Carrying Words Like Weapons:
Hip-Hop and the Poetics of Palestinian Identities in Israel

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Tucked discreetly behind Ben-Gurion International Airport, amidst rows of industrial factories and seemingly endless railway tracks, lies one of Israel's forgotten towns.[1] Despite recent efforts to revitalize this small city, for its roughly 66,110 residents (20 percent of whom are Palestinian Christians and Muslims), Lyd [Hebrew: Lod; Greek-Latin: Lydda] remains one of the most dangerous, drug addicted, and crime infested cities in the Middle East.[2] Vestiges of urban neglect are most visible in its Palestinian neighborhoods: Samekh Het, Warda, Shannir, Neve Yarek, and Al-Mahatta. Within these small enclaves, many of the houses and streets are unnamed or unnumbered, well-paved roads are rare, and basic utility services are inconsistent and unreliable. Open sewers and overflowing dumpsters disfigure an urban landscape of derelict and abandoned buildings covered in graffiti.[3] Within brief pockets of open space, children cordon off the boundaries of imaginary soccer goals with abandoned shopping carts, light poles, benches, and clotheslines of drying laundry. In a cruel and ironic counterpoint, makeshift soccer games intermingle with Lyd's thriving drug trade.[4] In full view of the street, wandering passersby purchase plastic bags of cocaine and crystal meth through slots carved into the many concrete walls of abandoned apartment buildings and warehouses. Unafraid of police interference, dealers openly announce their presence through a series of lights strewn across the endless walls of cement and twisted rebar. Neither the children playing in the streets nor the dealers seem overly concerned about the others' presence. Sedimented over time into the urban landscape, a persistent culture of drug abuse and urban decay has gripped these neighborhoods such that instances of illegal activity and violence are no longer strange or out of the ordinary.

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[1] Portions of this article appeared in *My Voice is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance*. PhD diss., University of Illinois, 2006.

[2] Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001.

[3] Haim Yacobi's research on so-called "mixed cities" in Israel examines various informal mechanisms of state neglect and dispossession. In particular, Yacobi's analysis of surveillance and spatial resistance in Lyd accentuates the struggles for identity evident among Lyd's Palestinian inhabitants. For further reading see Haim Yacobi, "In-Between Surveillance and Spatial Protest: The Production of Space of the 'Mixed City' of Lod," *Surveillance and Society* 2.1 (2004): 55-77.

[4] Official crime statistics from Lyd are difficult to obtain. However, several articles in Israeli newspapers have documented the problems of drug addiction and drug related crime in Lyd. For this, see Ori Nir and Lily Galili, "The Jews Can Leave but the Arabs Have Nowhere to Go," *Ha'aretz* (Jerusalem), 3 December 2000.

Walking these streets, it is difficult to imagine such urban neglect nestled in the shadow of cosmopolitan Tel Aviv. Forgotten by the Israeli state, many of Lyd's Palestinian residents feel marginalized by an ethnic Jewish majority unwilling to provide basic civil services for its non-Jewish citizens: infrastructure, utilities, law enforcement, health care, education, and so forth. Such is the view of my guide to the city, Tamer Nafar, Israel's most famous and infamous Palestinian Hip-Hop artist. Having grown up on these streets, Nafar possesses a unique ability to interpret Lyd's dense urban cityscape.

"This is where our music comes from," Nafar explains while walking back to his family's apartment. "Our rhymes are about what it is like to be '48s [Palestinian citizens of Israel], to see the crime and the violence and the suffering, and to know that we are second-class to Jews. . . . Well, now the minority is opening its mouth. I've got a voice, and the stones I throw are rhymes. Some guys burn tires or shoot guns, but this is my way."[5]

Seeking a means to express his anger and frustration at the dire situation in Lyd propelled Nafar into the world of transnational Hip-Hop, a field of artistic expression attuned to the racism and ethnic discrimination he feels as a Palestinian minority in Israel. In the process, Tamer Nafar and his rap group DAM have now come to dominate the burgeoning Hip-Hop movement taking hold among many of Israel's disenfranchised and dispossessed Palestinian youth. Through rap, communities of artists and performers like Tamer Nafar have sought to de-center stereotypical representations of Palestinians in the mainstream Israeli media, as well as to open new spaces for public discourse on Palestinian ethnic rights. In stark contrast to the long history of nationalist music produced and consumed by Palestinians under occupation or in diaspora, this new form of Hip-Hop seeks to engage Israeli society from within, as a voice for equal rights and opportunity as Israeli citizens. In this article, I investigate many of the dominant social and political issues facing these rappers as they negotiate the Palestinian condition in Israel. In so doing, I seek to engage issues of national discourse, hegemony, and social protest, arguing for the utility of music and popular culture in resolving central questions of individual subjectivity and collective identity formation.

In particular, I focus specifically on the Palestinian-Israeli rap group DAM, with whom I had the pleasure of working and touring over the course of my field research in Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank between 2002 and 2005. As Israel's first Palestinian rap group performing in

[5] Tamer Nafar, interview by author, 8 June 2005, Lyd, Israel.

Hebrew, English, and Arabic, DAM (Tamer Nafar, his younger brother Suheil Nafar, and close friend Mahmoud Jariri) has drawn significant international media attention from the likes of *Rolling Stone*, the BBC, CNN, Reuters, and a host of various arts and culture publications. In both the posh discothèques of Tel Aviv as well as the Palestinian coffee houses of the northern Galilee, DAM has become a mainstay in Israeli rap and Hip-Hop culture. Their unique ability to navigate between and within various ethnic, national, and transnational performative frames has garnered them a strong following among Israeli Jewish, Christian, and Muslim fans.

In traveling with DAM to their various performances, both in Israel and in the West Bank, I became acutely aware of the various ways in which these rappers navigate the aesthetic and ideational dispositions of two very distinct audiences. In language, dialect, musical form, and content, DAM approached each audience very differently. The code switching involved in performing in front of an audience of Israeli Jews and West Bank Palestinians is indicative of the many ways in which Palestinian-Israelis negotiate the discursive fields of identity and politics in their daily lives. The difficulties of being both, and yet neither, Israeli or Palestinian, is not lost on these musicians. Palestinians of ’48 typically live as the feared internal “other” in Israeli society, and are simultaneously portrayed as collaborators and traitors by Palestinian nationalists for being *bityûḥid* [Judaized], carrying Israeli passports, speaking fluent Hebrew, and participating in Israeli politics and society.

What is especially fascinating, however, are the many ways in which DAM’s music transcends the rigid nationalist structures that have dominated both Israeli and Palestinian cultural narratives. More than simply translating cultural nuance and meaning between Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, DAM’s music reveals how the established discourses of ethno-national exclusiveness (in the case of Israel) and direct linkages to the land and a particular “peasant ethos” (in the case of Palestine) are both betrayed by social heterogeneity and new forms of performance, media, and communication. In performance, DAM explicitly confounds nationalist histories of the State of Israel based on Jewish homogeneity, throwing into relief a long history of interaction and indoctrination with and within the Arab world. Likewise, through the performance of an explicitly transnational African-American popular music, these young rappers create spaces where traditional conceptions of Palestinian nation and resistance are reconfigured to include media, aesthetics, and technologies from the cosmopolitan/non-Arab mediascape.

Relational History and the Dual Society Approach

On a more conceptual level, the growth and expansion of Palestinian Hip-Hop in Israel is illustrative of what Perry Anderson has termed a "relational history" of interaction and contact in Israel/Palestine.[6] Following the lead of social historians such as Joel Beinin, Zachary Lockman, Rebecca Stein, and Ted Swedenburg such a "relational" approach focuses specifically on moments of interdependence and mutual communication between Palestinians and Jews that challenge and contradict the entrenched "dual society model."[7] In this dual society model, Palestinian and Jewish communities are treated as predominantly coherent and internally unconflicted cultural formations, developing and maturing along separate and distinct historical trajectories within fields of meaning unique to each group.[8] From this, Jewish (later Israeli) and Arab (later Palestinian) identities are theorized as natural, if not pre-given modes of consciousness, rather than seen as performative *constructs* derived from historical, social, and political fields of relations and reactions. To seek a "relational history," as these researchers have advocated, calls into question the established Arab/Jew binary, and highlights mutually constitutive histories between and within various social formations. More importantly, a move toward "relational history" refocuses our attention onto the processes whereby these collective identities are constructed, challenging us to interrogate the ways in which the boundaries between communities are drawn and maintained, and how the practices of exclusion and conflict are negotiated and performed in daily practice.

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[6] In a roundtable discussion with various historians, Perry Anderson publicly called for a "relational history." According to Anderson, this would be a step beyond the current historiography, which is largely national in focus and bereft of any understanding of the "dynamic inter-relationships [between national histories] over time." This roundtable discussion was later published under the title, "Agendas for Radical History," *Radical History Review* 36 (1986): 26-45.

[7] See especially Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; and *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. In addition, Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg have also advocated a relational approach in their work on popular culture in Israel/Palestine in "Popular Culture, Relational History, and the Question of Power in Palestine and Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33.4 (2004): 5-20. For a musicological study of the relations between Jewish and Arab communities in regards to folkloric dance see Elke Kaschl, *Dance and Authenticity in Israel and Palestine: Performing the Nation*. Leiden: Brill Press, 2003.

[8] Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 3-10; and "Arab Workers and Arab Nationalism in Palestine: A View From Below." In *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, 249-272. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

In recognition of the 60th anniversary of Israel's declaration of statehood, in which musicologists, performers, and theorists from across the globe gathered to take stock of Israel's diverse musical soundscape, a move toward a "relational musicology" is especially important in several ways.[9] First, in seeking to understand the historical interrelations and interdependencies of all of Israel's citizens we move away from the persistent discourse that understands Jewish and Palestinian communities only in terms of their own internal dynamics and interactions with the greater Jewish (i.e. European) and Palestinian (i.e. Arab) worlds. As many esteemed researchers of Israeli music have so eloquently demonstrated in their research, the ongoing project of Israeli nation building has not occurred within a purely Jewish vacuum.[10] Rather, Israeli music and culture is best conceptualized as a dynamic conversation of many diverse voices framed within discourses of history, modernity, religion, and the nation-state. Nor can Palestinians deny the incredible influence of Jewish and Israeli national culture and media in the development of Palestinian music and dance.[11] As collective identities, imaginings of Israel and Palestine are profoundly contingent, mutually constitutive, and imbricated within a dynamic cultural conversation. With this in mind, if we are to truly "Hear Israel" we must in some way attend to this dynamic cultural conversation inclusive of all its many voices (Jewish as well as non-Jewish). To do so, would begin a much needed relational dialogue of history, art, and culture that moves beyond the prevailing dogma of two discrete homogenous national entities

[9] An example of this was the recent conference *Hearing Israel: Music, Culture, and History at 60*, convened at the University of Virginia under the direction of James Loeffler, Joel Rubin, and Alon Confino, 13-14 April 2008.

[10] See for example, Eric Cohen and Amonon Shiloah, "Major Trends of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music," *Popular Music* 5 (1985): 199-223; Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, and Pamela Squires-Kidron, "*Musica Mizrakhit:* Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," *Popular Music* 8 (1989): 131-142; Motti Regev, "Israeli Rock or, A Study in the Politics of 'Local Authenticity'," *Popular Music* 11 (1992): 1-14; Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004; Philip Bohlman, *The Land Where Two Streams Flow: Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989; Gila Flam, "Beracha Zefira: A Case Study of Acculturation in Israeli Song," *Asian Music* 17.2 (1986): 108-125; Amy Horowitz, "Dueling Narrative: Zehava Ben Sings Umm Kulthum." In *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005; Benjamin Brinner, *Playing Across the Divide: Musical Encounters in a Contested Land*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

[11] While the literature on Palestinian music is sparse, several important studies have emerged, cognizant of the cultural interrelations between Palestinian and Jewish communities. See Motti Regev, *Oud and Guitar: The Musical Culture of the Arabs in Israel*. Ra'anana: Beit Berl, 1993; Elke Kaschl, *Dance and Authenticity in Israel and Palestine: Performing the Nation.* Leiden: Brill, 2003; Amatzia Bar-Yosef, "Traditional Rural Style under a Process of Change: The Singing Style of the Hadday, Palestinian Folk Poet-Singers," *Asian Music* 29.2 (1998): 57-82; Nasser Al-Taee, "Voices of Peace and the Legacy of Reconciliation: Popular Music, Nationalism, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East," *Popular Music* 21.1 (2002): 41-62; Dalia Cohen and Ruth Katz, *Palestinian Arab Music: A Maqam Tradition in Practice.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

locked in a bitter existential conflict where violence is believed the "only normal … or even possible form of interaction."[12]

Resistance Rap, Ethnic Engagements: "Born Here"

As an example of the type of relational dialogue I am proposing, there is perhaps no greater statement than DAM's highly influential song *Hûn Anwalîdat* [Arabic: "Born Here"]. Coupled with a large-scale music video produced and directed by Guliano Mer-Hamis, "Born Here" has circulated widely within Jewish and Palestinian Hip-Hop communities around the world since its conception in 2002. The production of the song and video was sponsored by the Israeli non-profit organization *Shatil*, whose mission is to raise awareness regarding civil rights violations and discrimination against Palestinian-Israelis. Representatives of *Shatil* stated that their support for this project was derived from the belief that, "music is a powerful means of social protest, and that DAM has a particularly unique talent for engaging both Jewish and Palestinian communities [through Hip-Hop]." With this in mind, DAM composed this song in two versions, one in Hebrew and the other in Arabic, in order to specifically engage Israeli Jewish and Palestinian audiences. The project culminated in a large-scale music video, featuring the talents of fellow Palestinian rapper and R&B singer `Abeer Al Zinati.

The video begins with the all too common moment when Israeli police demand to see the identity cards of three Palestinian youths. Filmed to resemble documentary footage, one of the officers looks into the camera and demands that it be turned off. Slowly, as Tamer Nafar steps out of the vehicle and reaches for his wallet the camera pivots to reveal trepidation and fear on the face of the young rapper. Ominous synthesized descending fifths narrate the introductory moments when Nafar is about to be searched by police. Then, as the main beat track begins, the camera quickly flashes in on the young rapper's face to indicate a break with reality, and the beginning of a fantasy montage where Nafar's true anger at the situation may be fulfilled. Nafar then begins his first verse, posturing and gesturing angrily in the faces of the police officers, revealing a momentary shift in power and authority, an alternative performative space where Palestinian rage may be freely expressed. Scenes of police control and surveillance are then

[12] Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

juxtaposed with images of the rappers leading angry crowds of demonstrators through the streets of Lyd. Rapping in perfect Hebrew, Nafar sings out:

> This is hunting season, the prey is one more home,
> Of a dove trying to survive under the hawk's regime,
> (*page ripped*) let's try something more optimistic:
> Each day I wake up and see 1000 cops.
> Maybe they came to arrest a dealer…(he's here, he's there, oh no, they came to destroy his neighbor's home).
> What is happening here?
> A hate bubble surrounding the ghetto.
> Why is it hard for him? And who's going to answer him?
> Everywhere I go, excuses greet me.
> I broke the law? No, no the law broke me!
> Enough, enough gentlemen.
> I was born here, my grandparents were also born here.
> You will not sever me from my roots.
> Understand, even if I have faith in this "imaginary" regime,
> You still haven't allowed me to build a porch to stand on and express it.[13]

Figure 1: "*Hûn Anwalîdat*" [Born Here] video images

[13] Hebrew and Arabic translations for "Born Here" were provided by the artists.

Throughout the video, signs of urban neglect, state surveillance, and popular protest dominate. Uniformed officers are shown searching pedestrians, all while Nafar angrily protests in the faces of his interrogators. The officers, seemingly frustrated, then proceed on their way while hundreds take to the streets in solidarity against the urban presence of state authorities. With mounting crowds demonstrating in the streets, police closely monitor their actions with camcorders and binoculars, further signifying the penetrating panopticism of the state into the lives of Lyd's Arab population.

In speaking directly to an Israeli Jewish audience, Nafar draws upon common Hebrew vernacular phrases, slang, and references idiomatic to Israeli Jewish cultural frames. "A dove trying to survive under the hawk's regime" is an overt reference to former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policies of home demolition in Israel and the West Bank. Pointing out the ever-present police, who demolish homes built without government required permits, but do little to combat rampant drugs and crime, reveals an apparent hypocrisy in the way Palestinians are subjected to Israeli law, and raises awareness on an important, though often neglected, social issue.[14] Nafar's claim that "he didn't break the law, the law broke him" is also a reference to African-American empowerment, especially visible in the work of Tupac Shakur, Malcolm X, and others.[15] Confronting his target audience directly, Nafar calls out, "I was born here, my grandparents were born here. You will not sever me from my roots." The constructs of birthplace, roots, and ancestry are perhaps the most powerful indices of Israeli and Palestinian national discourse and feature prominently in his musical message.

`Abeer Al Zinati then provides a momentary break in the montage with a melodic rendering of the song's chorus, entirely in Arabic.

Our neighborhood is embarrassed, not dressed in silk,
A bride without a veil, waiting, longing for her beauty.

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[14] Haim Yacobi estimates that approximately 50 percent of the Palestinian population of the city of Lyd occupies so-called "illegal structures," built without government permits or approval. Among non-Arab cities, this marks the largest informal construction activity in Israel. See Haim Yacobi "In-Between Surveillance and Spatial Protest: The Production of Space of the 'Mixed City' of Lod," *Surveillance and Society* 2.1 (2004): 60.

[15] In Tupac Shakur's famous song, "Everything They Owe," he makes a very similar point. By striking out at the structure of ideology and power that defines African Americans as "drug dealers and empty souls," Tupac was the inspiration for Nafar's belief that "he didn't break the law, the law broke him." Tupac's original rhymes state, "Supreme ideology, you claim to hold/Claiming that we are all drug dealers with empty souls/That used to tempt me to roll, commit violence/In the midst of an act of war, witnesses left silent. . . ."

Time has passed her over, forgotten her.

The separation wall mutes her hope.

Like a bird that breaks out of her cage, she will spread her wings and fly.

Here Al Zinati likens her neighborhood, and — by extension — the Palestinian people, to a young bride unable to fulfill her dreams of marriage. Caged behind the separation wall, she expresses her hope that one day Palestinians "will spread their wings and fly."

In our conversations, Al Zinati explained that the decision to keep the chorus in Arabic was based on several factors. As this was her first major performance opportunity, she spent weeks writing a chorus that fully captured her feelings of frustration living as a Palestinian teenage girl in Israel. The lyrics held a great deal of meaning for her, such that she simply could not find the appropriate words in Hebrew. "To shift such personal feelings into Hebrew felt like a betrayal to me," she insisted. "For the rhyme and flow of the song, and my own message, Hebrew just didn't seem to work." Upon reflection, she believed that this was the right decision. "It was important to have a Palestinian presence in the Hebrew version [of the song], for the Jewish audiences to hear Arabic, in order to fully understand us and our situation."

In language, music, fashion, and performative gesture, these young artists attempt to confront mainstream Israeli audiences from within familiar discourses of Hip-Hop, history, politics, and the nation-state. Among the various rhetorical and poetic strategies utilized, none carry as much meaning and importance for the performers as the recurring phrase, "born here." Articulated in dialogue with a long history of Israeli Jewish nationalist song emphasizing indigeniety, ancestral roots, and cultural authenticity, "Born Here" advocates for a resignification of Israeli nationalist history to include generations of native inhabitants. In particular, Tamer Nafar composed "Born Here" in counterpoint with the widely popular Israeli Jewish anthem *Kan Noladeti/Kan Bayti* [Hebrew: "Born Here/My Home is Here"], composed by Uzi Hitman and performed by Orna and Moshe Datz at the 1991 Eurovision song contest. On taking third place at the coveted international song contest, "Kan" became an instant classic among Israeli Jewish youth, taking a prominent place among the canon of *Shirei Eretz Israel* [Songs of the Land of Israel]. It is this song in particular, and its underlying nationalist meaning, that DAM sought to engage in their Hip-Hop counterpart.

Here is my home, here I was born, on the plain by the sea.
Here are the friends I grew up with, and I have no other place in the world.

Here is my home, here I would play, in the lowlands by the mountain.
Here I drank water from the well, and I planted grass in the desert.

Here I was born, here my children were born.
Here I built my home with my own two hands.
Here you are also with me and here are all of my thousand friends.
And after two thousand years, an end to my wandering.

Here I played all my songs, and I walked on a nightly journey.
Here in my youth I defended my plot of God.
My plot of God.

Here I set my table, a piece of bread, a fresh flower.
I opened the door to the neighbors and we'll say "*Ahlan*" to whoever comes,
"*Ahlan*."

Uzi Hitman's now classic pop anthem is a powerful articulation of many fundamental Israeli nationalist tropes. Looking to the future, "Kan" makes a very powerful declaration of presence and permanence on the world stage. "Here I was born, here my children were born" presents a forward-looking indigeneity of the post-Sabra Jew, *rooted* (literally and figuratively) into the "plains by the sea" and the "lowlands by the mountain" through birth, growth, and re-birth. References to the land, the mountains, and the sea serve to instantiate a primordial connection between the Jewish body ("I have no other place in the world") and the land, fulfilled in the establishment of the Jewish state "after 2000 years an end to my wandering." To "drink water from the well" and to "plant grass in the desert" draws its meaning from the Israeli nationalist trope of pre-1897 Palestine as a barren desert, waiting to be transformed, planted, and gardened by colonization/civilization.

If the first two verses and chorus celebrate Israel's presence in/on the world stage, performatively affirmed by Israel's participation at Eurovision, the third and fourth verses establish a narrative of Israeli relations with its immediate non-Jewish "neighbors." "Here I built my home with my own two hands" commemorates the great efforts of Israel's founding families to create for themselves a homeland against seemingly insurmountable odds. Surrounded by "my thousand friends," Israel establishes its place among the European powers, an outpost of "Western/European" values in the heart of the "Eastern/Oriental" world. Called to service in one's youth, Israel "defended [her] plot of God" against foreign invasion. This important phrase, "my plot of God," is repeated so as to solidify Israel's religious claim to be the sole heirs to the Promised Land. In a gesture of peace, a table is set with a "fresh flower" and "a piece of bread" to welcome whoever of Israel's neighbors may come. With an open door, Israel warmly greets its neighbors with the colloquial, "*Ahlan*" [Hebrew slang, derived from Arabic: "Welcome"].[16]

While "Kan" was an immediate hit at the Eurovision contest among participating international audiences (Spain, Yugoslavia, and Turkey each awarded it their highest score), the song has had a very different legacy for Palestinians in Israel, under occupation, and in diaspora. In particular, DAM cited it in our interviews as "dishonest," "a lie," and "propaganda," composed to legitimize Israel's nationalist claims in complete disregard of its indigenous population. According to these artists, "Kan" does not begin to describe their experience as Israeli citizens living in Lyd. While Orna and Moshe Datz may have "built [their] home with [their] own two hands," Tamer Nafar has not been allowed "to build a porch to stand on and express [his opinions]." In Nafar's Israel, neighbors are not welcomed to the table with flowers and bread; rather, neighbors watch as their homes are demolished and drug dealers rule the streets. Nafar's most pointed criticism is directed at what he sees as a "negation of history" endemic to Israeli nationalist discourse. If "Kan" articulates a forward looking Jewish presence and permanence in the "Promised Land" through social and cultural reproduction, "Here I was born, Here my children were born," Nafar counters with an account of Palestinian presence going back generations, "I was born here, my grandparents were also born here." Appropriating "Kan's" prominent metaphorical juxtaposition of body and land, Nafar warns that, despite such dire conditions and urban neglect, "[Israel] will not sever me from my roots."

[16] Despite being borrowed directly from Arabic, "*Ahlan*" is perhaps the most common greeting one hears on the streets of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv among Hebrew-speaking Israelis. From the Arabic root word *ahl* ["family/kin"] and *sahal* ["smooth"], "*Ahlan wa Sahlan*" literally asks that you be among family and that your travels be light and easy.

“Born Here” Arabic Version

Situated along the fault lines of two competing nationalist discourses, DAM released a second version of “Born Here” entirely in Arabic. While the beats, soundtrack, and chorus are identical, in the Arabic version of “Born Here” the content of the lyrics differs considerably. If Nafar is especially critical of inherent structures of racism and discrimination in his Hebrew lyrics, the Arabic version assaults a very different socio-political issue internal to Palestinian society. Here, Nafar takes aim at Palestinian apathy, weakness, and vulnerability. He calls for Palestinians to rise up “in the ears of those who encroach upon us,” and demand justice. He strikes out against the Palestinian culture of martyrdom, which bemoans lost land “rowing through the tears,” but does little to effect political change. “I can understand all the tearful eyes, but I don’t understand those who don’t wipe their tears away.” He is embarrassed that political demonstrations for Palestinian rights in Israel are 90 percent Jewish, and that neighbors do little to help each other when bulldozers arrive. There is also a certain vulgarity in imagery and text in this Arabic version not seen in the Hebrew above. Speaking from within a purely Palestinian frame, Nafar doesn’t hesitate to attack nationalist taboo. He goes so far as to intimate that the reason Palestinians have been consistently abused is because, “we are the ones who are spreading our legs.” Rather than perpetuate the myth of the eternal victim, Nafar demands that Palestinians take some responsibility for their condition and the initiative to constructively work for its amelioration. Such statements reflect an interior voice of national shame and embarrassment in stark contrast to the idealist united front projected in the Hebrew version.

For us, destroying houses is just like a whisper,
As long as we remain silent in the ears of those who encroach upon us.
But if you scream NO!, you will drown it in a sea of justice.

Listen! I can understand all the tearful eyes,
But I don’t understand those who don’t wipe their tears.
Lost and asking for the land, rowing through his tears.

What is happening here? Why is everyone looking at us?

> Maybe because we are the ones who are spreading our legs [allowing ourselves to be abused]?
>
> Oh man, the last time there was a demonstration against destroying houses, there were 100 people, 90 of them Jews.
> If today you sit and watch as they evict your neighbor,
> Tomorrow they will come to your house, and your neighbor, like you, will sit, watching in your place.
>
> The list is long but it has an end of falling to the power.
> Power that is incapable of seeing, knowing, but scared.
> If terror is living inside us, it will not live in our children.
> What will we say to the weakest link in the chain? Good bye…

Mediating a relational dialogue between nationalist discourses, DAM clearly takes a transgressive position. Neither side of the "dual society model" accurately depicts their experiences as Palestinian-Israelis. Their anger, resistance, and demand for social change highlights the interstices of nationalist taboo and the performative means through which the boundaries *between* Palestinians and Israelis are actively constructed and maintained.

Conclusions: Popular Music, Politics, and Power

In seeking to explore the "relational" histories and identities of Palestinian-Israelis, a critical understanding of the processes of popular culture can be especially important. Through DAM's work, we see how popular media and performance structure social spaces where the social and political effects of ethnic dislocation are not only expressed, but are actively confronted and debated. These performative "texts" (songs, poems, paintings, dances, videos) demarcate the boundaries of a discursive field wherein ideas of self and other may be further engaged, resignified, and/or naturalized within or against the dominant order. It is within the performative interplay of the body and the nation-state that such resignification takes place. DAM's potential for meaningful social impact depends largely on their ability to express their message in Arabic, Hebrew, and English, drawing upon common vernacular phrases, slang, obscenities, and

references indigenous to each cultural frame. In this way, DAM articulates their often transgressive message from within the discursive boundaries of their targeted audience. Their cultural fluency in contrasting nationalist trajectories allows for a performative resignification of entrenched nationalist ideology. In refashioning popular conceptions of Palestinian suffering and seeking direct dialogue with the Israeli mainstream, DAM confounds nationalist dogma. Their usage of highly stylized Hebrew slang makes a play for the incorporation of Palestinians into the Israeli state imaginary. DAM's music reveals to Israeli Jews how their native language and cultural practices can be appropriated and resignified into an ideological weapon against ethnocratic hegemony. Articulated within the transnational frame of Hip-Hop, DAM mobilizes a well-known vocabulary of subaltern urban resistance in the service of Palestinian ethnic rights. Such a targeted appropriation of African-American racial discourse seeks to indexically link Palestinian efforts for recognition in Israel with larger cosmopolitan understandings of racial empowerment.

In the face of Palestinian nationalists, DAM speaks out against the prevailing discourse of martyrdom and the "righteous victim" endemic to nationalist media. Instead, they advocate for a redefinition of traditional Palestinian identity, inclusive of new forms of performance and media. Contrary to the established repertory of Palestinian resistance media, based largely on the folkloric preservation of indigenous music, dance, and other cultural practices, DAM articulates the fluidity of Palestinian identity in conversation with larger cosmopolitan frames. Through Hip-Hop, DAM draws from a distinctly African-American discourse of civil rights, promoting a spiritual connection between subaltern communities that transcends boundaries of the nation-state. Embedded in a shared urban experience of ethnic discrimination and resistance, Hip-Hop cultural practices and values are reconfigured so as to index a distinctly Palestinian condition in Israel.

Moreover, DAM reveals the relational histories of interaction and influence among Israeli citizens regardless of religious affiliation. Growing up in Israeli schools, speaking Hebrew, and living within an ethnically Jewish state, these young rappers best identify themselves as Israeli citizens. In style, dress, politics, and cultural practice they feel more similar to, and more at home

with, Israeli Jews than with Palestinians in the West Bank.[17] As DAM's visibility in the mainstream Israeli music scene increases, and as more and more Israeli Jewish, Christian, and Muslim rap fans flock to their performances, these young rappers bring to fore the historical, social, and cultural interconnections between Palestinians and Jews in Israel, and further contradict the mythologized nationalist histories of Jewish and Arab autonomy in the region. Their multi-ethnic performances constitute a unique social space where relational histories are embodied in the gestures of participants. Traditional lines of national affiliation may then dissolve within the "neutral space" Hip-Hop provides.

But perhaps most importantly, DAM offers the chance to hear a voice too often silenced in Israeli nationalist discourse. While Arabs now constitute over 20 percent of Israel's population, too often the voices of Israel's non-Jewish citizens go unheard and unnoticed in the national soundscape.[18] In moments of intense national dialogue and debate, it is particularly important to amplify subaltern voices in the realm of music, history, and culture. As millions commemorate the 60th anniversary of Israeli statehood *and* the Palestinian *naqba* [catastrophe], it is perhaps appropriate to recognize the wide panoply of voices for whom this event remains a dominant marker of self, nation, and other.

In the field of popular culture, and specifically in the work of artists such as DAM, we find a discursive space unencumbered by nationalist history and dogma. Within such a performative space, entrenched political binaries may be refashioned into unique moments of collaboration and relational listening. Popular culture, specifically African-American Hip-Hop, enables new social formations to coalesce and to dialogue within new associative frames of meaning, articulating an emerging transnational interconnectedness. Empowering this relational moment through performance reveals the limits of the nation-state discourse, and offers new lines of inquiry into processes of hegemony, politics, and power. What is more, such music challenges essentialist representations of Israeli identity, exposing a new front for interrogating ethnicity, nationalism, and transnationalism in the contemporary Israeli soundscape.

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[17] I make this assertion based on personal observations of the group interacting and performing in various locations throughout Israel and the West Bank. Informal conversations with DAM on the road often reiterated this ideational affiliation.

[18] Population data published in 2007 reveals that Palestinians now constitute 20.763 percent of Israeli society. See, for example, "Statistical Abstract of Israel." Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007 [http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/].