self-discovery and healing, as does your strength and determination.

Dedication

*This work is dedicated to the people of Palestine—
To those who endure with strength and inspire with their courage,
To whom I offer my deepest respect and love,
And my yearning for a home restored, for justice long overdue.*

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1. Introduction

This thesis, *Resonating Voices: Waves of Sound and Spirit in a Palestinian Musician's Quest for Identity and Freedom*, is an autoethnographic exploration of artistic identity, informed by my journey as a Palestinian musician navigating the intersections of sound, identity, and political struggle. By adopting artistic research and reflexive autoethnography, I position myself as both researcher and subject, engaging in a self-reflective inquiry to uncover how personal and collective complexities, the lived realities of Palestine, and global influences shape my artistic expression and worldview.

This thesis is a continuation of my previous Master of Fine Arts research in Music, with a specialization in Improvisation and World Music Performance at Gothenburg University, Sweden. Building on the foundational work with my primary instrument, the qanun—a central instrument in the traditional Arabic ensemble, which I have played for over 21 years—this study expands my exploration of its expressive possibilities and the significance of voice and poetry as a medium for emotional resonance and cultural connection. By navigating the complexities of my Palestinian identity and the challenges imposed by geopolitical realities, I aim to illuminate pathways toward a more inclusive and dynamic musical landscape.

While this inquiry is deeply personal, it extends outward to connect my evolving artistic practice with broader collective narratives. It situates the qanun within the lived experiences of a people whose history is marked by a profound struggle for self-determination and fundamental human rights. It reflects how individual expression can resonate with and amplify the broader pursuit of cultural resilience and the fundamental yearning for freedom.

Born in Jerusalem in 1990 and raised in Bethlehem during the First and Second Intifadas, my upbringing was profoundly marked by occupation, restrictions on freedom, and witnessing everyday acts of oppression imposed by military violence until this day (Abualkibash, 2017). These experiences, compounded by historical and intergenerational trauma, have deeply influenced my artistic identity. Music became both a refuge and a means of reclaiming agency—a way to channel personal pain while connecting with the enduring power of tradition

and collective identity. An identity and a narrative that was determined for it to cease to exist and had been veiled by the orientalist narrative that paved the way for the colonial narrative and existence (Said, 1977).

The sociopolitical environment of the Palestinian lives is enmeshed in collective social injustices, therefore, it requires to consider the "holistic being" within the sociopolitical context in order to understand the individual (McClure, 2011). Through this inquiry, I seek pathways to examine my emotional landscape and my music remains inseparable from the broader Palestinian struggle for freedom, particularly as my homeland endures immense suffering at this very moment, impacting the nature of my reflections and creations. The accumulated impact of trauma, loss, deprivation, and daily humiliation manifests in various ways, including feelings of internalized oppression and self-recrimination that have, as every child and youngster in Palestine, affected me as well (Barron, 2015).

Improvisation and experimentation are central to this inquiry, offering a liberating framework for articulating the inexpressible and cultivating profound connections with others. Two primary case studies guide this research: *Sonic Exile*, a collaborative project with Jano Doe, merging the traditional sounds of the qanun and Poetry by Palestinian poets with modular synthesizers and my long-standing collaboration with Faris Ishaq, a global Nay master and percussionist from Bethlehem, Palestine. Faris's rootedness in his Palestinian heritage, his passion for the Nay, and his ability to blend tradition with innovation continually inspire my work. These projects delve into themes of displacement, cultural resistance, and human connection, drawing on Palestinian folk songs, poetry, and personal experiences to craft soundscapes that embody longing, defiance, and hope, while uncovering a profound sense of shared vulnerability. This dual function of music—as a space for personal healing and as a means of resisting—forms a key focus of this research.

In addition, the project will look at my month-long collaboration with the Palestinian Amwaj Choir in Hebron and Bethlehem, followed by a tour in Italy. Within Amwaj, young Palestinians are reclaiming their narratives, using music to preserve their heritage amid relentless attempts at erasure. As Weiner (2023, p. 996) puts it “Palestinians have been 'denied subjectivity and 'permission to narrate' their own history and experiences” a condition exacerbated by the settler

colonialism that continues to strip them of their language, identity, and equal participation in all aspects of life across historic Palestine. In this light, the act of singing and sharing stories through music becomes an essential counter-narrative—an assertion of existence and a refusal to be silenced. The transformative role of music in shaping both individual and collective consciousness resonates with Aldridge’s insight that music has the power to elevate awareness, foster hope, and renew the spirit (Aldridge, 1995). As such, these collaborations hold profound significance, not only in personal growth but also in their broader global resonance.

Reflexive ethnography forms a cornerstone of this study, aligning with the creative processes of collaboration and improvisation. The main focus of reflexive ethnography is addressing the topic of culture and subculture, where authors draw on their personal experiences to reflect on themselves and relate to self-other (Ellis, 2000). Through the weaving of my experiences with those of my collaborators, this reflective technique allows the study to investigate the layers of self and cultural expression, offering a nuanced perspective on the sociopolitical forces shaping Palestinian music.

The following chapters guide the reader through this exploration. First, I outline the key concepts framing this research, providing a foundation for understanding the inquiry. This is followed by a discussion of the methodological approaches used to navigate this reflexive autoethnographic inquiry. As mentioned, the core of the thesis is comprised of two primary case studies: *Sonic Exile*, and my collaboration with Faris Ishaq. Then, I discuss my month-long collaboration with the Palestinian Amwaj Choir during a tour in Italy and Palestine.

These case studies address central questions, such as: How can Palestinian music serve as a medium for asserting artistic identity and resisting cultural erasure? and How do improvisational and cross-cultural collaborations reshape artistic practices and contribute to self-definition? The thesis concludes with a broader reflection on these findings, situating them within the wider discourse on music’s potential as a transformative tool for navigating the complex intersections of identity, cultural continuity, and sociopolitical resistance.

Finally, the concluding chapter synthesizes the key findings, with the final concert, *Fragments of Love and War*, serving as a unifying expression that reflects the complexity and subtlety of

artistic expression and the evolving formation of identity, offering a lens into the layered experiences of my journey as a Palestinian.

2. Outline of the Key Concepts

The act of creating music offers profound insights into the interplay of identity, collaboration, and cultural memory, serving as a lifeline for cultural preservation and self-expression, particularly within the Palestinian experience. Art, as Meskimmon (2011) notes, reconfigures the social, ethical, and political climate of our time.

It is essential to recognise the role of music in processing the complex experiences of trauma and the fragmentation of self that often accompany it. Continuous traumatic stress, distinct from isolated traumatic events, permeates the daily lives of those who lack safe spaces, where trauma is normalized (Farajallah, 2022). This ongoing trauma not only undermines physical safety but also destabilizes psychological well-being, often leaving little room for relief or recovery. The psychological impact is particularly severe among Palestinian children, with 95% displaying symptoms of depression, hyperactivity, aggression, and a preference for isolation, underscoring the profound and enduring effects of living under constant threat (Farajallah, 2022). Through sound, poetry, and collaborative creation, music transcends its role to become a vital tool for navigating and processing the deep psychological wounds inflicted. Intergenerational trauma stemming from direct and constant violence, among others (Veronese, 2020; Weiner, 2023), has ultimately limited the capacity for free engagement within the community and with the world, disrupting self-worth, self-expression and creativity.

In response, integrating personal experiences of pain, collective memories, tradition, and the spirit of resistance into the music offers a medium to revisit the ancestral legacy of culture and authentic identities and bring forward the longing aspirations for life of dignity and collectivity. Palestinians not only bear witness to their struggles but also confront the forces of erasure. Music emerges as a medium for bringing fragmented memories, identities, and hopes into harmony. It serves simultaneously as an act of survival and a powerful assertion of Palestinian identity. According to Veronese (2020), places can define the possibilities for both individual and collective lives, as well as shape identities. People can, however, question and reinterpret these

boundaries by intentionally engaging with them. This notion stresses how creative pursuits can mature into intentional attempts to reclaim and remodel emotional and physical places, rather than simply reacting to external stimuli. The following explains the key concepts that underpin this research.

- **Artistic Identity and Its Evolution:**

Artistic identity is a dynamic and ever-changing concept, shaped by the interconnection of personal, political, and cultural factors. It implies that identity is continually being rebuilt through experiences and creative endeavors. In particular, Palestinian artistic identity combines individual stories with a collective struggle, reflecting how art can be a survival tool as well as a storehouse of memory.

Laïdi-Hanieh (2006) argues that Palestinian cultural resistance is deeply rooted in self-representation rather than externally imposed narratives. This perspective situates artistic identity within a dynamic process of rewriting one's own story in the face of fragmentation and occupation. As Palestinian art transitions from traditional frameworks like *sumud* (steadfastness), Abuelhiga (2020) describes it as a firm nonviolence, an active dedication to righteousness, and as 'a kind of patient strength. . . . It emphasizes how artists navigate changing social and political circumstances in the context of contemporary explorations into identity and belonging. This change points to the continual balancing act of interacting with international artistic influences while still conserving cultural heritage.

Historically, Palestinian art has been inseparable from the national struggle for survival and resistance. Following the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 Palestinian artistic production became closely associated with the nationalist resistance movement as Maha Nassar (2014) explains with art serving as a potent instrument for empowerment and protest. El-Amyouni (2024) expands on this by emphasizing the fragmentation inherent in Palestinian political identity, which oscillates between moments of unity and disintegration.

The Palestinian experience, marked by cycles of coming together and falling apart, manifests in the complex and often contradictory nature of the national struggle. The frequent shifts between

collective unity and disintegration reflect not only the challenges of resistance but also the deeply embedded tension between fragmentation and coherence within Palestinian identity. As El-Amyouni, (2024), articulates, Palestine exists both as a political force and as a symbol—a name shouted from the margins of global power structures, even in the absence of official representation. This duality shapes how Palestinian artists engage with their identity, navigating between fragmentation and unity, in a constant process of redefining selfhood.

To transcend what Mbembe (2002) refers to as "the dead end" of simplistic victim narratives in the battle for selfhood, one must go beyond narrow definitions of identity confined to race and geography. Mbembe calls for the recognition of "intersecting practices" that not only address factual and moral disputes but also pave the way for "self-styling"—the active and intentional creation of one's identity. This shift from a static to a dynamic, self-directed conception of identity is crucial to understanding how Palestinian artistic production and its accompanying cultural narratives are formed through ongoing struggles for self-definition and autonomy.

In sum, artistic identity is not merely a reflection of cultural heritage or political circumstances; it is an active, dynamic process that transcends external limitations and allows individuals to assert their voices and agency. Palestinians also challenge the ongoing settler colonialism that culminates in historical erasure and denial of equal rights to language, identity, social, political, and economic participation across historic Palestine (Weiner, 2023). In this way, Palestinian artistic self-narratives become a crucial mechanism to construct and reconstruct their identity, affirming the dignity and humanity of the Palestinian community in the face of sociocide and political erasure (Laïdi-Hanieh, 2006).

- **Cultural Resistance:**

Cultural or creative resistance is the reclamation and preservation of cultural narratives through artistic expression, allowing marginalized communities to assert their identity and heritage in the face of erasure. Webb-Mitchell (1995, p.223) poignantly says, "Forgetting the narratives of self, family, and community is inhuman because our accumulated history of suffering and happiness is then gone and forgotten." This profound observation emphasizes the vital necessity of cultural preservation, especially for Palestinians, for whom music, poetry, and art have long served as vessels of memory, preserving narratives that would otherwise be lost to time and erasure.

El-Amyouni (2024, p. 21) articulates that “existence is resistance,” tackling the fact that simply to exist and create within occupation is, in itself, a profound act of resistance. Asserting existence through creation is not just a personal act, but also a communal one, resisting both the external forces of occupation and the internal forces of forgetting.

Palestinian resistance to these forces has been robust, centering on *sumud*—the steadfast refusal to leave and to be colonized (Qumsiyeh, 2010). Historically, Palestinian resistance has found expression in a wide range of nonviolent actions, from labor and tax strikes to boycotts of Israeli products. This robust history has coalesced into movements such as the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement, supported by the Geneva Convention, which affirms the right of colonized peoples to resist all forms of oppression (Weiner, 2023). However, as he suggests, ending the occupation would likely end much of the resistance itself, highlighting the interconnectedness of resistance and occupation.

Palestinian art and music reject the notion that their struggles should be relegated to the past, challenging the normalization of occupation and giving voice to lives defined by resistance that hold the core of the collective pursuit of self-determination. As El-Amyouni (2024) notes, the Palestinian identity is “deeply intertwined with resistance”; even in the diaspora, Palestinians continue to sing, write, and create as acts of existence and endurance, demonstrating their right to a place within the world’s collective narrative. Music, poetry, song and theater have long been instruments of resistance against occupations from Napoleon to the British to Zionist militias and organizations and of collective imagination and strength (El-Amyouni, 2024). Art became a dynamic force that preserve, empower and carry forward the collective identity and aspirations for a future where oppression and violence have no more place. This resistance is not passive; it is active and present, woven into the very fabric of their culture.

Moreover, Stephen Duncombe (2002) elaborates on the power of cultural resistance to create a “free space” where new meanings and visions for the future can emerge, challenging the ideological and material dominance of oppressive powers. He also suggests that ideologically, cultural resistance “creates a space for new language, meanings, and visions of the future,” positioning it as a transformative force capable of redefining both the present and the future of

marginalized communities. For Palestinians, this creation of a new language is crucial in asserting their identity and vision in the face of displacement and occupation.

- **Cultural Memory and Artistic Expression in the Palestinian Context:**

Cultural memory compasses both the preservation and reimagining of traditional music, stories, and artistic expressions and is essential in connecting our collective past with the present and future. As a Palestinian artist, my creative journey is deeply intertwined with the ongoing struggle to preserve and reimagine our cultural heritage. Santos (2011) speaks of art as a tool for creating "living memory," preserving historical narratives and challenging the exclusionary national stories that have often marginalized Palestinian voices. In the collective Palestinian consciousness, music becomes a critical vessel to "reinscribe" memory, preserving the past while shaping a new, resilient, and determinant future (El-Amyouni, 2024).

This process of resistance through art is crucial in the Palestinian both at home and in the diaspora, where the boundaries between "being" and "belonging" are constantly negotiated. Here, the artistic expression of cultural memory and tradition comes as a language to recall history and tell the truth. Cultural production affirms our appreciation of this existence and to the heritage that enriches this resilient existence. In addition, it is an assertion of our continuous existence especially in the face of efforts to claim otherwise and always question it.

Palestinian music and poetry often carry the weight of memory, shaping identity within a socio-historical framework. Memory becomes a "mediational tool," linking individuals to their collective experiences and guiding the formation of new identities and actions (Brescó de Luna, 2012). For Palestinians, particularly those in the diaspora, the very act of remembering is a form of survival. Through music, we can bridge past struggles with present resilience, ensuring that our shared history is passed down and reimagined for future generations.

This ongoing narrative revolves around the collective memory of the Nakba, the catastrophic displacement of Palestinians in 1948, which continues to shape our identity and politics today. The trauma of the Nakba is a living memory that shapes our present and strengthens our continued resistance. It is not a thing of the past; it is a living memory that informs our present and fuels our ongoing resistance. As Masalha (2012) writes, the Nakba is not just an event but a

continuing process of dispossession and erasure, one that is actively concealed by dominant narratives that seek to exclude Palestinian experiences from the historical record. This erasure is part of the larger strategy of colonial control, which seeks to deny Palestinians the right to narrate their history. Yet, despite these efforts, our collective memory persists. Through music, poetry, and storytelling, we actively resist the erasure of our history. Through my artistic work, I seek to honor this memory as a vivid recollection and a call to action—a directive act.

Here, self-awareness and cultural negotiation are explored through the lens of collaboration. Sections 4.1 *Sonic Exile* and 4.2 *Echoes from Bethlehem* examine how music connects personal histories with universal human experiences. The dialogue between bodies, instruments, and stories creates a sonic space for identity to exist and evolve, a multidimensional landscape where identity might find grounding in cultural memory while simultaneously being reshaped through collective exploration. This study aims to observe how these collaborative spaces transform identity, allowing it to be both anchored and continuously reimagined and reconstructed in real-time encounters.

In Section 4.3 *Discussion*, I I will reflect on the commonalities, challenges, and subtle connections that surfaced within both projects, exploring how shared vulnerability, the intimate nature of the duo format, and the serendipitous ways in which these collaborations began have collectively shaped our work. This reflection aims to draw out the nuanced ways in which these encounters resonate with the core themes of this thesis.

In Section 4.4 explore the collaborative project with *Amwaj Choir*, which reflect key themes of identity preservation and collective resistance central to this research. Composed of young Palestinians, demonstrates how music can function as a counter-narrative to erasure and a tool for reclaiming identity. These collaborations highlight music's potential to facilitate resistance and solidarity, supporting the broader exploration of identity, cultural memory, and the role of artistic expression in personal and collective resilience throughout the thesis.

3. Research Design

This research situates Palestinian music as a dynamic force of cultural assertion, where sound becomes both a sanctuary and a battleground. Moving beyond conventional analysis, it looks

into improvisation and cross-cultural collaboration as radical processes that push the boundaries of artistic identity and redefine selfhood. Reflexive autoethnography and collaborative music-making serve as the study's methodological anchors, bridging the personal and collective to reveal music's capacity to embody lived realities and amplify silenced narratives.

3.1 Methodology

The methodology of this research is rooted in the approaches of artistic research. In addition, I draw on aspects of autoethnography, duoethnography, and reflexivity to create an interwoven methodological framework. Together, these approaches integrate personal narrative, collaborative inquiry, and creative exploration to investigate the complexities of my Palestinian identity within the context of music-making and research.

The interplay between imagination and research invites a reevaluation of how knowledge is produced and conveyed, particularly in artistic and ethnographic contexts. By moving beyond the rigid conventions of documentation and description, artists and researchers engage with "imaginative speculation" as a critical method of discovery (Ravetz, 2009). This approach challenges traditional notions of objectivity, embracing subjectivity and personal experience as integral to the inquiry process. The imaginative techniques employed in art allow for a more thorough investigation of human experiences, which may otherwise be "muted by the hard science of collecting data" (Taussig, 2009). By situating personal concerns within expressive forms that transcend textual or descriptive limitations, these practices highlight the potential of artistic inquiry in understanding complex cultural and social phenomena. This imaginative lens not only broadens the scope of methodological possibilities but also enriches the narratives created in the space between art and ethnography.

- **Artistic Research**

Artistic research forms the foundation of this inquiry in which the creative process itself becomes an investigative method. As Borgdorff (2006) explains, "research in the arts devotes attention to both the materiality of art to the extent that it makes the immaterial possible, and to the immateriality of art to the extent that it is embedded in the artistic material." This approach

demonstrates a natural kinship with established research traditions such as ethnography and action research, which inform practice-based inquiry (Borgdorff, 2012).

Artistic research differs from the research of art, as it involves an element of "finding" rather than "searching," where chance, complications, and uncertainties play pivotal roles in guiding discovery (Henke et al., 2020). Unlike systematized methodologies dependent on pre-legitimated models, artistic research thrives in zones of ambiguity, allowing for disruptions, fictions, and uncertainties to inform the process. These qualities contribute to its aesthetic singularity, enabling the researcher to engage with subtleties and render them manifest with clarity and precision (Henke et al., 2020).

This inquiry aligns with three overlapping approaches to artistic research in music: text-based positioning and validation, "pure" artistic research expressed through music itself, and reflective approaches that focus on the act of making music (Schippers, 2017, p. 165). This triadic framework allows the laboratory of the practice room or music studio to serve as the primary site of research, where experimentation and reflection converge to generate new understandings (Schippers, 2017, p. 167).

Within this framework, methods such as participant observation, field studies, autobiographical narratives, performance ethnography, and collaborative inquiry resonate deeply with the artistic processes explored in this research. Artistic research positions the creative process as both subject and method, offering a dynamic lens to investigate cultural and social phenomena. By engaging in artistic practice, this study examines how identity and resistance manifest through the act of making art. The artist's practice becomes the "field" of investigation, positioning the creative process as both the subject and the method of inquiry. Similarly, action research, with its transformative and enhancement-oriented aims, aligns with the artist's pursuit of innovation and engagement, enriching the discourse around the intersection of art and research practices (Borgdorff, 2012).

● **Reflexivity as a Conceptual Framework**

Reflexivity underpins this research as both a conceptual framework and a methodological tool. It acknowledges the dynamic interplay between the researcher, their artistic practice, and the

research process. Every researcher has, to some degree, a connection to or involvement with the subject of their research (Davies, 2012), underscoring the intrinsic role of my Palestinian identity in shaping the trajectory of this inquiry. Reflexivity enables a critical awareness of how my lived experiences as a Palestinian musician inform the selection of case studies, collaborative processes, and analytical perspectives. This self-awareness transforms the research process into a dialogic space, where personal and socio-political contexts intersect to inform artistic expression.

- **Autoethnography: Situating the Personal within the Political**

Autoethnography serves as a core methodology, allowing for the integration of personal experiences with broader cultural and political narratives. This approach situates my journey as a Palestinian artist within the larger discourse of cultural continuity. The scholarly work becomes an opportunity for self-reflection as well as the product of scholarly work; that is what reflexivity can entail (Davies, 2012). My travels, during this research, are documented through field notes and recordings, capturing improvisational sessions and collective practices. Here, music turns into a reservoir of cross-cueing memory and a medium for reimagining identity.

Methods such as participant observation, performance ethnography, autobiographical narratives, thick descriptions, reflection in action, and collaborative inquiry are among the techniques that resonate deeply with artistic processes. Ethnographic research, characterized by its critical and engaged approach, acknowledges the interconnectedness of researchers and their subjects in the field, providing a compelling model for certain types of artistic research.

- **Duoethnography: Collaborative Narratives**

The methodology is further enriched by duoethnography, a collaborative approach that juxtaposes multiple life histories to generate new understandings of culture and identity. The duoethnography emphasizes the relational components of cultural identity and uses dialogue to support a critical self-study (Norris 2012). This method allows for a nuanced exploration of how my experiences as a Palestinian artist in the diaspora connect with those of my collaborators, each of whom contributes their unique cultural perspectives to the creative process.

Duoethnographic practice in this research involves engaging in conversations and improvisational sessions with collaborators, artists I encountered during my travels, and local artists in Palestine. The dialogic nature of duoethnography creates a polyvocal setting where differences are celebrated and transformative insights develop. This approach stimulates "regenerative transformation," in which the act of sharing stories and artistic practices opens up new avenues for understanding identity and belonging (Sawyer, 2015).

- **Integrating Methodologies to Explore Identity**

This approach presents the theoretical tool for investigating how music and identities interrelate with complex social and political realities, a synthesis of reflexivity, autoethnography, duoethnography, and artistic research. Reflexivity provides the crucial awareness of the researcher's positionality, while autoethnography situates one's story within broader cultural and political contexts, whereas duoethnography adds a collaborative dimension and gives voice to mutual understanding through conversations in the relation of identity. Improvisation, in this sense, highlights the transformative power of sound as a medium for healing and resistance. Therefore, such methodology not only answers the central research questions but also meets the wider intents that develop presence and probe into the nature of Palestinian identity within the context of art-making.

This, in a way, echoes the fluidity and adaptability of Palestinian identity. Improvisation becomes at once a meditative practice and a creative process that allows dynamic investigation into the freedoms and constraints of socio-political life. The improvisational sessions are documented by recordings and reflective notes during live performances, workshops, or informal collaborations. These sessions are analyzed as sites of artistic experimentation and collective engagement. As Carless (2021) observes, music creates "space in ways that others might also be encouraged to contribute," inviting a participatory and inclusive approach to identity construction. Through improvisation, this research explores how sound functions as a medium to articulate the complexities of Palestinian identity, from the personal to the collective, and to open up possibilities for intercultural dialogue.

3.2 Data Generation

The primary case studies which are described in the ensuing sections provide the fundamental information and content of my research. The primary data collected includes recordings, videos, discussions, semi-structured interviews, and journal entries and I draw on mutually beneficial methods to generate the data / content, including:

- Intercultural musical collaborations
- Improvisation
- Verbal dialogue
- Musical dialogue
- Field trips
- Personal reflective journal

3.3 Data analysis

I used coding and thematic analysis two common techniques in qualitative research to examine the data (Neuendorf 2018). The thematic analysis allowed me to emphasize the core themes that came from the data, while coding helped me to identify particular words phrases and concepts that recurred throughout the discussions and improvisational sessions.

This approach allowed me to organize and make sense of the multi-layered information generated by both projects. The data gathering of the interviews was very precise and planned steps. The interviews were semi-structured talks that involved the interviewees' reflections perspectives and ideas about the subject. Interviews were conducted either in-person or via Zoom, recorded, and then transcribed.

Upon revisiting the recorded interviews and bridging research questions and my reflection, there was a process of filtering the interviews. Through this process, the music itself evolved as a result of the sessions, sculpted by the reoccurring themes and collaborative spirit that came up during those interactions.

3.4 Research ethics

Ethical standards ensured that the process did not compromise the integrity of the process or the wellbeing of all participants. Interviewees provided verbal consent for their views to be used in this thesis and the performance booklet that accompanies it. The time provided by contributors was done so on a voluntary basis with agreement to have their artistic contributions acknowledged. Consent forms are held by the researcher with examples included in the appendices. All contributors for this project were voluntary participants and completed signed consent forms prior to collecting any data. Participants also granted consent for acknowledgement of their artistic contributions within the thesis and related materials.

The entire research process followed the "Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity" and "Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland," along with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. As a matter of fact, this instruction guided the current study to follow "basic principles of research integrity," "research procedures," "safeguards," "data practices and management," "collaborative working," and "publication" (TENK, 2023). All data was securely stored, both physically and digitally in PDF format on dedicated NAS storage to ensure confidentiality and safety.

A commitment to ethical practice was central to every aspect of this study. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were carefully considered and implemented as appropriate. The researcher encouraged a respectful atmosphere, valuing differences in perspectives and opinions, thereby creating an environment conducive to open discussion and meaningful contributions. These approaches maintained the integrity of the researcher-participant relationship and increased the overall validity of the study.

4. Case Study and Context

This chapter discusses the essential dimensions of the research through an overview of what can be considered to be key studies and experiments in that area. These defining engagements intersect the boundaries of identity, artistic freedom, and the collective pursuit of justice. In an era of structural inequity, cultural erasure, and global disintegration, these collaborations attempt to produce and reflect an example of hope.

Each collaboration explored in this research provides a window into the complex ways in which music serves as both a personal and collective language of resistance. The very act of making music, especially in cross-cultural contexts, thus empowers individuals to negotiate and express their identities, voice themselves, and take part in a larger conversation about liberation. Whether through improvisation or collaborative creative spaces, such instances of connection represent significant acts of resistance against the influences that attempt to suppress or marginalize individual voices.

These case studies are not only reflections of individual journeys but also collective expressions that echo the struggles of communities worldwide—communities that continue to fight against colonization. By exploring these collaborative artistic efforts, the research underscores the potential of music to break down walls and build pathways for global solidarity and emancipation.

In this context, the very creation of music becomes, in itself, a process far beyond mere artistry—it is an act of reclamation: staking the right to be recognized, affirming an identity, and resisting any forces that would seek to deny or distort both the individual and collective histories. As we move through an increasingly fragmented world, these case studies hint at the perseverance of human creativity and the everlasting trust that art, particularly music, has the ability to unite, heal, and transform. Fundamentally, this research positions music as a force that can bridge divides, elevate voices, and offer a platform for global dialogue. This is a call to recognize the importance of artistic freedom and the power of cultural expression in shaping the destiny of our shared global community.

4.1 Musical Case 1: Sonic Exile as a Shared Journey Through Improvisation

Musical excerpts related to this case are available in the Research Catalogue exposition:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2843034/3256673>

As both a musician and a researcher, my work exists within a liminal space of interaction of improvisations and the ongoing search for belonging. Collaborations like *Sonic Exile*, developed with Jano Doe, demonstrate the vast potential of sonic experimentation to navigate through these quests. The question arises: What does it mean for sound to carry the weight of representation, resistance, and emotional resonance?

In *Sonic Exile*, the creative process evolves beyond mere sound production into an intimate act of exploration and discovery. These artistic practices aim to bridge diverse perspectives and to create shared pathways of vulnerability and artistic inquiry. How can the improvisation I approach hold the space for connection, reconciliation, and healing in topics of displacement and political struggle? Through this lens, I critically explore how shared sonic spaces challenge established boundaries and facilitate a dialogue between personal experiences and collective memory.

The collaboration began unexpectedly, yet meaningfully. Two days after Jano was invited by Michal Cáb to create a multichannel installation for the *Music is Obsolete* exhibition at the University of Arts in Prague, we crossed paths at a cultural and activist event in Helsinki. The working title of the exhibition is connected to this manifesto: <https://ticho.multiplace.org/other.html>. The evening revolved around a film depicting Palestinian stories of daily life under occupation. The room felt heavy, filled with the quiet shock of people confronting the stark realities of what it means to live under constant threat.

I was there to perform Palestinian folk songs—songs meant to honor my heritage and the pain of our people. During the performance, as I played, a moment of paralysis gripped me. Memories of my own experiences of terror, and fear flooded back—moments I thought I had buried. Watching

from afar as my homeland suffers under relentless violence, I felt a wave of helplessness and despair that nearly silenced me. But in the music, I also found a way to speak.

After the performance, Jano approached me with an invitation to collaborate on the exhibition. Her proposal, though laden with uncertainty, spoke to the complexity of “representing Palestine” from a “remote position.” I understood their hesitation, as it echoed my inner battle as an artist: how to be, as an artist, someone carrying the identity of this place, authentically, with all the inflicted complexities, without allowing its enormity to overwhelm my voice? The term “voice” reflects not just sound, but the possibility of unheard experiences being given space, often for the first time. It challenges the conventional idea of unity, offering a platform where difference is not only acknowledged but celebrated. In music lies not only an opportunity for us to express ourselves but also for us to listen—to one another, to the silence, and to the voices that have yet to be heard.

Our collaboration carried on as the drive of the genuine quest to express what, otherwise, is difficult to express in other means, persisted. Although our life paths were so different—Jano with his raw and unique approach and me with my background in music—there was something that connected us. It was this common ground that helped us lift our improvisation beyond the individual stories of the people and to something more raw and evocative. Through this collaboration, the project unfolded organically, reflecting the synergy between our approaches. We met, shared experiences, and spoke about what’s going on in the world around us—the urgent reality unfolding in Palestine and the burden of carrying these stories across distances.

Following our discussions, we picked up our instruments and let the music unfold. I began by singing Palestinian folk songs, letting the melodies flow from a place of deep connection to my homeland. In the Arabic maqam framework, I improvised in the moment, allowing the music to evolve as it responded to the energy in the room. Jano, with their DIY modular synthesizer, layered their sonic textures, complementing and challenging the melodies I was singing. Our instruments engaged in constant dialogue, neither leading nor following, but coexisting within a shared sonic landscape that was ever-shifting, responsive, and imbued with tension and release. The music itself became the conversation, a medium by which we could connect and try to articulate the complexities of the emotions that we both carried.

The recordings I'm sharing in the exposition capture moments that felt crucial to the process, moments where the essence of our sessions came through. These recordings document times when poems, melodies, and electronic sounds intertwined, unfolding in real-time. It wasn't just about reacting to each other; it was about co-creating. Each sound, each gesture, responded directly to the other, allowing the music to grow organically, shaped by our shared energy and the emotions we were both channeling. It felt like we were building something together—something that could only exist in that space, in that moment.

After one of our sessions, Jano remarked on how she felt she understood what I was singing, despite her minimal knowledge of Arabic. For me, this was a moment of discovery. There were moments when the music mirrored the thoughts and feelings we had just shared, and afterward, we both expressed how in sync we felt with each other's emotional responses.

The qanun, with its deep historical roots in Arabic musical heritage, carries the memory of a culture that fiercely refuses to be erased. Combined with the unexpected frequencies of the modular synthesizer, the music became a reflection of my own experience—a struggle between the pull of tradition and the push of modernity, between the rootedness of identity and the fragmentation of exile. Our improvisations often felt like dialogues between these opposing forces. The structured melodies of the qanun would meet the unpredictable oscillations of the modular, creating moments of tension that resolved into something new.

Improvisation in Arabic music, and particularly taqsim, rests on tradition but is also immensely individualistic and fluid. My approach to improvisation is informed by this tradition, where each moment of expression is guided by the systems of the Arabic maqam—a modal framework offering both structure and freedom. As Farraj (2019) explains, "Performing a taqsim is bound by traditions, conventions, and aesthetic norms that guide improvisation, such as the maqam's pathways, its intonation, idiomatic phrasing, the instrument's vocabulary, and ornamentation style." This balance between tradition and personal expression is central to my practice. The maqam gives a basic structure—a mode imbued with specific emotional and narrative connotations—with which I navigate a space of spontaneity, crafting melodies that reflect both my emotional state and my culture.

During the session, a flow of various poems in fragments emerged, layered with Palestinian poetry from the Nakba of 1948 onwards. These poems, many of which came to mind spontaneously, evoke the unyielding spirit of a people longing for home. The Nakba, described by the United Nations as the "catastrophe," refers to the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of more than 500 villages during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, a moment that irreversibly disrupted Palestine's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society (United Nations, n.d.).

As both creator and researcher, my role in this project is inherently reflexive. This interplay between self and other, individual and collective, lies at the heart of the research. The collaboration with Jano underscores the power of improvisation—not just as a musical technique but as a method of inquiry. Through sound, we navigate the complexities of identity, creating spaces where fragmented elements come together to form something whole. Within this archive, the mechanical hums of the modular synthesizer create an evocative texture that interacts with the qanun's presence.

In the analysis of *Sonic Exile*, I heavily drew on the tradition of *mawwal*, a genre of Arabic poetry characterized by strong emotional resonance and improvisational qualities. *Mawwal* began as eloquent poetry before evolving into an improvisational vocal art that reflects the complex emotional landscapes of its performers. Often performed as a solo, it allows the vocalist to show a wide emotional range, turning language into musical expressions. *Mawwal* is closely tied to the concept of *tarab*, an emotional response and aesthetic principle in Arabic music. This is characterized by a slow tempo and repetition to evoke a profound emotional experience (Al-Ghawanmeh et al., 2021). *Mawwal* serves as a bridge between poetry and song, joining literary artistry and musical improvisation to capture the raw emotions of the performer.

The next section introduces *Ya Tutet Iddar*, a *Mawwal* composed by Abu Arab. Through its lyrics, the *Mawwal* speaks to the Palestinian experience of exile and displacement, in hopes that no matter how much time passes or how many hardships must be endured, return remains a possibility.

The verses in Arabic are as follows:

يا توتة الدار .. صبرك عالزمان إن جار"
لا بد ما نعود .. مهما طول المشوار
يا توتة الدار .. حلفتك برب الكون
"لا بد ما نعود .. مهما طول المشوار"

Translation:

"O fig tree of the home, be patient with time if it turns cruel
We will return, no matter how long the journey takes.
O fig tree of the home, I swear by the Lord of the universe
We will return, no matter how long the journey takes."

Abu Arab, born Ibrahim Mohammed Saleh in 1931, is widely known as "the poet of the revolution." His artistry is deeply entwined with Palestinian folk traditions, making his work both a reflection and a vessel of the collective pain and aspirations of the Palestinian people. Abu Arab fled to Syria as a refugee after being uprooted during the 1948 Nakba. The narrative and cultural resistance that are ingrained in his work are reflected in his lyrics and melodies.

When I eventually reached the end of the Mawwal, the word "Ya Weili" rang from within my being. It appeared as if the profundity of the situation caused it—a guttural and raw expression carved by the emotions and stories that surrounded me. "Ya Weili" (يا ويلى) is a commonly used phrase in Arabic, carrying connotations of grief, despair, and a sense of impending hardship. Derived from the Arabic word "ويل" (Weil), which signifies intense hardship and suffering, it often emerges in profound emotional distress. To say "Ya Weili" is to summon grief itself, to call upon the presence of sorrow and calamity, and to acknowledge the depth of the tragedy. As growing up, I often heard my father utter "Ya Weili" in moments of fear, particularly when we faced military aggression, with our lives and those of our loved ones in peril. In this phrase, the resonance of a larger collective voice emerges, carrying the weight of shared grief.

The following poem, *'Aabir al-Layl* (عابر الليل), by Mohammad Alqaisi, speaks of the determination to move on in the face of tremendous loss regarding displacement and persecution.

Its words paint a picture in the reader's mind that describes a walk in which each step is heavy with sorrow, yet it is done under the deep pull of loyalty to one's country.

Arabic Text:

إنني أحمل آلامي وأمضي

عبر آلاف الدروب الشائكة

إنه حبي باق في قرار الأرض يا عمواس

Poem: "عابر الليل" (The Night's Wanderer)

Translation of the Fragment:

"I carry my pains and move on
Through thousands of thorny paths
My love remains in the heart of the earth, O 'Imwas."

Mohammad Alqaisi, a notable figure in Palestinian modernist poetry, was born in 1944 in Kafr 'Ana, near Jaffa. His work is marked by a profound connection to the Palestinian cause, deeply shaped by the 1948 Nakba. The destruction of his village and subsequent displacement defined his early experiences, which were further forged in the realities of refugee camps. Alqaisi's poetry captures the sorrow, resilience, and identity of the Palestinian people, drawing strength from his profound connection to his homeland. A short phrase came to mind from a poem I read a few days ago: "Ya Dar" (يا دار, Oh Home), taken from "جراح فلسطينية" (Palestinian Wounds) by Mohammad Alqaisi. I have chosen to share only the line "Ya Dar, Ya Dar" to connect it to a deeply personal memory, where my father, in a moment of imminent danger, cried out "Ya Dar" as our home was threatened by a tank. This simple yet powerful utterance captures the profound anguish of fearing the loss of everything that home represents—a loss that resonates deeply within the Palestinian experience. In Alqaisi's words, I find solace and connection: "لاطلبك يا دار،" "بعد الشيد بالحنّا" ("I will come to you, my home, after painting it with henna").

Though unplanned at first, our subsequent musical sessions became profoundly influenced by conversations on Palestine, global systems of control, and the human condition within divided societies. These dialogues laid the groundwork for our improvisational process, setting a space where resonating voices would surface and intertwine.

Free from a predetermined agenda or rigid framework, we embraced spontaneity in both sound and dialogue, letting the resonance of our shared emotions and ideas guide the creative process. Within this exploratory space, we wove together our diverse elements: the acoustic timbre of the qanun and the atmospheric textures of the modular synthesizer. This convergence unfolded into an ever-evolving soundscape, layered with emotional intensity and unexpected sonic dialogues. This interaction points out the vital role emotions play in nurturing resonance. As McDonnell (2017) asserts, "Emotions serve to enrich the very experience of resonance" (p. 7), thus amplifying the profound connection between sound, emotion, and meaning. Knowledge of this is important in understanding how music, identity, and resistance come together within my artistic research.

Cultural memory, as Santos (2011) explains, is the ability to reconstruct identities through the endurance of knowledge and principles inherent in a society's cultural heritage. This memory, passed through generations via art, dress, poetry, and even everyday practices, ensures that traditions are maintained and that cultural identity survives. In Palestine, this cultural memory is preserved in the very fabric of everyday life—such as the intricate designs of embroidery, the songs of crop harvest, and the deeply-rooted traditions like *Al-‘Aunah* (العوّنة). The latter, a vital community practice, is particularly poignant in the olive harvest season, where neighbors and relatives come together to help one another complete the harvest, often without the need for formal invitations. This collective memory connects directly to the values of community, indigeneity, and a profound connection to the land, all of which are critical to the survival of Palestinian identity. *Al-‘Aunah* extends beyond mere cooperation in agricultural labor; it is a manifestation that binds generations. This tradition, much like the enduring storytelling (*Hikaye*) and the proverbs passed down through time, serves as a cultural thread that brings the Palestinian people together in the face of displacement and struggle. "Cultural objects can validate people's feelings, making cultural schema appear to solve the practical problems when they otherwise might not." McDonnell (2017) (Page 10)

Despite its broad appeal, the metamorphosis of resonance from a metaphor into a fully realized theory remains incomplete. While Schudson (1989) highlighted the role of cultural toolkits, institutions, and collective memory in shaping the resonance of cultural objects with audiences, and Snow (2008) called for a reimagining of resonance in interactional terms, the concept often

points to the alignment of discourses with the worldviews of their audiences. This tension between theory and practice is significant in the context of my artistic research, where resonance is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived experience.

In this case study, the importance of *Al-‘Aunah* lies in its role as a living testament to the endurance of Palestinian culture. This rings true not only in the context of the olive harvest but in all aspects of Palestinian life where cultural memory keeps the community united. The traditions of *Al-‘Aunah*, along with the storytelling, the music, and the very fabric of Palestinian culture, are forms of resistance that celebrate survival and preserve identity. They stand as a collective rejection of erasure and a testament to the resilience of the Palestinian spirit.

The narrative surrounding Palestinian resilience often acts as a double-edged sword, simultaneously acknowledging their strength while diminishing the urgency to address the systemic injustices they endure. As Mahmoud Abu Adi, Psychologist and researcher in psychology, behavioral, and social studies, says, "People justify their inaction by imagining Palestinians as inherently resilient, removing the urgency to address their struggles" (Atheer Podcast, 2024). This framing is a dangerous framing that keeps Palestinians in the "accustomed to suffering" frame, which absolves the global community of responsibility for confronting the root causes of their oppression.

In our collaboration, music became both a literal and metaphorical space for expression. It allows us to voice our diverse experiences, retaining individuality while forming a collective whole. Yet, this unity does not erase difference—it amplifies it. Here, music provides a site wherein we can make our sounds while leaving "space" for others. The "space" I mean here is not that which is between beats and/or notes but also in silent beats, where new additions and perspectives are invited to contribute.

Other fragmentary moments in those sessions include the inclusion of a Palestinian folk song, "Lyaa Wlyya." This song is deeply rooted in Palestinian heritage, expressing themes of identity and connection to the land. Widely cherished among Palestinians, "Lyaa Wlyya" burst with great power into one such moment of the session itself, highlighting the profound emotional and cultural resonance of Palestinian folk traditions within the context of our exploration.

Participation in NEXT Festival: Sonic Exile at Klarisky Church

We were invited to perform in Bratislava, Slovakia, within the NEXT Festival, which is an international venue for presenting new and experimental contemporary music. Since 2000, NEXT has been organized annually, offering space for both established and emerging artists to engage audiences with innovative musical expressions. Our concert on November 30, 2024, at Klarisky Church, provided an extraordinary opportunity to share our creative process with a wider audience.

The Klarisky Church's centuries-old architecture and deep acoustics transformed it into a live agent of this performance, as the playing of synth, voice, and qanun resonated within its ancient walls. This evocative setting allowed the music to resonate not only as an artistic experience but also as an urgent reflection on the present moment, urging both us and the audience to confront the shifting realities of the world through the immediacy of sound.

Including photos and videos from this performance in my thesis serves to document this pivotal moment in Sonic Exile's journey. These materials capture the experimental soundscapes we crafted and the collective atmosphere of connection and introspection, showcasing music's ability to act as a space for exploration and solidarity in times of uncertainty.



Shafeeq Alsadi + Jano Doe performing live at Koncertná sieň Klarisky during NEXT 2024: Advanced Music Festival, organized by NEXT: Advanced Music Festival. Photo: Šimon Lupták

4.2 Musical Case 2: Echoes from Bethlehem

Musical excerpts related to this case are available in the Research Catalogue exposition:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2843034/3089613>

In this case study, the laboratory of improvisation serves as a site for exploring identity through collaboration, situated in one of my field trips to Palestine during this research. It delves into my ongoing collaboration with Faris Ishaq, a Nay master and percussionist from Beit Sahur, a Palestinian town east of Bethlehem. Together, we navigate our Palestinian identity and cultural memory through improvisation.

This case study draws from our summer 2023 reunion, where Faris and I shared an extended conversation and a subsequent improvisational session. Founded in our long-standing artistic and personal connection, this gathering deepened our shared exploration of identity through sound. Our shared process of creating naturally ties into the broader themes of this research, which have continuously surfaced during our time together across diverse contexts, musical expressions, and settings. Over the past 11 years, improvisation has been the cornerstone of our connection and central to our shared musical language.

Faris and I first have always collaborated in Bethlehem, a city steeped in cultural, spiritual, and political significance. Bethlehem's history as a site of continuity and disruption shaped our music, serving as both a geographical and symbolic anchor. As Palestinian artists, our shared experiences became the foundation of our artistic relationship. Faris's profound connection to the Nay and my own lifelong relationship with the Qanun created a synergy that allowed us to engage with our heritage. Like Palestinian embroidery knits the blessings of the land and the wisdom and tenacity of ancestors into magical patterns and as Dabke dancing resembles the purest form of dancing to the nation, so it is the Palestinian music which serves as a conscious use of any music to the greater cause of Palestinian self-determination (McDonald, 2013).

Improvisation lies at the heart of our collaboration where music becomes an act of liberation. These improvisations allow us to reclaim agency, articulating the complexities of our existence and tackling the fact that simply being and creating becomes a profound act of defiance

(El-Amyouni, 2024). The voices of the Nay and Qanun, central to Arabic music, carry the weight of Palestinian history, knitting centuries-old traditions into a living narrative that resists erasure and reimagines identity through sound. “Traditions created so much beauty,” Faris noted, “but they also come from stories, struggles, and hardships. Tradition is not static—it is a living, evolving force.” This duality—honoring the past while reimagining it—infused our session with a profound sense of purpose.

Yet, as our collaboration draws on the deep traditions of Arabic music while integrating global influences from our years of travel and cross-cultural collaborations. This dynamic aligns with McDonald’s observation that “Palestinian lifeways constitute the ideational and performative links between the self and the nation” (McDonald, 201, p.21). By allowing these influences to flow into the music, it becomes a living archive, shaped by the interplay of tradition and evolution. Bethlehem, both a physical and symbolic space, serves as a grounding force for this archive, with its sacred and cultural significance

This mirrors the broader theme of my thesis—exploring how artistic freedom allows for the survival and evolution of cultural memory in contexts of ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Through this collaboration, we reaffirm our commitment to the freedom to innovate and connect. This work contributes to a broader conversation about what it means to create, resist, and belong in a world that often denies us these fundamental rights.

The reunion with Faris in Bethlehem was a significant moment in my research journey. After years of being apart, this encounter brought our connection into sharper focus, both as collaborators and as individuals navigating the layered complexities of being Palestinian artists. It became a living embodiment of the key questions driving this research. How can music navigate identity and conflict? How does it preserve cultural memory while opening space for innovation? And how can it connect us to ourselves, each other, and the infinite dimensions of being? Through this session, these questions found resonance—not in definitive answers, but in the act of playing, listening, and being present.—a bridge between past and present, self and other, and the visible and the unseen.

A core approach in this case study was a conversational dialogue between myself and Faris, centered around the core themes of this research. This method allowed us to explore, reflect, and

deepen our connection to the present moment, feeling the pulse of the place we were in at that particular time. As part of this process, I transcribed our conversation and analyzed it, unpacking the layers that resonated with the journey we were navigating through our collaboration. This reflective practice serves as a means of understanding how our discussion shaped the improvisational outcome. *Echoes from Bethlehem* is rooted in a return to our origins—a reconnection with the land, people, and traditions that have shaped us. This also extended to more tangible, physical aspects of our collaboration, as we met during my field trips to Palestine for the purpose of this thesis.

Faris and I started talking about the artistic and personal struggles we have gone through over the years. He shared with me his processes of reconciliation with his instrument, the *Nay*, and the fears he felt being a largely self-taught musician entering formal music spaces like Berklee. He described to me a very important realization: "The character of the instrument says more than what Faris says. The universe is bigger than all of our thoughts about how music should be played." Our conversation unfolded into a reflection about our mutual journeys, both shaped by uncertainty and a continuous search for authenticity. The struggle to balance structure and spontaneity in our music paralleled the broader challenge of navigating fragmented identities. As I shared my reflections on improvisation, I noted its sacredness as a practice: "I cannot plan improvisation. It connects deeply with essence and invites others to take part." This reciprocal sharing of ideas and experiences reestablished our connection, as musicians and as individuals exploring the vast dimensions of existence.

For Faris, improvisation is not about imposing oneself on the music but about listening deeply to what it wants to become and along with each musician, the music "melts together" into something greater than the sum of its parts. Faris also speaks of the importance of stillness and awareness in improvisation, and that the music is a mirror of self-reinforcement of our conversation and the music we created. Each note, each silence, became an expression of presence—a way to connect with ourselves, each other, and the broader pulse of existence. Our musical session was inspired by the concept of flow, which feels effortless. Improvisation became the natural extension of our conversation, embodying the themes we had just explored.

Faris's approach in music as "effortless flow" influenced the direction of our session. He reflected, "Harmony wants to happen by itself. Music wants to happen by itself.", highlighting the importance of letting go of control and allowing the moment to guide the process. This insight connected deeply to the nature of improvisation—how to remain fully in the moment while navigating the pressures to shape music into something structured and shareable.

Faris comments that improvisation requires trust—not only in one's collaborators but in the process itself. One of the most powerful ideas Faris shared was his belief in the integrity of musical impulse. "Pulse cannot deceive you," he said, reflecting on how the fundamental rhythm of music serves as a guide through even the most complex improvisations. As Krishnamurti, a renowned philosopher and spiritual teacher, suggests, true exploration requires freedom from preconceptions, allowing the mind to observe life as it is (Krishnamurti, J., 1976). This notion felt particularly relevant during our session, where the interplay between the Nay and qanun unfolded organically, guided not by preconceptions but by the pulse of the moment. This trust was evident in our session, where we navigated odd rhythmic patterns and unexpected harmonic shifts with mutual respect and curiosity. These moments mirrored the interconnectedness of our experiences as artists and fellow human beings.

The interconnectedness in our improvisations is palpable to the connection of the land, where the sounds of the qanun and Nay seemed to echo the landscape itself. Faris's reflections on language further deepened this connection. He spoke of the Arabic term "سبحانية" (*subhaniyyah*), which contains the root meanings of "now" and "flow with God." It is a concept that mirrors the improvisational act—a surrender to the present moment and the divine flow of creation.

As we played, my mind wandered back to the path that had brought us to this moment. Faris's insight into the question "Why do we go through the dissolving of the ego?" is that the journey, with all its challenges, is fun. It is interactive. This recognition of both the struggle and the joy of self-discovery felt deeply personal to me, echoing my attempts to reconcile the fragments of my identity through music. This revelation is consistent with Krishnamurti's perspective on examining life without distortion: allowing the mind to observe and interact truthfully. In this sense, improvisation becomes a meditation—a way of being fully present and open to the unknown. Our session concluded with a shared realization: music is not merely a tool for

expression but a vehicle for transformation. As Faris observed, “It becomes a relationship of trust,” where each musician leads their truth, yet the music melts into a unified whole. This dynamic mirrors the broader themes of this inquiry, where music serves as both a personal refuge and a collective voice.

Looking back, this encounter with Faris was as much about reconnecting with myself as it was about reconnecting with him. The elements we discussed—presence, impulse, and the dissolution of ego—are fundamental not only to our music but to the broader exploration of identity and belonging that supports this theory. Through our conversation and improvisation, I was reminded of the power of music to hold space for reflection, to bridge the gaps between past and present, and to offer glimpses of a deeper truth. This encounter reaffirmed the importance of listening, not just to the music but to the silence between the sounds, to the pulse that guides us, and to the truths that emerge when we allow ourselves to be fully present in the now. Reflecting on **Echoes from Bethlehem**, I am left with questions that expand the scope of my research. How does the act of returning—to a place, to a collaborator, to oneself—shape the creative process? In what ways does improvisation serve as a bridge between the personal and the collective, the past and the present? And how can music continue to offer a space for Palestinians to assert their identities in a world that so often seeks to erase them?

4.3 Discussion: Sonic Exile and Echoes from Bethlehem: Expanding Questions and Themes

As mentioned earlier in section 3.3, to analyze the data that emerged from both the Sonic Exile and Echoes from Bethlehem case studies, I employed a combination of thematic analysis and coding. One striking commonality between the two case studies is how improvisation functions as a shared language—flexible, dynamic, and unbound by the constraints of structure. In *Sonic Exile*, improvisation emerged as a way to bridge cultural and emotional distances, allowing Jano and I to co-create a space where voices could coexist. Similarly, in *Echoes*, the improvisational process with Faris reflected a deep mutual understanding rooted in shared cultural heritage. This shared language of improvisation, while universal in its flexibility, is also deeply personal in its expression.

In analyzing the discussion with Faris in Bethlehem Echoes, I organized the data into thematic categories to centralize terms that shaped the improvisational process. These recurring themes became focal points in my analysis to explore how different aspects of our cultural and musical practices intersected with the individual and collective aspects of our Palestinian identities. This process also allowed me to reflect on how improvisation, as a dynamic and evolving practice, became a space where these themes could be navigated and expressed. Ultimately, this analytical framework helped me draw connections between the personal and the collective.

However, these similarities prompt deeper questions: How does the context of collaboration shape the nature of improvisation? In *Sonic Exile*, the tension between my deeply personal connection to Palestinian identity and Jano's external perspective created a fertile ground for discovery. In contrast, Echoes from Bethlehem drew on the familiarity of a long-standing relationship, allowing for a more seamless merging of voices. Does familiarity deepen the improvisational process, or does the tension of navigating difference offer a richer creative potential?

Cultural memory is fundamental to both projects, but it manifests in different ways. In *Sonic Exile*, the inclusion of Palestinian poetry and maqam structures created a sonic archive that preserved and reinterpreted cultural heritage. The modular synthesizer's unpredictable frequencies contrasted with the qanun's rootedness, emphasizing the contradiction between tradition and modernity. This brings up bigger considerations regarding the borders of identity: How do collaborative activities disrupt preconceived assumptions of selfhood? When working across cultures and traditions, how do we navigate the balance between honoring our roots and embracing change? These questions are particularly relevant in the context of displacement, where identity is frequently a point of negotiation and transformation.

Both case studies draw attention to the value of presence—not only as a physical state but as a deep connection to the present. In *Sonic Exile*, presence was a central theme, reflected in the spontaneous unfolding of sound and the emotional resonance of each action. In *Echoes from Bethlehem*, Faris's insights into pulse and stillness emphasized how presence anchors improvisation, allowing the music to flow naturally. These reflections invite further inquiry: How does presence affect the quality of collaboration? In what ways does the act of being entirely

present challenge or enhance the process of creating music? Moreover, can presence be taught or cultivated, or is it an innate state that develops organically?

Ultimately, *Sonic Exile* and *Echoes from Bethlehem* are linked by their exploration of connection—between people, histories, and ideas. They push the frontiers of what music can do, transforming sound into a medium of discovery. Yet, they also leave open questions about the nature of collaboration, the role of tradition, and the possibilities of improvisation.

As these case studies converge, they invite a broader inquiry into the themes of this thesis: How can music create spaces for dialogue and understanding in a fragmented world? What does it mean to truly listen—to ourselves, to each other, and to the stories embedded in our memory? For me, improvisation has always been a sacred act, unplanned and unfiltered. It is where my fragmented identity as a Palestinian and a global artist finds coherence, albeit momentarily. Faris, too, acknowledged the transformative power of improvisation: “Harmony wants to happen by itself. Music wants to happen by itself.” This shared understanding affirms that improvisation transcends technical mastery or preconceived notions; it is an act of being fully present, allowing the music to unfold naturally.

The questions that have arisen are not merely academic; they are lived experiences. They are the heartbeat of my artistic inquiry, echoing every conversation I have, and every moment I spend reconnecting to the land, the people.

4.4 Resisting through culture: The Palestinian Amwaj choir

Video content relating to this case is available in the Research Catalogue exposition:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2843034/3062133>

While the following context was not the primary focus of my research project, this section offers a reflection on further findings emerging from a meaningful collaboration with the Palestinian Amwaj choir during one of my field trips. This is intended as a way to dig deeper into the wider findings and implications of my research.

During my time with Amwaj in the summer of 2023, the collaboration spanned a month, with preparations and rehearsals in Palestine followed by a tour in Italy. Not only did I witness the choir's incredible devotion to expression, but I was also moved to reflect on my own childhood experiences in Palestine. Being part of and observing their rehearsals and performances stirred in me the need for connection and the fragmentation I felt growing up, desiring to belong to a larger community.

As a child, I grappled with the dissonance between my innate longing for freedom and the environment that repressed it—a place where talent often fought to thrive in the face of societal and political oppression. The more I learned about the freedoms others had in the world, the more I felt the crushing reality of grappling with a vast machinery of control that sought to confine not only my movement but also my aspirations.

The daily struggles—limited freedoms, relentless checkpoints, and the need for permission to travel even a few kilometers—created a constant state of disorientation and longing. These restrictions, augmented by military violence, closures, and curfews, have left deep psychological scars on Palestinians, making it a reality of trauma and constrained possibilities (Abualkibash, 2017).

Amwaj's work reflects music's capacity to hold space for resilience, transcending performance to offer pathways for connection, expression, and collective strength. Through their artistry, the choir demonstrates how music resonates as a vital thread in the fabric of cultural identity, intertwining survival, self-determination, and shared humanity into every note. As Laïdi-Hanieh posits, cultural production in Palestine is tied to self-representation, challenging imposed narratives and asserting a presence that resists erasure (Laïdi-Hanieh, 2006).

In the face of severe restrictions on Palestinian freedom of movement, the ability to travel and perform with Amwaj in Italy became immensely meaningful. For a people denied access to airports and borders, crossing these imposed boundaries becomes an extraordinary assertion of existence. Amwaj's songs and shared performances carry the voices of those who remain confined, revealing that even under systemic suppression, Palestinians can still create and connect. Through the autoethnographic lens, I witnessed how Amwaj exemplifies collective production as a revolutionary act, strengthening the bond between individual and collective

identities. It is a dynamic process of renewal and assertion that reshapes both individual and collective memory. The singers, aged 8 to 18, engage not only with traditional Palestinian music but also integrate contemporary compositions.

Amwaj's focus on intercultural dialogue and its commitment to creating a space where diverse backgrounds, gender equality, and non-alignment with any specific political agenda are central to its pedagogy, create an environment where music functions as a opportunity of personal liberation and cultural affirmation. This collaborative effort brings forth not only artistic growth but also a profound psychological shift—where music becomes a way of reasserting the value of human life in a system designed to strip it away.

As part of the Amwaj tour, I performed on the qanun in a series of concerts, with *Opera Amal* as the centerpiece. Inspired by Walid Daqqah's novel *Hikayat Sir al-Zeit* (The Tale of The Oil's Secret), which tells the story of a boy imagining a reunion with his imprisoned father. Daqqah was a Palestinian political prisoner in occupation jails and has written a number of novels and books stemming from the persistence of the human spirit in the face of injustice. Tragically, more than a year after the tour, Daqqah passed away in detention. The opera featured a composition by Camille van Lunen, and a libretto by Cornelia Köhler, and was accompanied by an ensemble of strings, percussion, and qanun. Mathilde Vittu's artistic direction was pivotal in shaping the opera's emotional and musical creation, while Michele Cantoni's leadership ensured the seamless integration of the choir's broader goals. In addition to *Opera Amal*, the tour included performances featuring a mix of traditional Palestinian songs and contemporary compositions.

In October 2024, I was able to reconnect with Michele, the co-founder and director of Amwaj, via Zoom. This session was deeply reflective, especially given Michele's strong connection to Palestine. As an Italian musician who has lived in France, England, and now Palestine for 20 years, he explained how his understanding of identity transcends any singular place or culture. He emphasized that his sense of self is based not in geographical or cultural confines, but in values, critical thinking, and an ongoing understanding of humanity. "The first degree of identity should be with oneself," he reflected, noting that identity is an evolving and fluid construct, shaped by interactions with the world.

Michele's thoughts on the importance of speaking up in the face of overwhelming sadness were especially moving during our talk. He emphasized that, for him, cultural resistance is more than just an act of art; it is part of a larger way of life, a refusal to accept oppression in any form. He put it, "It's about not allowing oneself to disappear in the face of overwhelming grief... It is even more necessary and meaningful to do something rather than shutting down and shutting up." This resonates strongly with the heart of Amwaj's mission and the importance of their work. For many of the young choir members, singing in the face of adversity is not seen as something light-hearted or inconsequential, but in their collective expression, it is an act to preserve their cultural heritage.

Michele emphasized the great impact of their tours in Europe, where they spread a message of humanity, solidarity, and resistance against prejudice. "The choir understood how powerful and important it was to be in Europe... to carry a message that fights the prejudice that people have," he said, emphasizing the need of amplifying Palestinian voices in spaces where stereotypes and misunderstanding abound.

Michele and I talked about how music—especially when it contains words—becomes more than just sound; it is a conduit to the heart of the audience, challenging societal norms and confronting political forces. By using song to communicate meaning, the choir can have a profound effect and speak truth to power while establishing a strong bond with their audience. The work of Amwaj, particularly during such a critical time, exemplifies the strength of Palestinian identity, not only fighting external forces but also confronting internal battles of despair and hopelessness, which threaten to stifle creativity and expression.

Michele stressed the importance of artists not falling to despair, saying, "It's about challenging oppression, not shutting down activities, and certainly not staying silent." This resonates with the challenges faced by Palestinians, particularly those in the diaspora, who navigate external injustice while also battling to maintain their creative spirit. Michele believes that acknowledging suffering and despair is insufficient; there is a fundamental responsibility to actively oppose, create, and persevere, especially in the face of overwhelming grief. His statements reverberate the thesis's core themes—how music can navigate, reshape, and assert

identity in the face of oppression and how creative expression can be used for individual liberation and collective survival.

Michele shared his witness of being in Palestine and that the complexities of identity are magnified when one is immersed in a continuous fight for justice. In this environment, identity is constantly renegotiated—an ongoing process of reflection, adaptation, and resilience. He also noted how cultural institutions like Amwaj continue to work as an artistic and social initiative to carry a weighty narrative, challenging the misconceptions about Palestine. As Michele pointed out, many Europeans were surprised to learn that Palestine has not only hospitals but also music schools and choirs, shattering the stereotypes that often diminish Palestinian humanity. The choir members, acutely aware of the importance of their position, embraced their responsibility with pride, realizing that their music carried not just a cultural message but a powerful resistance. He also described a moving moment from one of their concerts in Brussels in February 2024, when a woman, who had recently fled the genocide in Gaza, approached the choir in tears. She expressed her intense emotional response to their performance, perceiving it as a message of solidarity with Gaza and the larger Palestinian struggle. These moments of interaction assure the importance of their work: the choir members were not just sharing their talents but challenging the misconceptions about Palestine.

This conversation confirmed my view that the fundamental duty of artistic expression, particularly in times of evil, is to continue and give voice to the silenced. This insight expands on the thesis's exploration of how Palestinian music, particularly through collaborative and cross-cultural efforts, serves as a vehicle for resisting cultural oblivion and shaping an identity that is both rooted in tradition and evolving in response to contemporary struggles.

Michele gave a profound comment on resilience, drawing from a recent article by Omar Barghouti, where he encountered a quote by the British Pakistani author Nadeem Aslam. The quote, "Despair has to be earned. Personally, I have not done all I can to change things. I haven't yet earned the right to despair," resonated deeply with him. He went on, "If every one of us could internalize this kind of spirit and say, 'Before I despair, I have to try all I can to make things better, to challenge things too,' and then, when all fails, that's okay—I can despair."

Michele found this perspective to be obvious and strong, supporting a mindset of perseverance in the face of adversity. His words illuminate a fundamental concept in my research: resistance is not passive but needs active participation, and despair is a choice that comes only after exhausting all efforts to bring about change. For Michele, the act of continuing to work, to create, and to resist is in itself a rejection of despair and a commitment to the possibility of change, no matter how harsh the conditions. Michele's emphasis on the value of community was evident when he spoke about the role of collective music-making. "That's how we should do it: be with everyone while we are making the music, rather than isolating ourselves in our boxes," he said, urging the importance of inclusivity and solidarity, particularly during times of crisis.

Michele's last words, inspired by Nadeem Aslam's philosophy, resonate deeply within the context of Palestinian resistance. He expressed hope for the future, encouraging people not to give up and to unite in their efforts to bring about change. "It's not just a matter of dreaming; it's about what one wants for oneself and the freedom one wants to express things," he said. This aligns perfectly with the vision of Amwaj: an initiative that insists on the importance of cultural and artistic expression. Michele's belief in the power of art to shape identity, and foster unity—a continual act of resistance through culture.

5. Personal Reflections on Sound and Self

This process has involved intellectual inquiry and a profound psychological and emotional journey. Through the lens of autoethnography, I have documented my thoughts, collaborations, and improvisations, which release the tension built up through years of carrying the weight of a conflicted identity. This has served as the medium through which the soul speaks beyond the limitations of words, particularly in improvisation. In these moments, I can connect with my instrument and the people around me, creating a shared space that goes beyond ordinary interaction and allows for a deeper, more authentic exchange.

When I left Bethlehem in 2019, it was not only a physical departure but a quest to find meaning, refuge, and a deeper connection to myself and the world. Music became a way to navigate this journey—a vessel for holding the pain of displacement, the memories of home, and the

aspirations for freedom and identity. It allowed me to listen, not only to others but to the silences within myself.

In the unfolding of this exploration, we start to glimpse something both beautiful and unsettling, something beyond words. It's the fullness of life—the brightness and richness of it—and at the same time, the dark, brutal realities of our shared humanity that came to be. Here, we must confront not only the beauty that creation and love bring forth but also the “machinery” that has dehumanized entire communities, reducing lives to points on a map, and using the highest forms of technology to take away the most basic rights of existence. To open ourselves to what lies beneath the layers of conditioning and normality, we have to pause—to simply look at life from a place of genuine inquiry and stillness. In that quiet, we come face to face with a deeper reality, a void within that seems strangely alive despite everything we are doing, building, and creating in the world. And this looking, this seeing, isn't just for a fleeting moment. It requires us to keep looking.

As Krishnamurti observed, war is not an isolated event but a reflection of how we live day to day, an intensification of our small daily acts of indifference or aggression. This division, this desensitization, thrives only as long as we refuse to look. The question becomes: how do we live with awareness, truly seeing both sides of humanity? How do we create not just art or music but a life that resonates with this deep seeing, where sound and action arise from a place of genuine understanding? As artists, as creators, our work becomes a call, a reaching into that awareness to clear the layers of oppression, to loosen the dividing boundaries, to feel a pulse of truth that transcends divisions. It is a journey of removing what is false to touch the enduring.

As I reflect on this path, I am drawn to the profound words of Jiddu Krishnamurti, who posed essential questions about the role of the artist and the nature of creation. Krishnamurti asks, "What is an artist? Is he something apart from our daily living? The beauty of living. This inquiry resonates deeply with the themes of this research, calling us to reconsider artistry not as an isolated pursuit but as an integral part of living fully, responsibly, and authentically.

Krishnamurti's view—that the artist should first and foremost be a "total human being," fully attuned to life, love, beauty, and responsibility—offers a guiding light for understanding the artist's role in moments of crisis. In his assertion that true creativity arises from a "whole,

healthy" relationship with nature and existence, I find a powerful reminder of the urgency and sacredness of artistic practices. For me, music has always been more than sound; it is a way to establish and nurture this relationship—a channel through which the fragmented self can connect with a larger sense of purpose and belonging. Krishnamurti's challenge to question our attachments to national, ideological, or cultural identities resonates deeply with the journey of this research, particularly his assertion that, "When we identify ourselves with a country, with certain ideologies... we are incapable of being humble. Because only when you're inquiring in humility, you learn, you find out."

The art that emerges from this place is not an escape but a confrontation and liberation—a reminder of what humanity can be, what life could mean if we choose to look with full honesty at what's there. And perhaps in this stillness, in this inquiry, we begin to dismantle that machinery, to bring about a harmony that holds both the beauty and the brutal truth of existence, calling each of us to be truly alive, together.

In the end, this reflection brings together all the elements of my journey—the collaborations, the improvisations, the struggles, the inspirations, and the emotional weight of being a Palestinian artist in today's world. As I reflect on the journey of writing this thesis, I find that the process has been not only academic but also deeply personal and emotional. Over the past two years, I have moved through moments of joy, struggle, pain, and revelation, encountering a vast spectrum of human experience. The essence of this thesis lies at the intersection of these experiences and my evolving artistic identity, shaped by my engagement with the world around me. My reflections have shown that my identity is not fixed but an ever-shifting narrative, influenced by the ongoing crisis in Palestine, by my connection to the land and the memories of growing up in Bethlehem during the First and Second Intifadas, and by my current life in Helsinki. Music thus becomes both an act of resistance and a means of healing—a way to reclaim my voice, express collective pain, and create beauty in a world that often denies us that right.

Through this work, I hope to honor the resonating voices that have guided me, to contribute to a global dialogue of solidarity, and to affirm the transformative power of art to reimagine what it means to live fully and authentically in a fractured world. Through layers of sound, through the

threads of connection, and through the courage to express vulnerability, the artist becomes a bridge between the seen and unseen, the spoken and unspoken.

Improvisation offers a way to respond to these crises, not with solutions but with presence. It is a practice that invites the body to react, to feel, to listen deeply. It is an act of liberation, erasing the boundaries that separate us and connecting us to something larger—a shared resonance, a collective pulse. Improvisation is not just sound; an exploration of truth through vulnerability, and a way to remember what it means to belong, to love, to trust in the natural rhythms of existence. The art that arises from such seeing is not an escape; it's a confrontation and a glimpse to what humanity could be if we chose to see with complete honesty. And in this stillness, this inquiry, we may begin to unravel the machinery, creating a harmony that holds both the beauty and the brutal truth of existence. It's a call to each of us to be alive, fully, and together.

Resonating Voices reflects this journey—both personal and collective. It is a recognition of all those whose voices have shaped this work, whether quoted, collaborated with, or simply felt. These voices resonate through the open spaces of authenticity, through the courage to be vulnerable, and through the genuine quest for truth. They remind us that amid a human crisis, there is an urgency not only to resist but also to connect, to honor the humanity within ourselves and in each other. I see this work not as a conclusion but as an ongoing exploration. The resonating voices in this thesis are not fixed—they are living, evolving, and calling us to listen more deeply, question more bravely, and connect more authentically.

Krishnamurti's call to embrace the totality of life as a foundation for creativity inspires me to approach this performance not as an endpoint but as a continuation of the quest for truth, freedom, and connection. The concept of Resonating Voices, which is central to this thesis, reflects this integrative view. It is not just about sound but about the common spaces of inquiry and expression that music generates.

The horrific crisis happening in Palestine, and indeed around the world, demands not just reflection but transformation. As artists, we must seek ways to reinvent, reconnect, and restore, rather than simply reflecting the brokenness. The title of this thesis, Resonating Voices, captures this notion. It speaks to the voices that have informed this work—those of collaborators, mentors, ancestors, and communities—as well as the hidden connections that music can

evoke. These voices are not limited to sound; they are moments of recognition, shared presence, and of a common pulse that binds us to one another and to life itself.

This humility—being receptive to the present to oneself and to others—is consistent with improvisation's core value as a liberating practice. Improvisation, as explored in the collaborations of this thesis, invites a continual observation and a discipline of presence. In the act of creating music, particularly through the spontaneous interplay of instruments, identities, and stories, the artist must shed preconceptions, biases, and attachments to outcomes. This is comparable to the process of removing the outer layers of imposed identities in order to reveal the more profound realities of the individual and the shared experience.

I am reminded of the significance of this inquiry as I prepare for the research's final performance, a concert featuring collaborators from all across the world. We share presence, courage, and resistance through the music we create, the stories we tell, and the connections we build. They urge us to recognize the resonant voices of our shared humanity and to move beyond the concepts of nationality, ideology, and individualism.

Osho's assertion that "creativity is the greatest rebellion in existence" Creativity, as he says, means breaking free from conditionings, rejecting the limitations imposed by collective psychology. These creative acts necessitate a willingness to step into the unknown, to risk vulnerability, and to believe in the process of improvisation as a means of discovering both self and collective voice. Osho's vision of the artist as someone who must "inquire in the jungles of life." This rebellion is not destructive; rather, it is fruitful. Osho's emphasis on leaving behind the "mob mind" aligns with the necessity of creating spaces where authentic voices can come to light.

The connection between creativity and discipline, as looked into by Osho, is especially pertinent in the context of improvisation. He argues that living with passion and intensity requires discipline—not the rigid obedience to societal expectations but the discipline of presence, exploration, and self-awareness. This is shown in the improvisational practices discussed throughout this research, where the discipline of being present in the moment allowed for the emergence of genuine expression.

In his interview with the Atheer podcast, Mahmoud Abu Adi fervently stresses that in order to free the mind, we need to confront the systems that aim to define us by our pain and exhort us to rethink our shared future. Living under occupation causes psychological, emotional, and deeply ingrained trauma that is fundamental to our culture and identity, he explains. Abu Adi asserts that psychology's contribution in liberation goes beyond treating trauma—it is about helping people reclaim their agency and, more importantly, giving them the ability to influence their own destiny. We must break free from the narratives that reduce us to mere victims or passive receivers of fate, as he points out. Resistance, in his view, is not just a response but the reimagining of what could be, beyond the framework of occupation. The ability to imagine and act upon a different reality is the true power of the mind in defeating oppression. This directly challenges the strategies of occupation that aim to make us believe there is no escape, no vision, no alternative—only despair. For Abu Adi, healing begins with the recognition that our pain is not an isolated experience but rather part of a larger history of resistance. This process of healing and liberation is inherently collective, rooted in our shared past, and it is through this recognition of collective suffering that we begin to heal and move forward. As he continues, liberating the mind is reclaiming it, envisioning a future free from the cycles of trauma and oppression imposed by occupation. (Atheer Podcast, 2024).

Jiddu Krishnamurti who challenged traditional notions of thought and selfhood, offers insights that I have felt resonate deeply with the process of music-making. Music, particularly in its improvised and collaborative forms, offers a profound experiment in freedom. As we compose or improvise, we encounter moments of tension: the desire for a specific outcome, the fear of imperfection, or the attachment to familiar patterns. These internal frictions reflect the "distortions" described by Krishnamurti, in which conscious or unconscious impulses interfere with pure observation. To truly explore any field, one must approach it with freedom, free of preconceived ideas or ambitions (Krishnamurti, 1976). In music, this translates to letting go of expectations, accepting the unexpected, and listening deeply—not just to others, but to oneself.

Krishnamurti's phrase that "the analyzer is not separate from the analyzed" brings great insight into the creative process, especially in music-making. Typically, when musicians reflect on their performance—judging whether a melody feels authentic or questioning the flow of rhythm—they create a barrier between themselves as observers and their music as the object of

observation. However, Krishnamurti dismantles this distinction, claiming that both the observer and the observed arise from the same consciousness. This understanding transforms the paradigm of self-critique in music: the doubts and judgments we project onto our work are inseparable from the creative process itself. Recognizing this interconnectedness allows us to approach music as an extension of ourselves, rather than as a product to be perfected from the outside. In this way, the process of analyzing becomes less about imposing judgment and more about welcoming the wholeness of creation—a seamless flow in which the analyzer and the analyzed are simply facets of the same creative energy.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The case studies looked at in this research—“Sonic Exile”, “Echoes from Bethlehem”, and the work with the Amwaj Choir—together, they offer a multifaceted understanding of how improvisation, cross-cultural collaborations, and the integration of tradition and innovation within Palestinian artistic practices can serve as powerful acts of defiance against the ongoing erasure of Palestinian identity.

A common thread linking these case studies is the role of improvisation as both an artistic method and a tool for resistance. The collaborative improvisation with Jano Doe in "Sonic Exile" revealed a shared vulnerability that transcended individual narratives. The dynamic interplay between the qanun and Jano's modular synthesizer created a sonic environment in which Palestinian cultural memory could meet modern sound experimentation, demonstrating the dynamic and suppleness of Palestinian self-expression and cultural reservoirs. Similarly, “Echoes from Bethlehem” offered a different yet complementary perspective, where improvisation with Faris Ishaq is stemmed in our shared Palestinian cultural heritage.

The maqam system and the interplay of instruments like the Nay and Qanun allowed for a deep dialogue with both tradition and the reclamation of the spirit of the land. Faris’s philosophy that "harmony wants to happen by itself" speaks to the idea of letting go of control, allowing space for the music—and by extension, the identity—to evolve authentically. The broader concept that identity—like music—is a dynamic, ever-evolving process, shaped within both personal experience and collective history. As an artist navigating exile, the improvisational process holds

a space to allow and to reconnect with my unfolding Palestinian identity in light of personal struggles inflicted by the constraints of the concept of nationality and of the larger, ever-ongoing political struggle in my homeland.

A key concept emerging from both “Sonic Exile” and “Echoes from Bethlehem” is the idea of cultural resistance, which was powerfully exemplified through the artistic practices of both collaborations. As El-Amyouni (2024, p.21) asserts, “existence is resistance”—simply being and creating within the confines of occupation is a profound act of defiance. In “Sonic Exile”, the recordings were sonic experiments charged with emphasis on the reimagination born from both Palestinian folk traditions and modern sonic landscapes. This is a direct and resourceful challenge to the oppressive forces that sought for a narrative to become submerged and forgotten through usual rhetorical and material instrumentalities.

The Amwaj Choir’s of Palestinian youngsters bring themselves to the spotlight to sing to their fundamental rights of being and to tell their stories beyond the common preconception, They are potent stands of self-affirmation and self-awareness, directly challenging the ignorance and prejudice surrounding Palestinians and their identity. The cultural resistance through the collective effort of the choir became a vital counter-narrative and a creative chamber of young spirits nourishing their authenticity and reaching out to fellow humans while continuing to surpass the forces and notions that attempt otherwise.

The preservation and reimagining of cultural memory are central to both the “Sonic Exile” and “Echoes from Bethlehem” case studies. Music was a medium for artistic exploration and a living archive in the “Sonic Exile”—holding and reinterpreting Palestinian cultural memory. This work is a testimony to the continuance to revive the threatened cultural memory. Palestinian artists intersect with diverse art work in coding the silenced Palestinian narrative that offers insights to contemporary Palestine (Santos, 2011). Similarly, in “Echoes from Bethlehem”, the practice of Al-‘Aunah, a Palestinian tradition of communal support, resembles the collective nature of bringing something to life and continuity.. The effort of creating music embodies the collective vision and aspirations of a living memory by continuing to recount the exclusionary historical narratives and cultural legacy of Palestine while engaging with the present challenges of national displacement and erasure.

Through an exploration of the “Sonic Exile” and “Echoes from Bethlehem” case studies, as well as my reflections on the work with the Amwaj Choir, key findings have emerged that shed light on the profound ways in which music—particularly through improvisation and cultural collaboration—becomes a site for resistance, healing, and cultural memory preservation.

Key Findings:

This research identifies six key findings that underscore the transformative role of music and artistic collaboration as tools for navigating identity, resisting erasure, and the collective resilience within the Palestinian context. The key findings outlined below offer new perspectives on the interplay between artistic expression, sociopolitical struggle, and the evolving dynamics of identity formation.

1. **Improvisation as a Pathway for Identity Exploration:** Through both “Sonic Exile” and “Echoes from Bethlehem”, improvisation was revealed not just as a creative method, but as a critical act of identity formation and resistance. By engaging in spontaneous, collaborative music-making, artists and performers negotiate the complexities of their identities.
2. **Music as Cultural Resistance:** Whether through the interplay of traditional and modern instruments in “Sonic Exile”, or the grounded cultural practices in “Echoes from Bethlehem”, music becomes an active form of resistance. It is a proactive act of cultural reclamation, directly challenging the erasure and distortion of Palestinian history and identity.
3. **The Role of Cultural Memory in Artistic Expression:** The importance of cultural memory emerged as a dynamic force in preserving the reservoir of the Palestinian culture and history. Music and other forms of art are cultural relics that possess the exceptional capacity to archive the legacy of a culture and of a history. Artwork also stretches memorial connection from the past struggles to the future aspirations of survival and continuity in contributing to the global heritage.
4. **Presence as a Foundation for Identity Transformation:** The case studies emphasized the importance of presence—not just as physical participation, but as an emotional and psychological state that facilitates deeper connection and creative flow. Being fully

attuned to the moment allowed for a fluid, evolving understanding of identity, where both the self and the collective were continuously redefined in the act of creation.

5. **Globalization and Artistic Identity:** Globalization in this modern world promotes a certain lifestyle and a way of being that challenges the space for diverse identities to survive and thrive, especially for individuals and communities that have been under the weight of long, systemic deprivation and denial of self-determination and sovereignty. Palestinian artists are particularly vigilant to these forces, both at the occupied homeland and in the diaspora, that reinforce the imposition of a globalized identity that can strip individuals of their cultural specificity. Through the study of both solo and collaborative work, it became evident that music can authentically rebuild the fragmented identity by guiding the balance of tradition and contemporary to heal and flourish, rather than adopting a custom identity.

Limitations

While this research offers valuable insights into the role of music in Palestinian identity, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. Due to time constraints and the unfolding political situation in Palestine, the scope of fieldwork and direct participation was limited. The ongoing occupation in Palestine has consistently restricted freedom of movement, making access to historic Palestine incredibly challenging. This, combined with the unfolding crisis in Gaza and across all of Palestine, has further hindered opportunities for conducting in-depth interviews or engaging in more extensive fieldwork. Additionally, the collaborative process was shaped by the real-time unfolding of events in Palestine, which added a layer of emotional intensity that made it difficult to establish long-term, uninterrupted engagements with all collaborators.

Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Looking ahead, this research opens several avenues for future exploration. Future studies could focus on the role of Palestinian music in broader international solidarity movements, to assess how art intersects with global political movements. Additionally, further research could explore the evolution of Palestinian artistic identity in response to shifts in political and technological landscapes, particularly in the digital age. Finally, there is potential for examining how music

education, as exemplified by the work of the Amwaj Choir, serves as both a means of cultural preservation and a tool for resistance against forced cultural exclusion.

The cultural resistance and activism help to create a free space that transforms and challenges the oppressing hold of the dominant power (Santos, 2011). The value of art in conserving historical narrative, living memory, and altering the prevailing ethno-national narrative that has deliberately excluded the people from their story and history. The future of this research lies in continuing to explore how art can serve as both a reflective and transformative force in the ongoing struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

Final Performance:

The final concert of my Master's studies in Global Music at Sibelius Academy, "Fragments of Love and War", brings together diverse voices, traditions, and artistic expressions. Rooted in the spirit of intercultural dialogue. The collaboration with musicians, poets, and improvisers from various backgrounds infuses the performance with a rich, multidimensional texture, blending the personal and collective experiences of love, loss, and resilience. This shared creative process amplifies the narrative of Palestinian identity and the universal power of art to bridge cultural divides, inspire empathy, and celebrate the beauty of human connection amidst adversity.

As a natural progression from this research, the final performative outcome of this project had taken shape on December 13, 2024, at Helsinki Music Centre as part of the Global Fest. This event had brought together individuals from Slovenia, Valencia, India, Slovakia, France, Palestine, Jordan, Chile, Argentina, and Finland—each contributing their unique voices to a shared space of creation and solidarity. These collaborations had not only expanded the dialogue around Palestinian identity but also had created a platform for artists to collectively engage, each bringing their unique art and soul to the stage.

The lyrics we had sung, drawn from Palestinian poetry and the poetry of the artists joining, had woven our stories together, articulating both the shared agony and beauty. Working collaboratively with musicians to arrange and write these pieces had been a way to honor our collective experience. This reflection had reached its peak in this concert, a synthesis of two and a half years in Finland and the insights they had brought. It had been a convergence of the resonating voices that had echoed through my journey—from Bethlehem to Helsinki. The

concert had served as a space where music, memory, and meaning had intersected. Much like this thesis, the concert had not just been a representation of who I am but a reflection of the ever-changing nature of identity and artistic expression in a world fraught with uncertainty.

Access the live stream of the concert through the saved link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmPM8e_CyxA&t=2370s

The concert booklet can be found in the Appendix.

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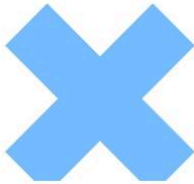
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Appendix



TAIDEYLIOPISTO
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Consent for use of personal data

Consent to participate in the research: TITLE

I have understood that participation is voluntary, and at any point in the research I am at liberty to notify the researcher that I no longer wish to participate in the study.

- ☐ I want to participate in the artistic research as an expert/artist/composer, and I want the information to be published including my name.
- ☐ I want to participate in the artistic research project anonymously.
- ☐ I give permission related to the law of copyright to use my piece of art/performance as a part of the research.
- ☐ I give permission related to the law of copyright to show my piece of art/performance publicly.
- ☐ I want to be identified as the author of my piece of art/performance
- ☐ I want my piece of art/performance to be published unnamed.

I have received sufficient information about the research project. I have understood the information and I wish to participate in the research study.

Signature of research participant

Print name

Email address

Researcher's Contact details:

Name

Email

Phone

Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki

Global Music Department
Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki

CONSENT FORM FOR AN INTERVIEW

This form confirms that I give consent for my participation in an interview for the bachelor / master project by Richard Alsadi as part of their bachelor / master's degree in Global Music, Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki.

The central focus of the bachelor / master project is centered around the themes of the Palestinian identity and exploring it through artistic research and practices.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Information given during the interview will be treated confidentially and it will not be used for any other purpose than the research concerned, and potential presentations or articles related to it. Parts of the interview may be quoted anonymously within the research. The anonymity of the interviewee will be protected, and the research data will be stored securely after the research has been completed. On completion of the project, the recordings and the codes to the interviewees will be destroyed. Transcripts of the interview will be stored securely for up to five years and thereafter destroyed or filed to an archive. The researcher is committed to follow the responsible conduct of research by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity and the Code of Conduct of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

The interviewer has informed me on the issues above and I agree to participate in the interview and study voluntarily. I can withdraw my consent at any given time by contacting the researcher, Richard Alsadi but the data collected up to the withdrawal may be utilized in the research. In case I have any questions concerning this interview or the research, I can also contact Richard Alsadi by e-mail (Richard.alsadi@uniarts.fi) or phone (+46737578536).

In the case of the interview being conducted online, consent is given by replying to this email.

The researcher has provided me with sufficient information on the research and the use of personal data and I have had a chance to ask for details on any issues.

Place and Date

Interviewee Name and Signature



"Fragments of Love and War" - a journey of sound, memory, and emotion - takes the audience into a world of poetry, melody, and silence, where the meaning extends beyond words or translation. Each fragment—each note, pause, and vibration—is part of a greater whole, reflecting the timeless themes of longing, love, and resilience. This is not a concert of explanation but an offering to connect through sound and silence where every moment holds the depth of stories left untold.

About the Artist

Shafeeq Alsadi is a Palestinian qanunist, singer, and composer. His work is rooted in Arabic music traditions, blending his art with global influences.

Performers

- **Shafeeq Alsadi (PS):** Qanun / Voice
- **Joan Peiró Aznar (VLC):** Guitar / Oud / Voice
- **Prabhat Das (IN):** Tablas
- **Nemat Battah (JO/PS):** Oud / Voice
- **Ana Lazar (SI):** Violin
- **Manuel Rosales (AR):** Guitar / Voice
- **Javier Navarro (CL):** double Bass
- **Leïla Martin (FR):** Riq
- **Jano Doe (SK):** DIY Modular Synth
- **Saku Liimatainen (FI):** Live Electronics

Sound engineer: Mikko Ingman

Light: Jukka Kolimaa

Production: Eeva Hohti

Fragments of Love and War (Part I)

This opening fragment sculpts a soundscape of poetry—dispersed verses from Palestinian poets, rising and dissolving in the moment. Live electronics and modular synthesizers create a sphere where words transform into emotion.

Furaq

Furaq—a sensation of leaving home, loved ones, and the familiar. I wrote this piece during a time of global isolation, drawing inspiration from the Arabic musical traditions of my upbringing.

Sirto

Sirto is a rhythmically vibrant piece, rooted in Arabic musical traditions and inspired by the fast-paced energy of the *sirto* form—a classical instrumental template known for its joyful and lively character. Composed by myself, this piece reflects on a journey shared with Ayaam Trio across many places—Delhi, Valencia, Palestine, and beyond. Joined tonight by Ana Lazar on violin.

The Sound of Us

The Sound of Us is a composition I wrote as part of my journey with Ayaam Trio. It reflects the delicate balance between silence and sound, offering a moment of pause within the concert's fragmented narrative.

Fragments of Love and War – Part II

This fragment unfolds through qanun improvisation, responding to the space, the moment, and fragments of poetry drawn from Palestinian voices since 1948. These words, resonating with my own understanding of being Palestinian today, emerge and dissolve, reflecting the chaos of displacement and the strength of enduring identity.

Duo with Manuel Rosales - A Dialogue of Shared Moments

Drawing from the eternal verses of Al-Hallaj—the 9th-century mystic poet who spoke of divine longing—“Enough sorrow that I call to you endlessly, as if I am far, or you are absent”—and Manuel’s poetry “Let me in, oh quay of sand-me in,” articulate the desire to bridge distances and grasp the silhouettes of loved ones, even if only for a fleeting moment.

Yamma Mweil el Hawa

Yamma Mweil el Hawa is a Palestinian folk song—a conversation between a mother and her son, in which the pain of exile, the longing for freedom, and the hope for justice are heard in its verses. This song has lived through generations deeply tied to the Palestinian experience, holds the memories of those who have refused to forget their roots. Tonight, this rendition pays homage to the strength of the Palestinian spirit and stands as a call for humanity to reject the normalization of oppression, dedicating it to all those who yearn for a world built on justice and peace.

Summer Smiles

Summer Smiles was composed by Joan Peiró Aznar and came to life during a tour of concerts in Delhi in January 2024. It reflects the shared journey of Ayaam. Released in October, offering a glimpse of an oasis of harmony in a fragmented world.

Ayaam, meaning “dimension” in Sanskrit, represents our collective exploration of survival, friendship, and healing through music. This piece reflects the sovereign joy of ordinary people who create beauty and connection within fractured realities. As the concert’s closing piece, it celebrates unity and the enduring ability of music to dissolve borders and overcome challenges.



Richard Alsadi photographed by Rosa Fuster Serquera in Potries, Valencia, summer 2024.