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Miranda L. Crowds

**Hip Hop in South Tel Aviv: Third-Space, Convergent
Dispossession(s), and Intercultural Communication in Urban
Borderlands**

PhD

**City University London
Department of Music
School of Arts and Social Sciences**

July 2016



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Declaration

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Hanover, Germany

July 2016

Abstract

This thesis critically examines the transformative function and the limitations of cross-cultural elements in current musical practices in Israel, specifically, in Hip Hop practices in the urban context of the diverse neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv. This study explores locales on border-areas of the urban space, investigating precisely how Hip Hop practitioners and their audiences negotiate identity, politics, and cross-cultural communication in an urban zone, which, even while it enables unprecedented intercultural encounters, is characterized by an overarching international conflict. Specific examples have been explored to illustrate how the diverse performers and audience members consciously embody the paradox of political disparity and co-existence through their eclectic musical idiom and through the social aspects of the music-making process and public performance.

My investigation shows how intercultural elements are negotiated in Hip Hop performances in contemporary Israeli urban space. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I propose and apply several theoretical frames of analysis. This multi-faceted framework allows the illustration of the complexity of the way in which the musical experience negotiates boundaries of identity and belonging. Amongst the theoretical frameworks are Homi Bhabha's concept of third-space (1990) and Maurice Halbwach's notion of local 'collective memory' (1941). My research locates the scope of investigation in a broad, abstract, transnational arena, and also in an analysis of the specific range of identities affected and potentially transformed by musical collaboration in a concrete and specific urban setting. The broad focus highlights how the Hip Hop groups under investigation operate and are regarded globally; the narrow scope enables an analysis of how, in the context of ethnic conflict and co-existence in contemporary Israel, identity construction and negotiation is experienced in different ways by the individuals physically co-existing in shared urban space.

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Part I: Broad Influences, Critical Issues:

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Objectives:

This research examines expressions of identity and intercultural exchanges in the musical practices of Hip Hop performers in Israel.¹ Specifically, it focuses on Hip Hop artists operating in the ‘borderlands’ of South Tel Aviv. By ‘borderlands’ I refer to Saada-Ophir’s concept describing a fluid, musical process of intercultural exchange: ‘[c]ontrary to earlier discourse that located the border in a specific place fixed boundary, this new perspective presents the borderland as an evasive space of interwoven entities, emerging through ongoing negotiations’ (Saada-Ophir 2006, 206). This concept of ‘borderlands’ is explored throughout this thesis in a variety of ways in the context of urban Hip Hop. The borderlands investigated here are literal, symbolic, and exegetical spaces that have emerged from dialectal perceptions of Tel Aviv as a modern, secular, Jewish city and Jaffa as a city with a proud Palestinian past.² This binary juxtaposition has created ‘in-between space’ in the urban experience, ‘a contested breeding ground for urban meaning-making, political activism, and resistance to Israeli domination’ (Montresecu 2009, 648). The various ‘borderlands’ explored here include areas other than just physical spaces on the Tel Aviv/Jaffa divide. Borderlands between neighbourhoods, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, and liminal performance spaces have also received particular attention.

This examination of intercultural negotiations in recent grassroots Hip Hop musical initiatives in South Tel Aviv is grounded in the discipline of Urban Ethnomusicology, which explores the complex relationship between urban space, artistic production, and performance. It also is grounded in the emergent field of Music and Conflict that explores the social and psychological impact of various types of conflict on musical performance and dissemination.³

¹ In this research, I use the term ‘Hip Hop’ to refer to a musical-cultural phenomenon that includes musical performance as well as fashion, locale, art, and lifestyle choices. I draw on Monica R. Miller’s definition of Hip Hop culture as having four components: ‘Mc’ing (the lyrical wing including beat-boxing and rapping), DJing, Graffiti production, and dance (historically breakdance)’ (2013, 4). I use the term ‘rap’ to refer to the lyrics and delivery of the lyrics.

² The latter modality is romanticized, the symbolic oriental, folkloristic characteristics of Jaffa contrasting with its social, economic, and demographic realities.

³ Here, I understand ‘conflict’ as referring to both large-scale and small-scale conflicts (see my description in the literature review).

This research addresses how Hip Hop artists in Israel negotiate the distinctive neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv to negotiate intercultural exchanges related to the music-making process. The geo-spatial focus of this research is from approximately Jabotinsky Street southwards, including the areas/neighbourhoods of Florentine, Neve Shaanan, and Bat Yam (see Appendix for a map of the areas of South Tel Aviv investigated in this research).⁴

The main objective of my thesis is to critically examine the transformative function and limitations of cross-cultural elements in musical practices in South Tel Aviv, specifically grassroots Hip Hop performance in this contemporary urban context. The particular focus on Hip Hop in this research was prompted by its contemporary identity as both a music genre and a political/social movement. Increasingly the moniker ‘Hip Hop’ is used as a metonymic designation for a plethora of different musical styles and genres, as well as for social and political movements. Hip Hop has been investigated as a metonym for battling national identities and subcultures, as well as a catalyst for intra-and extra-communal negotiations of identity and politics. More broadly, my thesis contextualizes the music studied in the local and global influences and movements in which it operates. This requires an investigation of the practitioners themselves, their political ideologies, the living communities within which they operate, and the people who encounter these practitioners in performance, rehearsal, and everyday encounter.

While this research addresses many questions, my primary research question is: how do the Hip Hop practices investigated here negotiate identity, politics, and cross-cultural communication in an urban zone that is characterized by an overarching international conflict? In answering the question, I utilize theoretical frameworks such as Homi Bhabha’s third-space (1991), Saada-Ophir’s notion of musical ‘borderlands’ (2005) and Yiftachel’s notion of ‘grey zones’ (2009), amongst others, to describe both literal and symbolic liminal musical performance spaces. In answering the main research question, I refine prevalent scholarly approaches to Hip Hop in Israel, which understand it primarily as an expression of subcultural resistance against the ‘dominant’ Ashkenazi-Jewish culture (e.g. Ben Elizier 2004; Egeiq 2010; MacDonald 2009, 2013, 2014; Massad 2005; Safieh 2013; Shabtay 2001). Instead, I interpret the efforts of Hip Hop artists in this particular urban milieu in Israel as

⁴ While Jaffa is a neighbourhood of South Tel Aviv, its symbolism and iconic impact on musicians has been investigated rather than its physical locations. This is due to Jaffa locations requiring special attention beyond the focus of this research.

involving a balancing act between local norms and expectations and transnational politics, both in their music products and self-representation (e.g. Stein and Swedenburg 2004, Dorchin 2012, 2013). Another one of my primary research goals is to bring to light the ‘real time’ complex individual experiences, that is, the needs and motivations of the diverse musicians examined here. Thus, I hope to add significantly to contemporary academic discussions of music in Israel and to contribute to literature on the region in general.

1.2 Adding to Current Scholarship

This research augments contemporary ethnomusicological research; to date, there is almost no literature on some of the groups or the individual musicians studied here.⁵ Moreover, hitherto studies of Israeli music have tended to use ethnic identity as the primary frame for analysis, showing how music represents competing national identities in the contemporary nation-state (Regev and Seroussi 2004; in the context of Hip Hop: Ben Ami 2006, Korat 2007, Orr 2011). In the context of music in Israel and intercultural encounter, recent scholarship has traditionally emphasized transnational power-relations, using the Arab-Israeli conflict as a frame to understand the encounter (e.g. Brinner 1999). However, following my fieldwork in South Tel Aviv, it became apparent that understanding the dynamics of Hip Hop performances in Israel required new frames of analysis to elucidate the complexities of identity and multiple power-relations embedded in Hip Hop practices. Therefore, my focus emphasizes Abu Lughod’s ‘anthropology of the particular’ in which cultural production is fluid, often involving pragmatic individual responses to specific circumstances rather than general prescribed behaviours (1991). As such, my research is as much concerned with the music performed and received by various actors in South Tel Aviv, as with the social encounters and events that accompany it, that do not always involve ‘making music’ per se. Overall, there are two main ways in which this research augments current scholarship on Hip Hop in Israel:

⁵ To my knowledge, the Russian break-dancers of South Tel Aviv have yet to be investigated in academic research and the band System Ali has not been examined extensively. To date, one article (Belkind 2013), and one doctoral thesis (Belkind 2014), include some material on the band System Ali.

1.) This research aims to refine the notion of Hip Hop as subcultural resistance to hegemonic systems of power.

To do so, I borrow the notion of ‘subculture’ from the Birmingham school, introduced by Dick Hebdige in *The Meaning of Style* (1979). Hebdige’s pivotal examination of youth subcultures built on his mentor Stuart Hall’s understanding of the positionality of subcultural subjects. Hebdige analyses the social fabric of society as being composed of dominant power structures and disempowered groups who struggle against them. While he focuses specifically on British post-World War II youth subcultures, his work can be used as a blueprint for an understanding of subcultures in general. Hebdige argues that all subcultures initially form through the common goal of resistance and that subcultures are generally perceived as undesirable by the greater, normative society (‘hegemony’). According to Hebdige, subcultures become powerful as a result of their rejection by hegemonic power structures. This power diminishes as the subculture’s practices (music, fashions, etc.) become commodified (1979).

Hebdige’s view of the relationship between subculture and hegemony and the subversive implications of style has arguably informed much of scholarship on Hip Hop. Hebdige has argued that a subculture is defined by its relationship to the greater society or by its self-definition as a subculture. True to the latter definition, Hip Hop artists in Israel-Palestine tend to identify themselves as ‘resisting’ ‘hegemonic’ institutions and/or leaderships on various levels (urban, national, global, and other). McDonald has aptly critiqued this categorizational tendency in the context of Palestinian identity:

Over time collectively understood notions of resistance become sedimented into daily practice. They become commonsensical, unquestioned, even cliché. In the hands of political operatives arguing for territorial recognition and a primordial relationship to the land, “resistance” becomes part of a larger discourse of emancipatory politics that overdetermines meanings, obfuscates the local, and presents several challenges to understanding power dynamics. This emancipatory politics can be read in the pages of scholarly books and journals as well as on the graffiti-covered walls of Jenin. In each of these contexts “resistance,” as it is casually employed, presumes an essentialized Palestinian identity, sacrificing local experience for an accommodation of difference. It becomes a discursive tool for building perceptual solidarity around a common cause by strategically essentializing a diverse field of history and experience (McDonald, Epilogue, 2013).

Here, McDonald considers that essentialized ways of understanding subculture, community and resistance have become normalized in the quotidian lives of individuals. According to McDonald, these perceptions pose a challenge for the ethnographer as they diminish the ethnographer's ability to decipher the nuances of local dynamics. Despite this challenge, recent academic scholarship on Hip Hop in Israel has resulted in interesting, often nuanced, discussions about how individuals of various religious/ethnic backgrounds negotiate their complex identities in relation to, and often in opposition to, the status quo. However, perhaps an overemphasis on certain kinds of subcultural resistance over others places practitioners into binary categories: oppressor/oppressed, Israeli/Palestinian etc. Such binary categorizations does not always adequately account for the negotiation of different systems of power with which the artists must contend. For instance, many of the artists that I interviewed articulated that their music was resistance against what they perceived to be the status quo. Yet, practitioners' understanding of the status quo was something that varied from group to group and even varied among different performers or audience members within a group. In some instances, the emphasis on 'resistance' was prompted by ethnic discrimination. In other cases, it was a response to the Pro-Palestinian anti-normalization discourse discussed in Chapter 2, which considers any musical initiative that does not directly constitute 'resistance' to 'Israel' a performative 'normalization' that should be avoided. Overall, the Hip Hop artists dealt with hegemonic structures on multiple levels. For instance, some opposed Israeli government policies that they considered to be unjust; others were constrained by the anti-normalization discourse that would censor their music if it did not conform to certain political directives.

McDonald is not the only scholar to point out the potential critical and ethical problems created by an over-emphasis on music as subcultural resistance. In the context of Palestinian music in general, El-Ghadban and Strohm point out the leveling effect created by this emphasis:

[A]rtists are all seen as a collective that is acting in a sort of choir of postcolonial critique, but not as individuals. In this case the discourse on art as resistance is paradoxically turned into a commodity, where artists who do not fit neatly into that frame, either aesthetically or politically, tend to be ignored (El-Ghadban and Strohm 2013, 191-192)

Similarly, Abu-Lughod's observes that the desire to locate resistance in cultural production has resulted in insufficiently detailed, critically simplistic analyses:

Despite the considerable theoretical sophistication of many studies of resistance and their contribution to the widening definition of the political, it seems to me that because they are ultimately more concerned with finding resisters and explaining resistance than with examining power, they do not explore as fully as they might the implications of the forms of resistance they locate (Abu-Lughod 1990, 41)⁶

As a case in point, Moslih Kanaaneh argues that studies of Palestinian music require unique musicological approaches because ‘while the rest of the world has moved to the postcolonial condition, Palestinians are still stuck in the colonial condition and seemingly have a long way to go in struggling for survival...and national independence’ (Kanaaneh 2013, 2).

Kanaaneh’s claim of Palestinian uniqueness is rather uncritically ethnocentric. Indeed, many of the communities interacting in the Levant discussed here can be said to exist under colonial conditions (for instance, the Bedouin communities). Fortunately El-Ghadban and Strohm qualify Kanaaneh’s reductionist generalization, also describing the levelling effect of such scholarship:

[A] trend supported by international activist groups frames Palestinian art and music as part of a globalized resistance movement, whereby the struggle of Palestinian musicians and artists is inserted within the larger postcolonial struggle of indigenous peoples for their autonomy. The risk here is that the long and rich histories of different peoples and nations are reduced to one traumatic experience – the colonial experience (El-Ghadban and Strohm 2013, 191)

Strohm and El-Ghadban’s critique is significant. They argue that the tendency to universalize the post-colonial struggle has resulted in an overwhelming focus on music that engages generally with post-colonial resistance.

⁶ This quotation concerns Abu Lughod’s anthropological research with Bedouin communities in Egypt. Significantly, while her approach relating to Bedouin communities advocates complex analyses of different forms of power, her introduction on Palestinian minorities in Israel (in Kanaaneh 2010) describes their complicated situation almost solely in terms of subcultural resistance.

2.) This investigation of Hip Hop aims to investigate multiple forms of identity at play, including intra-Jewish and intra-Palestinian ‘otherness’ in music production and performance.

Research on Hip Hop in Israel has tended to focus on musicians who either a.) promote some form of nationalism or b.) enact resistance in reference to Israeli government policies c.) promote non-Jewish minority rights.⁷ Some scholarship, such as Nili Belkind’s recent research, has engaged in a sophisticated analysis of Hip Hop in the region based on the Israeli-Palestinian transnational conflict:

Ethical and aesthetic positions that shape contemporary artistic production in Israel-Palestine are informed by profound imbalances of power between the State (Israel), the stateless (Palestinians of the occupied Palestinian territories), the complex position of Israel’s Palestinian minority, and contingent experience to ongoing political violence (Belkind 2014, Abstract)

While Belkind’s description of power imbalances cannot be disputed, the methodological result of confining one’s ethnomusicological analysis to this binary divide results in highlighting the Israeli-Palestinian power dynamics while potentially under-emphasizing the experiences of other players involved in artistic production. The merit in such a focus lies in its ability to raise awareness and legitimize the Palestinian counter-claim to traditional Zionist narratives of land-ownership, while illuminating power-differentials in the region.⁸ However, arguably, the focus on the conflict between ‘Israelis’ and ‘Palestinians’ has resulted in essentialized terms of land-ownership characterizing the musical performers. In fact, the terms ‘colonialist’ or ‘indigenous’, when reflected by actual, individual musicians and musical performances are fluid and malleable. Moreover, sometimes identities are deliberately adopted or negated in the lived musical experience for pragmatic or artistic purposes.

To untangle some of the complexities, this research adopts a focussed approach, highlighting the complex manifestations of identity that emerge in the social and musical practices of

⁷ This scholarship is discussed in more depth in the literature review and in Chapter 3.

⁸ Indeed, Furani and Rabinowitz have discussed a growing tendency to focus on Palestine’s/Palestinians’ as a topic of ethnographic research. They explain this phenomenon as being due to anthropologists’ growing interest in counter-claims to prevalent nationalist discourses (2011).

diverse individuals. My thesis re-locates the scope of research from a broad, abstract, transnational arena to an analysis of the specific range of identities affected and potentially transformed by Hip Hop performance in a specific urban setting. I engage with a broad array of transnational identities, including Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian identities. However, I also follow Stein and Swedenburg in moving beyond an investigation of nationalist formations of identity to consider:

[...] how gender, religion, ethnoracial identity, or (in the case of Israel) country of origin, crosscut nations and nationalisms in ways that further destabilize the convention of the Palestinian-Arab/Jew divide (Stein and Swedenburg 1994, 10)

The relational scope described above enables a detailed analysis of how, in the context of ethnic conflict and power-differentials in contemporary Israel, individuals experience intercultural encounters that are prompted by musical practices.⁹

My research echoes McDonald's view that, notwithstanding incompatible and even inimical politics, music-making in this socio-political space has a relational dimension. McDonald considers historical accounts to have separated Israeli/Palestinian narratives into a dual society model, constituting 'unconflicted cultural formations, developing and maturing along separate and distinct historical trajectories' (McDonald 2009, 119). By contrast, Hip Hop in Israel/Palestine emerged, not as separate trajectories of experience, but from a relational exchange, part of an intercultural exchange and tension. McDonald considers this process to be:

[I]llustrative of what Perry Anderson has termed a "relational history" of interaction and contact in Israel/Palestine... 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" (McDonald 2009, 119)

McDonald describes the need to consider relational elements, exchange, interaction and interdependence, in the broader context of Israeli and Palestinian history. However, while this

⁹ The individuals investigated here hail from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and include: Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, Jewish-Israelis (Ashkenazim), Jewish-Israelis (Mizrahim, also known as 'Arab' Jews), Ethiopian Jews, migrant communities from the South Sudan, Ghana, and Eritrea, 'worker' Filipino communities, and Jewish and non-Jewish migrants from the former Soviet Union.

‘relational model’ is useful to uncover the nuances of Palestinian music and/or musical collaborations, it is not always an adequate frame of analysis for the urban focus of this research. For this reason, I have drawn on several additional theoretical frames.

1.3 Theoretical Frameworks:

The theoretical frameworks utilized in this research have been employed as optimal frames to engage the fieldwork in order to highlight the complexity of the intercultural encounter in Hip Hop practices in South Tel Aviv. These theoretical frameworks are discussed below.

a.) Urban Third-Space

The ‘transient’ nature of the neighbourhoods in South Tel Aviv has not to date been explored in relation to the subject of Hip Hop production. Musical encounters occurring within third-space venues can arguably be viewed as the physical embodiment of Homi Bhabha’s extension of Walter Benjamin’s concept of third-space. These spaces can be understood as in-between environments constituting liminal temporal moments and spatial movements, as well as liminal ideological displays. I argue that, in concrete terms, performance in such spaces is worth investigating for its potential in stimulating intercultural encounters between individuals from a variety of identities and socio-political affiliations.

Golan discusses third-space from an urban development perspective, specifically in relation to Tel Aviv-Yafo (2012). Building on Golan’s observations, in the context of South Tel Aviv, the prevalent dialectics in the historical development of urban space is the physical/ideological binary dividing Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and hence, Jewish and Arab populations. I argue that this binary division has resulted in the creation of liminal spaces for performance venues. The dialogical historical relationship between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, which has undergone historical processes of change over the past 80 years (industrialization, post-industrialization, post-Fordism, re-vitalization, and gentrification), is directly related to its current liminal status. This status allows it to be exploited as a third-space by musicians, activists, and other residents of the greater urban space.

b.) Collective Memory

As I conducted my fieldwork, I became aware of the importance of collective memory in constructing musical and local identities. Collective memory, collective dispossession in particular, was evoked to stimulate group cohesion. My theoretical understanding of local, collective memory is informed by Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), the original formulator of the concept, specifically his work *La Memoire Collective* ([1941] 1992). While his work is over 60 years old, Halbwach's theoretical idea of collective memory was revived in the 1980s by British social historian Paul Connerton (1989) and more recently has informed scholarship in many disciplines, most particularly in Urban Studies in research that explores the link between urban landscapes and communal memory (Rodger and Herbert 2007; Jones 2011). In the context of Israel, Halbwachs has been drawn upon to elucidate the role of local, collective memory in commemorative activities (Weiss 1997; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, Azaryahu 2008) or urban violence (Bar Tal 2003). In my view, Halbwachs has yet to be applied and developed in academic scholarship in ethnomusicology. Specifically, I am applying Halbwach's understanding of the way in which collective memory is constructed by physical locations (e.g. buildings and objects) and every day local encounter plays out in Hip Hop production in South Tel Aviv.¹⁰ For Halbwachs, collective memory must be transmitted on the local level of real communities: neighbourhood, village, or city. It cannot be transmitted on the national level, since the idea of a nation transcends local connectivity. It was precisely loyalty to the local, urban community, as opposed to national identification, that often enabled intercultural interactions at Hip Hop performances. Local non-musicians as well as the musical groups that I researched articulated these narratives of collective memory. The transcendent experiences of collective dispossession formed the bedrock of many initiatives in the urban space, including those focusing on collective mourning. The common experience of past dispossession often created empathy that united both the band members and their audiences and other city-residents.

¹⁰ Kay Kaufman Shelemay uses Halbwachs in her research on songs and remembrance among Jews of the Syrian diaspora (1998). However, Shelemay's focus is not on the urban space itself, but rather on how collective music-making connects individual and communal memory.

c.) Intertextuality

‘Intertextuality’ is a polyvalent term with roots in Julia Kristeva’s poststructuralist theory. Here, I simply refer to a process of musical composition and performance that involves the insertion of other music/genres that invite the listeners to respond to the political dialogue caused by the inclusion. References to other music are often incorporated into the music and lyrics accompanying social protest, and particularly so in Israel. Indeed, both my fieldwork and the analysis of the music and lyrics found that Hip Hop practitioners explicitly quote other music and transform pre-existing music. They often use these techniques to generate social and political commentary. Intertextuality is one of the principal ways in which Hip Hop practitioners a.) created continuity with other music (and by extension other people) b.) communicated socio-political critique.

d.) Intercultural Communication

It can be useful to consider the negotiations of the practitioners investigated in this research through a theoretical understanding of culture as shared, diverse knowledge and expertise. This view is based on the concept of dialectical hermeneutics (Gadamer 2004, Ricoeur 1996). This concept is the philosophical view that individuals and/or communities construct their world through a process of cumulative interactive interpretation of diverse ‘texts’ (written, oral, artistic) that direct and filter both perception of and communication with others. Gadamer describes this interaction as the result of a ‘fusion of horizons’, a human aspiration for an interpretative understanding of ‘the other’, not a utopian, transcendent encounter, but part of an ever-changing process of partial, overlapping understanding (Lawn 2006, 66). Vertovec’s notion of ‘superdiversity’ has been useful for highlighting the interaction of identity variables such as nationality, language, and migration (2007). Vertovec’s term is an interpretative post-colonial theoretical frame designed to highlight the complexity of the intercultural encounter. Research assuming these theoretical frames will highlight the significance of dialogue on both individual and communal levels for engaging the necessary role of ‘the other’ in both self-identification and inter-community engagement, a process that includes the researcher him/herself, his/her identity as well as his/her dialectical relationship with the participants.

Four main topics of discussion are developed using the primary theoretical frameworks to analyse Hip Hop practices in South Tel Aviv. While I utilize different theoretical frameworks to approach different ideas, these all relate to the main research question. The main arguments that are developed throughout this thesis oscillate between two broad categories that relate to music and intercultural communication in the urban area under focus: 1.) Identity, conflict, and complexities of power and 2.) The relationship of music to urban space. In the latter category, the transformative function of urban musical production and its impact on individual, intercultural, and collective identity negotiation will be explored on two levels: (a) in the specific, local, urban context of South Tel Aviv and its idiosyncratic, multi-ethnic demography; (b) in the broader, more abstract context of the contemporary Middle East and Western involvement in the Palestinian ‘problem’ in the State of Israel and/or the ‘problem’ of Israel to the Palestinian and greater Arab leadership/s.¹¹

Identity, Conflict, and Complexities of Power

By examining the complex distribution of power, musical performance will be analysed as an embodiment of liminal identities. Scholarship has often considered the negotiation of identity within Israel/Palestine’s contested borders in order to understand the prevalent power structures and systems of oppression influencing musical artists. It focuses on how music both represents and empowers minority groups, most significantly the Arab Palestinians, oppressed by ethnic and political conflict in the State of Israel. This work most often generalizes the oppression and transformation on a broad, abstract, global level, by conceptualizing them as abstract issues of transnational identity: what does it mean to be an ‘Arab’ in the contemporary State of Israel, by extension, in the contemporary West?¹² Some researchers have suggested that this focus omits an investigation of other dispossessed communities inhabiting shared space. For instance, Smadar Lavie argues that a discussion of lower class Mizrahi communities is often avoided due to the transnational fixation of academic work or engagements with Israel-Palestine authored by Ashkenazi, western,

¹¹ I am aware that a simplistic local/national separation is problematic. Indeed, sources have critiqued the simple division of music industry into local or global categories (Leyshon, et al. 1998, Lovering 1996). Such categorizations are misleading because they imply that the categories are distinct. Therefore, this work often focuses on how the local informs the transnational and vice-versa.

¹² Such endeavours seldom explore what it means to be a ‘Jew’ in the Middle East outside the microcosm of Israel’s contested borders. These reflections, I argue, are crucial for a rigorous and critical perspective, music-focussed or otherwise.

Palestinian and Arab intellectual/activist elites (Lavie 2011).¹³ Following Lavie and others (e.g. Sa'ar 2006), I argue that one must look beyond (or within) this geo-spatial scope to include the motivations behind performances at different levels (neighbourhood, municipality, Levant, etc.). Indeed, Hip Hop production is informed by many different levels of belonging that performers and audiences use to construct identity and self-representation.

The socio-political nuances evident in the music of the groups under consideration challenge simplistic notions of subcultural resistance and highlight the nuanced differences between demographically diverse communities that are often subsumed by predominant ideological transnational binary dichotomies of Arab/Jew and/or Palestine/Israel.¹⁴ Even focusing on ethnicity alone, such communities are diverse including Palestinian citizens of Israel,¹⁵ Bedouins, Sudanese and Eritrean migrant communities and other population groups with liminal identities. In this thesis, I approach the concept of identity from a social constructionist perspective that understands identity formation as an individual or group's self-understanding, as well as one's changing self-image based on interactions with others as part of a social group (Burland and Magee 2014). Thus, the diverse social and ethnic identities of the group members and their own home neighbourhoods, as well as those of the audiences, are of critical significance.

Relationship of the Music to Urban Space

The particular history of South Tel Aviv has resulted in a flexible third-space (Bhabha 1991), which, I argue, permits subcultural musical performances. I follow Krim's view that the current emphasis on urban space as 'discursive' has resulted in the neglect of the impact of real space, and of considering the effect that its natural/geographical/historical physical structures have on resident populations (Krim, 2007, 29). It can be argued that the city-space itself has a direct impact on the music produced therein and vice-versa. Indeed, there is a

¹³ Lavie argues this in the context of the suppression of Mizrahi feminism primarily by Ashkenazi Jews residing in the diaspora, but also by 'elites' in Ramallah.

¹⁴ These are not the only ways in which scholars have understood divisions in the Israeli population. For example, Ella Shohat (1989) and Smadar Lavie (1996) dichotomize the Israeli population along class, rather than religious, lines referring to 'First World' and 'Third World' populations. The former are the 'Ashkenazim', a 'Eurocentric' demographic minority and the latter group encompasses Mizrahim (Jews indigenous to the Middle East, Palestinian-Israelis, and others). Shohat and Lavie's division can be viewed as controversial in that it rejects the traditional Jewish/Arab dichotomy.

¹⁵ For the purposes of this research, I will hitherto refer to Palestinians with Israeli citizenship as 'Palestinian-Israelis'. However, many members of this community might identify as 'Palestinian', '48 Palestinian', or even as 'Arab-Israeli'.

direct link between the interethnic qualities of musical production and performance and the eclectic urban space of South Tel Aviv, including Neve Shaanan, which encompasses the New Central Bus Station. The vision of the South Tel Aviv area as a transient, 'enabling' space, in which contemporary musicians operate, is a direct continuation of its early urban development as a suburb for a 'heterogeneous' population. This vision is also related to Tel Aviv's complicated historical and social relationship with Palestinian Jaffa since its development as a suburb of Jaffa in 1909. Its use as a transient space has remained consistent throughout the years: following the Second Intifada (2001), the arrival of a significant refugee population with an undecided civil status, primarily from war-ravaged countries such as the South Sudan, Ghana and Eritrea. Their arrival reinforced the identity of this urban area as a liminal space, thus permitting interactions between populations with divergent civil statuses, religions, ethnicities, and nation affiliations.¹⁶ The urban coexistence of diverse populations has resulted in a convergence of different historical collective experiences of trauma which, I argue, often functions as an adhesive for diverse individuals on a grassroots level. The transience of the urban space is heightened by the fact that the use of space and resources has been the cause of considerable debate between the national and municipal government. This complex relationship and its role in enabling 'non-traditional' musical production, will also be considered in this research.

1.4 Locales in Context: South Tel Aviv and Its Neighbourhoods:

Intended as a homeland for the Jewish people since its inception, Israel is actually home to many demographic groups whose existence there might challenge simplistic Zionist narratives. In addition to being home to individuals of Jewish Ashkenazi and Mizrahi extraction, Israel is also home to one and a half million Arab Israelis (this includes Palestinian citizens of Israel, Bedouin and Druze communities), 150,000 individuals of Ethiopian extraction (who are not considered authentically Jewish by some religious authorities in Israel). The area of South Tel Aviv, in particular, is home to approximately 300,000 migrants of various origins, from South East Asia and Western Africa. Kemp and Rajman argue that the early 2000s saw a pro-migrant stance among Israelis (2004), possibly a response to the need for a workforce for manual labour to replace Palestinian workers who could no longer enter the country because of restrictions imposed following the Second

¹⁶ The area of Neve Shaanan in particular was previously home to recent non-Jewish immigrants from Russia. The majority of members of this community has moved away as a result of social mobility (Hatuka 2010).

Intifada. This pro-migrant stance soon dwindled resulting in ‘increasing pressure on transmigrant communities, circumscribing socio-economic activities and resulting in increased detentions and deportations’ (Hankins 2013, 284). Thus, the area investigated in this research is an urban space, which, even as it is home to diverse populations, is also a space of tension and sharply divided communities.

While this research focuses on third-space and intercultural encounters in South Tel Aviv, it views Tel Aviv at large as ‘a demographically diverse urban centre in which the weight of ethnicity, identity, and nationality bears upon the structure of everyday life’ (Hankins 2013, 283). Like many urban spaces, Tel Aviv-Yafo is characterized by both diversity and segregation in its resident population. Geographically, the city and its suburbs have a definitive geospatial border all along the Western side, the Mediterranean Sea. The city spans approximately fifteen kilometres north-to-south (if one includes the neighbourhood of Bat Yam). The city spans approximately eight kilometres from East to West (if one includes the neighbouring suburb of Ramat Gan).¹⁷

Dubbed ‘the city that never sleeps’, Tel Aviv is considered a place inhabited primarily by young, carefree people. ‘Habuah’ (‘The Bubble’) is a nickname for Tel Aviv reflecting how many of its residents are perceived to live relatively ‘free’ lifestyles, isolating themselves from the systems of oppression around them: ‘Tel Avivians are described as navel gazers, draft dodgers and leftists who spend all their time sitting in cafes, sipping espressos, apathetic or indifferent to what goes on in the rest of the country’ (Goldman 2009). The city is often perceived in dialectical contrast to Jerusalem, which is perceived as religious, conservative, and tense while Tel Aviv-Yafo is perceived as secular, liberal, and free (Ram 2008).

My focus on South Tel Aviv is a natural one, as described in the following citation, which neatly summarizes the division between north and south Tel Aviv, as well as the significance of Jaffa (also cited in Monterescu 2009):

¹⁷ Some consider Ramat Gan and Bat Yam to be separate towns, while others consider them part of greater Tel Aviv-Yafo.

By many indices, Tel Aviv really is two cities. The north and center correspond to the myth [traditional Zionist mythologies], while south Tel Aviv is more like a development town out in the hinterland. The north is predominantly Ashkenazi, middle class, politically liberal, and secular. South Tel Aviv is the demographic antithesis of the north. It is dominated by poor and working class Mizrahim, politically right-wing and traditionally religious. Beyond the southside, but really in a class by itself within Tel Aviv, is Jaffa. Located along the coast immediately south of Tel Aviv proper, Jaffa has some 60,000 residents, about a third of them Arabs. It is the only place in Tel Aviv where Arabs live, except for a sprinkling here and there. In parts of the area, especially in the Ajami quarter, Arabs and Jews live next to each other, and for this reason Jaffa has gained the reputation as an example of coexistence. But again, reality is somewhat different from the image. (www.us-israel.org)

As described above, on the one hand, there is a noticeable division between north and south Tel Aviv. On the other hand, even within South Tel Aviv, there are distinct and diverse neighbourhoods, arguably including Jaffa. It should be noted that defining the neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv has been somewhat of an interpretative act since these spaces are not clearly delineated and are often contested by the different populations that reside inside and outside of them.

1.5 The Significance of Jaffa

It should be noted that locations in Jaffa itself have not been analysed in this thesis, other than the area I dub, the ‘Old Jaffa Plateau’, which borders the beach and the Ottoman sea-wall. Yet, the symbolic significance of Jaffa in Hip Hop artists’ negotiations of identity is crucial; this is largely because of its historical, dialectical relationship with Tel Aviv. Oral and written sources indicate that Jaffa was founded in Antiquity as a port-city: sources indicate human settlement in that area as far back as 7500 BCE (Mann 2006, 193; Kark 1990, 8). Throughout the centuries, Jaffa was inhabited by Christians (many of whom were pilgrims), Muslims, and a small Jewish community. From the nineteenth-century onwards, Jaffa has been characterized as an area of ‘social and cultural heterogeneity, a mix heightened by the annual arrival of pilgrims and other visitors from within Palestine and abroad’ (Mann 2006, 193). There had been a small Jewish community residing in Jaffa in contrast to the larger Muslim and sizeable Christian community from approximately the 1840s. From 1887 onwards, new Jewish areas such as Neve Tsedek and Neve Shalom were established North East of Jaffa. In the 1880s, the large-scale Jewish immigration began that would lead to the establishment of

the municipality of Tel Aviv in 1909, an area that hitherto had been one of several small Jewish suburbs. Mark Levine considers that the Jaffa prior to the British Mandate period (1917-1948) was a cosmopolitan hub transcending ‘political, cultural, and economical hegemony’ of the Ottoman state (Levine 2007: 173). Thus, Jaffa functioned as a ‘Levantine third space’ ‘in which incommensurable subcultures were, for a time, spatially reconciled’ (Levine 2007: 173). This pre-existing cosmopolitanism, Levine argues, facilitated the establishment of the Jewish suburb of Tel Aviv and its growth as a modern, Zionist city.

In part, the liminality of South Tel Aviv is a product of the changing relationship between the ‘new’ city of Tel Aviv and the ‘old’ city of Jaffa: ‘Perceived as a place of exotic danger, an orientalised space against which Tel Aviv defined itself as modern, Hebrew, and secular, Jaffa would ultimately prove to be Tel Aviv’s most problematic, and most productive, binary’ (Mann 2006, 193). Written accounts or depictions of Jaffa by early Jewish immigrants exemplify the notion of constructing identity through dialectical hermeneutics, construction of the self through both construction and distance from ‘the other’ (e.g. Gadamer 1970):

Early twentieth-century accounts of the city by Jewish immigrants focus on three main themes: Jaffa as the wondrous initial point of contact with the Holy Land; Jaffa as a jolting piece of an exotic and terrifying “East”; and Jaffa as a city with biblical and mythical origins (Mann 2006, 194).

According to Mann, these contradictory representations, prevalent in written accounts and city archives, resulted in a discourse of ‘Jaffa as Janus’. This image is exemplified in modern Israeli music recounting the arrival of refugees to Jaffa’s port.¹⁸ Jaffa was, practically speaking, a third-space between the new arrivals and the Arab community, an initial ‘point of contact’. Early refugee arrivals describe their (Euro-centric) surprise at seeing Arab labourers in the port ‘like pirates’ in strange attire (Mann 2006, 195). The Jaffa riots of 1921, attacks against Jews by the Arab population instigated by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, brought a new dimension to the Tel Aviv-Yafo relationship, one of inter-community violence. A new image of Jaffa emerged based on its transformation as a site of potential violence, ‘*Yafo ir damim*’, ‘Jaffa, city of blood’. Most recently, identification with Jaffa has acquired a contemporary, symbolic significance as marker of cross-cultural

¹⁸ Yehuda Poliker’s ‘A Window Overlooking the Mediterranean’ (1988) is a good example of such a song. In fact, the trope of the window on the Mediterranean is a common one in early Zionist literature both during and after the *Yishuv* (pre-1948) period.

communication, particularly ‘Jewish-Arab cooperation’ (Sa’ar 2006). Thus, Jaffa’s literal and symbolic historical significance is crucial when considering urban third-space in South Tel Aviv.

1.6 Positionality

As with any research, particularly research based on ethnographic fieldwork, the analysis and results are driven and constructed, to some extent, by the researcher’s identity. Bob E. White and others have maintained that the ethnographic encounter must by definition be intersubjective (2012). Moreover, ethnomusicological scholarship has systematically challenged the role of the ethnomusicologist as a ‘neutral observer’ (e.g. Nettl 2005 [1983]; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995), necessitating a consideration of the positionality of the researcher. This consideration also extends to practices undertaken in the field. Sunstein and Chriseri-Strater comment on the impact of the researcher’s identity in the important process of fieldnote-taking:

No longer are fieldnotes considered a mirror, or direct reflection of the researcher’s experience; rather, a researcher’s fieldnotes are recognized as a **construction** of that field experience...[t]hey will represent your perspective – gathered, recorded, mapped, and written according to your own conscious and unconscious choices about what you see and hear at your fieldsite. (Sunstein and Chriseri-Strater, 1997, 56)

Thus, fieldwork in general and fieldnotes in particular inevitably require an act of inscription in their inception. Therefore, this research requires a statement about my own background and politics. These have inevitably influenced my interpretations of people and events during the fieldwork process. To some extent, this research reflects my own identity as a western researcher of several different ethnicities and origins. To summarize, I occupy an identity that can be viewed as challenging simplistic divides between Arab/Jew or Arab/Israeli, Western/Middle Eastern. On my mother’s side, I am of a Russian-Jewish/Austrian-Catholic background, the grandchild of refugees who escaped the Holocaust. On paper, I am technically Jewish enough to satisfy orthodox ‘*battei din*’ (rabbinical courts). In my daily life, amongst other things, I identify as a liberal Jew and practice traditional Judaism. On my father’s side, I am of Bedouin extraction and therefore also identify with an indigenous non-

Jewish, non-Palestinian community in the Levant that practice both Islamist and pre-Islamic traditions. Residing in the Sinai, my Bedouin family live as second-class citizens within the state of Egypt, with various restrictions attached to their lower-class, semi-sedentary status (e.g. they are unable to own land, vote, and attend university). The Bedouin tourist trade, prompted by Israeli occupation (1967-1982), had hitherto been their primary mode of subsistence. However, recently the Egyptian government has curtailed Bedouin involvement in the tourist trade in favour of sedentary Egyptian business-owners. The Bedouin are often kept out of the tourist areas through the erection of fences and live in daily fear of police brutality. As a result, they live in a precarious state of segregation and poverty, which is unlikely to improve as long as the political instability in the region continues.¹⁹ Yet, their ongoing situation of segregation and oppression has received little scrutiny by the media, which typically focuses on more newsworthy instances of Middle Eastern conflict: the Palestinian national struggle and/or the conflict in Syria. The former, arguably a transnational icon in western activist rhetoric (Salzman and Divine 2006).

My unusual religious/ethnic background, as well as my own unique stance as an individual, made for some interesting encounters during fieldwork and interpretations of secondary sources. During fieldwork, I triangulated between feeling like an insider in the primarily Judeocentric environment in which I worked and as a privileged outsider due to my Western background and privileged education. However, I also felt stigmatization, ironically from both Jewish and Palestinian communities, as well as the other people I encountered in Tel Aviv, due to my Bedouin ancestry. The latter identification was often paradoxically considered at the very bottom rung of both the Palestinian and Israeli social hierarchy, even while it was lauded for its romantic (oriental), 'indigenous' character.

Further complexity of critical positioning is due to my life experience. I grew up oscillating between East Anglia and French Canada and have lived in the UK since 2008. During my research I also encountered actual stigmatization 'at home' from hegemonic sources in the UK power institutions of government, for instance, restrictions on international residents, as well as subcultural sources in the form of UK-based Pro-Palestinian activists who often seemed to consider me a living, breathing embodiment of 'normalization'. Overall, the topic of this research is not only of academic interest to me, but is a way of examining my own complex identity. I am the living embodiment of a Jewish-Arab-Western-'Other' borderland

¹⁹ Anthropologist Smadar Lavie has documented the situation of the Sinai Bedouin, in particular that of the Mzeina tribe (2006).

as my life experience intersects with a variety of dominant and subcultural identities both inside and outside of Israel. But my identity also allows me to experience the collective memory of diverse traumas. I am characterized by a sense of rootlessness in several spheres of belonging: the precarious situation of the Bedouin, the liminal status of myself and my family as ‘foreigners’ in our English home, and the intense feelings of displacement and alienation through the transmitted collective memory of the Holocaust, which involved my grandfather’s removal from Berlin and escape to the USA in 1941.

My linguistic capacities also invariably affected my fieldwork. When I started my research, I spoke, read, and wrote beginner’s Hebrew. Many reputable UK academics researching Israel-Palestine did not know Hebrew and therefore I initially did not consider this an enormous problem, but planned on hiring an aide/translator. However, this lack of fluency impeded my progress and my ability to easily converse with individuals in the field. Therefore, I applied for and received a grant to complete an intensive Hebrew Ulpan course at Tel Aviv University in 2013, after which I passed the Hebrew exemption exam for university study in Hebrew language. I also have a basic knowledge of Arabic, German, and Bahasa Indonesia, all of which served me well. If I were to do further research in the area, I would acquire a fluency in Arabic. However, for this thesis project, I hired a young Druze man to help me translate and navigate the field. Also, as a result of growing up in French Canada, I am fully fluent in French (spoken, reading, and composition). Surprisingly, my fluency in French opened many doors when conducting fieldwork, as many Jewish, Arab and other participants with backgrounds in North Africa were francophones.

As far as my politics are relevant to this research, my views are idiosyncratic, seldom aligning with those of right-wing Zionists, left-wing anti-Zionists, or with those of staunch supporters of Palestinian nationalism. This was partly because, as explored in later chapters, in Israel, the articulation of a clear identification with a social group or political party, regardless of the individual’s actual views, was necessary for the purposes of self-protection. Perhaps it was my identity as a western outsider-researcher that gave me the luxury of moderation where politics were concerned. The fact that I am a small, dark-skinned²⁰ and a married woman in my thirties are other aspects of identity relevant to my ethnographic research, particularly influencing the way informants related to me ‘in the field’. These

²⁰ Although this description is relative: I was often called a ‘light-skinned woman’ by certain people I encountered in South Tel Aviv (e.g. members of the Jewish-Ethiopian community, Jamaican ex-pats.)

aspects are mentioned not to essentialize categories of identity and belonging, but because they directly impacted the way in which people viewed me and reacted to me ‘in the field’ inevitably colouring the conversations and events in which I participated as a researcher.

Another important aspect of identity that was relevant to this research had to do with my musical training. As well as being an ethnomusicologist, I am also a musician, an advanced performer on the French horn. This means that I primarily perform orchestral music, band music, and chamber music in the UK. These are all genres that can more or less be associated with Western ‘art’ music and are often considered ‘high brow’ in relation to Hip Hop. This positioning as a performer of ‘classical’ music sometimes was irrelevant, but it sometimes significantly impacted fieldwork in surprising ways and is therefore important to mention here.

1.7 A Note about Terminology

Terminology relating to Israel-Palestine comes invariably with its own set of political associations. For this reason, a brief note regarding my choice of terms is necessary. I use the term ‘Israel-Palestine’ to designate the territory comprising Israel and the Palestinian territories, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Various international accords (e.g. the U.N., the European Union) specify the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as separate entities, which I refer to collectively in this research as ‘the Palestinian territories’.²¹ Some people would contest this use of designations. For instance, many Palestinian informants or pro-Palestinian activists refer to the entire space simply as ‘Palestine’. Conversely, some Jewish-Israeli informants refer to the West Bank as ‘Judea and Samaria’ a biblical designation that connects it with their Jewish heritage, or even refer to Israel and the Palestinian territories as ‘*Eretz Yisrael hashlema*’ (‘the whole of the land of Israel’). These designations were often used as a basis for bolstering restrictive ethno-nationalist ideologies of land ownership.

²¹ It should be noted that these areas are sometimes referred to as ‘the territories’ (*hashtahim* in Hebrew), ‘the occupied territories’ or ‘the occupied Palestinian Territories’. The latter is often used by individuals who identify as ‘left-wing’ and often is shortened to the ‘oPT’.

Designations for demographic groups residing in Israel are also politically charged. Individuals of Palestinian ethnicity with Israeli citizenship constitute approximately 1 million of Israel's population. Belkind effectively describes their history as follows:

They are descendants of the approximately 150,000 Palestinians who remained within Israel's borders following the Nakba, and today they make up approximately 20% of the country's citizens; the '48 distinction hence is one that also articulates differences in civic status between Palestinian citizens and non-citizens (Belkind 2014, 12).

I refer to members of this community as either Palestinian-Israelis or '48 Palestinians. The designation '48 refers to the year 1948, the year of Israeli independence and the exodus/exile of approximately 750,000 members of the Palestinian community.²² The war is often referred to by Jewish-Israelis as '*Milchemet Ha'atzma'ut*' ('The War of Independence') whereas many Palestinians refer to it as the '*Nakba*' ('The Catastrophe'). Hence, for Palestinians these designations are intrinsically connected with a collective past of trauma and dispossession. However, I often use other designations to differentiate members of the Palestinian community, differentiating between age, gender, and religion (Christian/Muslim/secular).

I use the term 'Jewish-Israeli' to refer to Israelis of a Jewish religious background. However, this general term problematically elides ethnic and cultural distinctions within the Jewish population, which is composed of three distinctive ethnic groups: Ashkenazi Jews, of originally European provenance, Falasha Jews originating in Ethiopia, and Mizrahi Jews, Jews with origins in Middle Eastern countries. From the 1950s onwards approximately 850,000 Mizrahim fled their homes in many Middle Eastern countries and immigrated to Israel both for ideological reasons and due to local persecution. For instance, expulsions of local Jewish communities due to persecution took place in Egypt and Iraq (Stillman 2003; 1979).²³ Thus, the term 'Mizrahi' is associated with dispossession, but more so with intra-Jewish 'otherness' as it was initially employed by Israeli Ashkenazi elites in a derogatory

²² Some cite the number as lower, some cite it as closer to 1 million. The exodus/expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 is a contentious topic and cannot be debated here. However, I designed and taught a module at the University of Chester (2014-2015) on the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 'Debates in History' series in the university's History and Archaeology Department. I am, therefore, well aware of the variety of viewpoints characterizing this debate.

²³ The exodus/expulsion of the Mizrahi Jews is also a politically contentious topic, though less so than that of the Palestinians. Curiously, it has often been given insufficient attention in scholarly work relating to music and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

way. However, over time, Mizrahi Israeli communities utilized this moniker to describe themselves, and hence, the designation became a symbol of empowerment. It must be noted, however, that even the term ‘Mizrahi’ is critically problematic because it implies the uniformity of all Jews emanating from the Middle East, regardless of their cultural and geographic origins.

1.8 Political Climate

Benjamin Brinner’s pivotal book on Arab-Israeli musical collaborations (1998) describes musicians operating in the aftermath of the optimism generated by the Oslo Accords of 1993. However, much has changed politically in Israel and the Palestinian Territories since the 1990s. The artists examined in this research, operating from the early 2000s onwards, arguably experienced more difficult social and political circumstances. The Second Palestinian Intifada, which began 28 September 2000, came during a period of regional and global events that transformed the Middle East and represented ‘a total breakdown of trust in the efficacy of diplomacy among Palestinians and Israelis alike’ (Ali, Feldman, and Shikaki 2014, 361). The Israeli response to the violence of the Second Intifada was increased security and control over the West Bank and the sequestering of Yasser Arafat in his mansion in Ramallah. The year 2002 saw the erection of hundreds of security checkpoints, and the separation barriers. In the summer of 2005, Israel disengaged from the Gaza strip. The period is characterized by a collapse of ‘pro-peace communities’, including collaborative musical groups, the weakening of moderate politics and the rise of secular and religious right-wing movements (361). In 2006 Hamas was voted into power in Gaza. This witnessed two occurrences of large-scale regional violence in 2006, the war between Hezbollah and Israel and the December 2008 to January 2009 war between Israel and Hamas on the Gaza strip. The transnational, political movement designated ‘the Arab Spring’ began in 2010 in a series of protests and demonstrations, both violent and non-violent, across the Arab world, including demonstrations in the Palestinian territories. The increased security measures taken by the Israeli administration, the escalating conflicts, and in particular the Arab Spring, all had a direct impact on the musicians explored in this research. The aftermath of these events constituted a challenge, in particular, for intercultural Hip Hop groups such as System Ali.

1.9 Methodology: A Note about Fieldwork

Critically examining the dynamics of musical collaborations in Hip Hop in South Tel Aviv required various forms of qualitative data collection. The two bodies of data utilized in the research methodology were ethnographic fieldwork and secondary sources, including documentary films focusing on the area. While my research draws upon interdisciplinary secondary sources, my primary mode of data collection was thorough ethnographic fieldwork conducted with performers and audience members in neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv as well as systematic recorded observation and interaction with performers to understand musical behaviour and experience.²⁴ In some cases the process of musical production is the focus of my ethnographic engagement, in others, interactions prompted by the music are the focus of scholarly analysis.

The participant observation fieldwork involved: 1) attending and participating in performances, rehearsals, music festivals, theatrical productions, and other events; 2) formal and informal interviews with the musicians; 3) discussions with a range of people involved in the Hip Hop performances in addition to the musicians themselves, including audience members, concert organizers, studio owners, managers, label-owners, and family members of the musicians; 4) multiple films of South Tel Aviv and Jaffa to inform my ethnographic note-taking (crucial for ‘jogging the memory’ when removed from the immediate fieldwork area); 5) social media and other forms of communication on the internet such as Skype (while not without their shortcomings, these methods of communication have proved vital in contacting overseas researchers and maintaining contact with musicians and other informants); 6) In addition to ethnographic fieldwork, I undertook a detailed examination/analysis of the music in live, recorded, and transcribed form.

My choices for the focus of my fieldwork and subsequent examples in this text were based on a combination of factors. First, I collected information on either Hip Hop performers who were primarily based in South Tel Aviv, for whom South Tel Aviv venues were major performance spots, or simply performers who made use of the eclectic urban space of South Tel Aviv for Hip Hop performance. Secondly, I focussed on performers from various different categories of identity and belonging, across boundaries of ethnicity, religion, class,

²⁴ It is important to acknowledge that the analyses presented in these pages may not always reflect what the musicians would say about themselves. Moreover, any errors of interpretation or recollection in relation to the fieldwork-data are my own.

gender, and language, in a variety of key formal and informal spots in South Tel Aviv (The Block Club, the Central Bus Station, ‘The Third Ear’ music shop, to name a few). In so doing, I invariably had to exclude some interesting examples from my discussion.²⁵ Some performers have not been included for reasons of pragmatism: I did not share any common language with some Eritrean performers encountered in the field, for instance, and therefore was forced to abandon potentially interesting subjects. While I did do fieldwork in Jaffa with its sizeable Palestinian population, I felt the data merited expansion and therefore may be included in future research. I chose instead to focus on the substantial data accrued from South Tel Aviv sites.

Travel to my field sites was sometimes challenging. To juggle personal and professional commitments in the UK, I took multiple trips to Tel Aviv. From 2011-2014, I made several journeys, some of which were delayed by local, personal issues (e.g. pregnancy) and transnational politics (e.g. military conflicts between the Israeli government and Hamas in 2012 and 2014). However, my multiple journeys proved useful, as the information obtained during systematic observation of locales in South Tel Aviv encompassed different times of year, providing a variety of data-samples.

Following my first fieldwork trip in 2011, I made specific choices about how I would gather data and represent my informants. For instance, early in the fieldwork process, I ascertained that while formal interviews worked well in obtaining information from established musicians, they proved alienating for many of the younger informants. When I did record formal interviews, depending on whether the interview would be agreeable to the participant, I left it up to the informant to decide whether they wanted to be video-taped, recorded using audio only, or if they wanted me to transcribe the interview in shorthand with no mechanical record. I had already developed a code that allowed me to take fieldnotes very quickly, which proved pivotal when simultaneously transcribing conversations and details about locations.

Much of the fieldwork that I conducted was with System Ali, a multi-lingual Hip Hop crew based in Jaffa and Bat Yam. From January 2011 to August 2014, I made multiple fieldwork trips during which I attended rehearsals with the group, conducted informal interviews and spent time with individual members. I also attended events with them of a musical, political

²⁵ Tel Aviv-based Hip Hop artist Itay Lukach is one omission who should be mentioned here. The eclectic multilingualism in his lyrics, a combination of Hebrew, English and Jamaican Patois may be investigated in future research.

or social nature in and around Tel Aviv. Discourses emerged from my interaction with the group as well as my analyses of their music and performances, relevant to cross cultural musical collaborations in Israel, music in urban centres, and global and Middle Eastern Hip hop.

I adopted an immersion-based fieldwork method involving residence in the target area, attendance at musical rehearsals and performances, and participation in public events and day-to-day life. This approach involved discreetly photographing and recording conversations and events whenever possible, or simply taking down notes by hand. While I always identified myself as a researcher if asked, sometimes it did not come up in conversation. To represent the informants in my research, I decided that in cases where musicians were publicly-known artists, I would utilize their real names in the research, excepting cases in which a topic of a sensitive nature was being discussed (e.g. experiences of discrimination, impoverishment, etc.) When my informants were not publicly known figures, were not musicians, or preferred not to be mentioned by name, I used pseudonyms for their identification.²⁶ Overall, the analysis of the data provided by the systematic observation of events and physical locations in South Tel Aviv elucidates how intercultural dynamics occur in grassroots Hip Hop groups, and how they can be used more broadly to stimulate positive relations.²⁷

1.10 Literature Review

Given the scarcity of ethnomusicological literature on the intercultural dynamics of Hip Hop groups in South Tel Aviv, I opted for an interdisciplinary approach, consulting sources from a range of subjects. Thus, this research utilizes sources from ethnomusicology, musicology, sociology, Jewish studies, Israel Studies, Palestine Studies, Middle Eastern studies, and international politics. For the ‘primary’ subjects (see below), the literature has been consulted in a holistic manner and the vast majority of published sources have been consulted. For ‘satellite’ disciplines, a large amount of existing scholarship, but by no means its entirety, has been consulted to complement the main topics.

²⁶ To protect the privacy of some subjects, I have not included any photographs of them or their real names (e.g. the Russian break-dancers, the audience members at the DAM performance).

²⁷ While I have tried to accurately represent people I encountered ‘in the field’, I take responsibility for any errors of interpretation on my part.

The main categories examined for this research fall under the umbrella of ethnomusicology: I. Music in Israel; II. Music in the Palestinian territories; III. Music and Conflict Transformation; IV. Hip Hop; V. Urban Ethnomusicology. To supplement my research, I have also looked at sources on: VI. the Arab-Israeli conflict. While I have categorized these topics as distinct, in many instances the subjects that they address overlap.

I. Music in Israel

Literature that focuses on music in Israel often examines the transformation of Diaspora musics into a national, Israeli repertoire. Therefore the scholarship is varied because of the wide assortment of distinctive Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Israel. And, as many musicologists have argued, (Benski 1989, Regev 1996; Regev and Seroussi 2004), different musics in Israel represent different competing ‘candidates’ for Israeli national identity. There is a considerable body of literature on the development of popular music in Israel examining the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* (Songs of the Land of Israel)²⁸ repertoire, formed in the pre-state period. This includes a multitude of sources, for instance, Jehoash Hirshberg’s *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine 1880-1948* (1996), (also Bohlman 1989, 2000, 2008; Gerson-Kiwi 1980; Davis 2010; Eliram 2001, 2006; Katz and Cohen, 1977, 2005; Perelson, 1998; Shiloah 1997; Zerubavel 1995; 2008). These sources focus on different communities. For example, Bohlman is primarily concerned with Diaspora music. Katz and Cohen and Eliram have a traditional ethnomusicological approach, compiling, notating and analysing ‘the music itself’;²⁹ both Katz and Davis discuss Lachmann’s ‘Arab’ radio show in British mandatory Palestine, whereas Zerubavel is concerned with the ideological construction of ‘memory’, and the broader relationship to popular culture in this construction, in the Israeli social fabric.³⁰ While Ruth Katz’ research deals primarily in Jewish-Israeli music she also collaborated with Dalia Cohen to produce the pivotal book, *Palestinian Arab*

²⁸ This is a type of song-repertoire formulated to express national identity and connections to the ‘Land of Israel’ in ideological opposition to Jewish diaspora traditions. This repertoire will be explored in further detail in Chapter 1.

²⁹ Early compilations of Israeli music by Idelsohn (1929) fall into this category as well.

³⁰ Zerubavel’s specialization is memory, and she employs this in other arenas, for example in a discussion of African American civil rights (1996). She also presented a riveting conference paper at the Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference (Chicago, 5 December 2012) in which she discussed various symbols prevalent in Israeli society in the *yishuv* period, and how these explained/influenced the construction of nationhood and self in relation to indigenous non-Jews.

Music: A Maqam Tradition in Practice (2005), that focuses primarily on the traditional music of Palestinians living in Israel.

The next ‘phase’ of scholarship on Israeli music, investigated popular musical forms that were historically suppressed by Ashkenazi-European hegemonies, most particularly *Muzika Mizrahit* (Mizrahi music). The best known work in this area has been undertaken by Israeli musicologist Edwin Seroussi (1989; 2002). Seroussi examined the process through which Mizrahi music became mainstream, emerging as it did from poor urban neighbourhoods, sold clandestinely at spots such as the central bus stations of Tel Aviv-Yafo and Jerusalem. In the 1980s it gained mainstream popularity. Amy Horowitz has contributed substantially to this topic as well (1999; 2010). Horowitz argues that the creation of Mizrahi music represented a struggle for social equality, and thus, the music draws on a cultural authenticity associated with indigenes. According to Horowitz, the composition of the music reflects the social situation of Jews who were exiled from Muslim countries, being ‘uprooted from Middle Eastern and North African communities and rerouted to a new local context that was at war with their former homelands’ (Horowitz 2010, 32). Drawing on Horowitz, anthropologist Galeet Dardashti critically examines the role and dissemination of Middle Eastern music in Israel as a tool for bridge building between both Israelis and Palestinians and religious and secular Jews (2009a; 2009b).

I have complemented my discussion of Mizrahi music with sources in related areas: the Mizrahi cause in general, in contemporary Israel (discussed in Chetrit 2010; Shohat 2006; Shenav 2006), and the complex histories of Middle Eastern Jewry from Antiquity until the present day (Stillman 2003, 1979; Karsh 2008). The important film, *Forgotten Refugees* (2005), directed by Michael Grynszpan, documents the large-scale departure and ethnic-cleansing of Jews from Muslim countries beginning in the 1930s. These sources explain to some degree how Jewish immigrants from the ‘Arab’ world, were originally considered contentious by Israeli Ashkenazi elites because of their cultural (and formerly physical) proximity with Christian and/or Muslim Arabs.

Another distinctive genre in Israeli music is *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit*, ‘Israeli ethnic music’, which is characterized by Arab-Israeli collaborations and folk music idioms, that researchers argue, grew out of optimism generated by the Oslo accords in the 1990s (Dardashti 2009a). Other work on such collaborations examines interesting divides that have not yet been

explored in detail. For example, Dardashti (2007) examines the recently-emergent *piyut* (hymn/psalm) communal singing as a medium that unites secular and religious Jews in Israel. Other studies on popular music in Israel examine the multicultural and/or collaborative aspects of the music or group and therefore will be discussed further under the ‘music and conflict’ category.

The body of critical literature on music in Israel began with limited accounts of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* repertoire in contrast to Diaspora musics; however, the current literature on Israeli music has become wide-ranging, exploring the impact of the nation-state on large groups (such as Mizrahim) and minority communities and vice-versa. Strikingly, only Palestinian music in Israel lacks, to date, a dedicated body of literature. Recently, emerging popular genres such as Hip Hop in Israeli urban centres (McDonald, 2009b) and music of Ethiopian minority communities in Israel (Webster-Kogen, 2013) has received scholarly treatment.

II. Music in the Palestinian Territories

The literature on music production in the Palestinian territories has been helpful in my research. David McDonald’s extensive early contributions (2006a, 2006b, 2009), for instance, discuss, amongst many things, both the revival and reconstruction of Palestinian traditional music to increase the solidarity of nationalist movements, the use of music and the arts in general, particularly for children, as an alternative to violent behaviour and a distraction to the violent incursions around them. Chuen-Fung Wong’s ‘Conflicts, Occupation, and Music-Making in Palestine’ (2009) discusses similar issues. Wong considers the ways in which Palestinian musicians use music to perform resistance, relief and reconciliation, using an ethnographic encounter with a Palestinian musician and oud-maker, Samer Totah (b.1972). Rachel Beckles Willson has made a significant contribution to music studies in the Palestinian territories. Largely, her work deals with how European musicians and educators operate in Palestine. In several conference papers, including ‘Charitable initiatives in Palestinian music production’ (2012) and ‘Music Teachers as Missionaries:

Understanding Europe's Recent Dispatches to Ramallah' (2011),³¹ she argues that these encounters reconstruct narratives that conform to western needs and expectations. Similarly, in her recent book, *Orientalism and Musical Mission: Palestine and the West* (2013), Beckles Willson argues that from the Ottoman period onwards, western institutions have projected the 'reforming' power of western 'art' music in Palestine, attempting to transform Palestinian Arab culture in order to join a 'global' musical environment defined by western norms. Beckles Willson also contributes a fascinating discussion of inter-ethnic encounters in Palestine relating to European missionaries and musical texts (2013).

Stein and Swedenburg examine the study of popular culture in Palestine in 'Popular Culture, Relational History, and the Question of Power in Palestine and Israel' (2004). They argue that the relative lack of representation of popular culture is due in part to a Marxist perspective that considers it a frivolous structure, extraneous to subsistence rather than an important component of personal and collective aspirations.³² Swedenburg argues that as long as Palestinians in the territories live under military surveillance, their popular culture is problematically viewed as not worthy of study in its own right. Elsewhere, he examines neo-orientalist stereotypes of Palestinians in the West, their reduction to a monolithic, peasant icon that has more to do with the alleviation of Western post-colonial guilt than the on-the-ground reality and diversity of modern Palestinian society (Swedenburg 1990).

Also worthy of note is *Palestinian Music and Song: Expression and Resistance since 1900* (Bursheh, Kanaaneh, McDonald and Thorsén, eds. 2013). While this volume focuses on music and resistance, it contains some critical and engaging chapters.³³ Recent film documentaries provide limited, but useful information on music in the Palestinian territories. For instance, Jackie Salloum's *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2009) examines how Palestinian youths living in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel form Hip Hop ensembles. This film includes footage of Tamer and Suhell Nafar and Mahmoud Jერი's group, DAM. The film *It's Not a Gun*, by Pierre-Nicholas Durant and H  l  ne Cotinier, which brings up Swedenburg and Stein's 'pop culture' debate in less formal terms, is a documentary of European activists/classical musicians visits to the West Bank, where they worked in Ramzi

³¹ The author very kindly sent me written transcriptions of these conferences papers (personal email communication, 2012).

³² The fact that there are a wealth of sources dealing with Palestinian culture but few dealing with Palestinian music would seem to support this assertion.

³³ I am pleased that even in the few years since starting my thesis in 2011, sources have emerged critically analysing Palestinian music in various contexts (e.g. McDonald 2013a).

Aburedwan's musical conservatoire in Ramallah, *Al Kamandjati*. In addition, recent articles (e.g. Karkabi 2013), forthcoming book initiatives, newspaper articles and online sources documenting Palestinian musicians and concerts have begun to fill the void, optimistically a precursor to more complete and critical academic coverage of Palestinian music.

III. Music and Conflict Transformation

This research necessitated familiarity with sources on music and conflict, since it explores the way in which identity formation in music is influenced by overarching conflict. Music and conflict transformation is a relatively new topic in the general area of 'peace studies', a discipline that has gained popularity from the 2000s onwards.³⁴ Studies of this kind examine music and music-production in areas of the world affected by conflict. The 'conflicts' explored in this literature are usually restricted to large-scale military, ethnic, and/or religious altercations. Arguably, the focus on broad, transnational conflicts results in a simplification of the definition of 'conflict' and implies that certain areas (e.g. the UK) are conflict-free zones.

Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics (2008) explores the potential of music as a tool for conflict transformation with a wealth of case studies. Interestingly, none of the contributors are ethnomusicologists. Editor and contributor Olivier Urbain writes about Israeli musician Yair Dalal's strategies for peace through his musical collaborations. Other contributors focus on music education and conflict transformation. Felicity Laurence, Cynthia Cohen, and June Boyce-Tillman take a practical approach in the volume, examining music's ability to incite empathy, reconciliation, and cross-cultural dialogue.³⁵ John O'Connell's *Music and Conflict* (2010) is a pivotal book exploring music and conflict transformation. In O'Connell's words, the book researches 'the significance of music for understanding conflict'. In particular, it focuses on the ways in

³⁴ Salzman and Divine critique the new discipline labelled 'peace studies', arguing that studies in this discipline are often activist-driven projects, rather than critical enterprises. The authors argue that such initiatives are often more inflammatory than proactive (2008). Anthropologist Joyce Dalsheim also argues that many 'peace-making' initiatives in Israel/Palestine are actually inflammatory (her book is forthcoming, but the chapters can be found on her website in the form of articles: <https://clas-pages.uncc.edu/joyce-dalsheim/>). While her work is not specifically about music, Dalsheim has published research on Jewish settlements in Gaza and the West Bank and critically engaged with cross-cultural communication between Jewish, Palestinian and Activist communities (Dalsheim 2011; 2013).

³⁵ O'Connell critiques this volume primarily because the ideas of empathy are western-centric (2011).

which ethnomusicology can contribute productively to the identification of intercommunal strife and to the resolution of intergroup hostility' (O'Connell, vii). In the introduction, O'Connell specifies that there are multiple ways in which to envision 'war' and 'peace' that must be acknowledged when studying music and conflict. Accordingly, the case studies explored by the authors, most of whom are ethnomusicologists, examine music's diverse roles in conflict. Music is shown to be both motivation for violence, even for war, as well as a tool for inciting reconciliation. Several contributions have particular relevance to my research, exploring how music can elide social difference. Jane C. Sugarman's discussion on music in the Kosovo war (1998-1999) and Adelaida Reyes research on the musical unification of the Nuer and the Dinka in the Sudanese conflict (1983-2005) were of particular interest.

An important sub-group of literature on music and conflict, are studies that examine musical collaborations between demographic groups in conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Musical groups with explicitly 'collaborative positioning'³⁶ have been of particular interest in reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Of special note, is Benjamin Brinner's pivotal study of Palestinian-Israeli musical groups in the 1990s Israeli ethnic music scene (*Muzika Etnit Yisraelit*) (Brinner 2009, 2008). Brinner examines the degree to which musicians are able to transcend conflict and to be commercially successful through the formation of inter-personal social networks. My own fieldwork has confirmed the validity of Brinner's important conclusions in the context of Israeli-Palestinian collaborations.³⁷

Research on Israeli-Palestinian collaborations often focuses on the politics of musical collaborations in popular music (Al-Tae 2002; Belkind 2010; Dardashti, 2009b). Al-Tae focuses on Israeli-Palestinian musical collaborations that express hopes for reconciliation and show a shared attachment to Jerusalem as a symbol that is culturally important for both Israelis and Palestinians. Belkind focuses on the collaboration between Achinoam Nini, a Jewish-Israeli of Yemenite origin, and Mira Awad, a Palestinian-Bulgarian Christian, in the 2009 Eurovision song contest. Belkind discusses the political implications of the symbolic union given the religious/ethnic backgrounds of the two participating artists at a time when

³⁶ I find this term, used by Brinner (2009) useful because it differentiates from musical groups that could be considered collaborations but that do not identify as such (e.g. System Ali), and musical groups that explicitly present themselves as collaborations from a marketing stance (e.g. the now-disbanded group *Alei Hazayit*).

³⁷ Recent literature in sociology discusses the emphasis of individuality over large-scale community in order to combat stigmatization (Mizrachi and Zawdu 2011).

Israeli launched a full-scale attack on Gaza in response to several years of Hamas-led rocket fire. Dardashti critically examines how Jewish-Israeli promoters and performers are often ‘culture-brokers’ for Palestinian performers in Israel. Dardashti’s work draws on George Yúdice in *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (2003), arguing that one of the consequences of globalization is that culture is increasingly used as a vehicle for social transformation: ‘Unlike past decades, when culture was administered and wielded on a national scale, in today’s global era culture is coordinated on many levels, both locally and supra-nationally, by corporations, private foundations, and the international non-government sector’ (2009b, 65). Using this notion of cultural transformation, Dardashti shows how Palestinians are employed in Israeli musical ensembles in both local and trans-national initiatives. Their inclusion, Dardashti argues, serves several functions: 1.) a token indicator of ‘Arabness’ appealing to nostalgic memories of Jews from Arab countries; 2.) to side-step discrimination against Israelis internationally by showing a desire for inclusivity. David McDonald also examines Israeli-Palestinian collaborations in popular music, specifically, discourses of ‘exile’ in music in Israel/Palestine that reinforce the notion of Jewish and Palestinian homeland (2013b).

Literature on music and conflict transformation includes several articles focusing on the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (hitherto the WEDO) (Beckles Willson, 2009a, 2009b; Cook, 2008; Riiser 2010).³⁸ The scholarly critique of the orchestra focuses on its hierarchical nature. Indeed, Riiser likens the orchestra to a nation-state, arguing that it has a chain of command structure and that its explicit peaceful mission-statement is not reflected in ‘real life’. This scholarship prompts reflections on the critical value of analysing the WEDO as an isolated phenomenon. Perhaps it would be helpful to situate the analysis in the larger context of musical initiatives purporting to ‘help’ conflict situations or rectify social inequality. While the WEDO has been singled out for particular critique, in many other high-profile musical initiatives, music is similarly presented as transforming personal or communal situations of hardship.³⁹

³⁸ The WEDO tends to be portrayed in a positive light in the media and in the documentary film *Knowledge is the Beginning* (2005).

³⁹ Many international initiatives utilize music's perceived ability to bridge socio-cultural divides as a selling point. For instance, the Venezuelan classical music education program for young people, El Sistema, utilizes a philanthropic marketing approach, and claims to improve the lives of impoverished youth.

Beckles Willson makes some important observations about disjuncture between the ideals of the orchestra and the day-to-day operations. For instance, she identifies a displacement function of Israeli-Palestinian musical collaborations:

[the musical collaborations are used to displace] the Israeli regime's segregationist policies for its Arab citizens and neighbours. Second, even while attempting to speak up for Palestinians it sidesteps the anti-normalization position taken by many Palestinian groups, who argue that partnerships with Israel 'normalize' the current relationship between Israel and Palestinians, an astonishingly long-lasting and profoundly cruel occupation that is indeed masked by cultural displays of collaboration (325, 2009a)

This statement prompts several important critical questions related to this research. For instance, it raises the question of why the segregationist/discriminatory policies of other participant countries or leaderships are not addressed by Beckles Willson in analysing the orchestra's power relations, nor the arguably segregationist impact of the anti-normalization discourse itself. Beckles Willson's statement prompts reflection on whether groups that, in contrast to the orchestra, operate at a grassroots level and with members living in shared urban space, exhibit similar power dynamics. Overall, the orchestra's potential for conflict transformation tends to be analysed as a transnational phenomenon. This level of analysis is understandable given the international scope of its quotidian activities and the explicit articulation of its transnational identity by its organizers. However, arguably the WEDO's value as a contact point and career-booster for young people living in politically polarized situations has yet to be sufficiently addressed.

IV. Hip Hop Studies

Recent literature on global Hip Hop in the Middle East shows how the genre has given voices to marginalized individuals, communities and/or ideologies. Ilana Webster-Kogen has researched Ethiopian Israeli Hip Hop, analysing its relationship to nationalist discourse (2012, 2014). Laudan Nooshin has discussed how Hip Hop has given a voice to marginalized identities in Tehran, and discusses the important role of the internet in disseminating 'deviant' musical products (2009, 2011). Thomas Solomon has published extensively on Turkish Hip Hop both inside and outside of Turkey (2005a, 2005b). In the context of Israel/Palestine, McDonald examines the members of Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop group

DAM, as an example to show how Palestinians with Israeli citizenship negotiate their complicated existence through trans-national Hip Hop (2006, 2009, 2011): ‘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’ (McDonald 2006, 117). McDonald also describes how Hip Hop brings the particular plight of the Palestinian-Israelis to an international audience. With the possible exception of Swedenburg’s work, research involving Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop has typically focussed on the ‘arabness’ of the individual performers in the context of the Jewish state, how they negotiate their conflicting identities through Hip Hop, and how their oeuvre challenges rigid nationalist structures (Belkind, McDonald, Dardashti, Webster-Kogen).⁴⁰ Additional work on Hip Hop in Israel examines that of minority communities vying for equality in the nation-state (Ben Elizier 2004; Equeiq 2010; Massad 2005; Safieh 2013; Shabtay 2001). Swedenburg (2013) also argues literature on Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop focuses only on music as resistance, resulting in the neglect of important aspects of performance. Building on his observation, my research will engage with divisions among Hip Hop performers that are constructed along diverse lines beyond the parameters of national affiliation and/or ethnicity.

For the purposes of comparison, it has been useful to look at international Hip Hop outside the context of Israel and Palestine. Accounts of global Hip Hop include Tony Mitchell’s pivotal book *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA* (2001), which examines a variety of international case studies on Hip Hop culture and performance. Also consulted are sources dealing with Hip Hop, youth cultures and identity such as *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds* (Nilan and Feixa, 2006) and research on Hip Hop and multilingualism such as Low and Sarkar’s article ‘Le plurilinguisme dans les cultures populaires, un terrain inexploré? L’étude du langage mixte du rap montréalais en guise d’exemple’ (2012), a fascinating discussion on empowerment through multi-lingual rap.

Literature on the origins of Hip Hop in American urban centres has also been consulted. For instance, Adam Krim’s *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000) outlines the poetics of rap as a ‘formation of ethnic and geographic identities’ in urban hubs in the USA (Krim 2000, 1). I have also consulted Adam Sexton’s compilation of critiques of African American

⁴⁰ Ilana Webster-Kogen’s work is forthcoming: these observations are based on an informal discussion that I had with her about her research on 2/7/2013.

Hip Hop and/or rap, *Rap on Rap* (1995) to highlight differences in the way analysts have treated the genre in the USA and the Middle East. Cheryl L. Keyes *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (2002) has been useful, particularly her description of fashion as a metonym for the values communicated by Hip Hop culture. Robin D.G. Kelley's notion of 'ghettocentricity' (in Krims 2000, 145) and Murray Forman's book *The 'Hood Comes First': Race, Place and Space in Rap and Hip Hop* (2002) have been useful to establish the importance of locale and 'the ghetto' in Hip Hop culture and rap lyrics.

V. Urban Ethnomusicology

In the field of urban ethnomusicology, case studies of the contemporary urban metropolis have been particularly useful for my research (e.g. Landau 2010; Baumann 1996). While both are London-based, they look at the interaction of various minority groups with urban settings and the social landscape, which is directly relevant to my research, as is Baumann's useful discussion of fieldwork approaches in a situation in which numerous language skills are required in order to undertake research. Studies on Israeli urban space include Abigail Wood's work on the 'soundscape' of Jerusalem, a discussion about the multicultural elements and the varied power-differentials embedded in the ethnically diverse city-sounds of Jerusalem's Old City (2013a; 2013b). Wood's analysis of the power differentials and structural inequalities evident in Old City residents' sonic negotiations is an alternative to the Israeli-Palestinian binary prevalent in so much of the ethnomusicological literature on the region. Also relevant here is Sarah Hankins' exploration of the relationship between sound, urban space, and 'multidimensional Israeliness' through her ethnographic fieldwork at Tel Aviv's central bus station (2013).

VI. The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Sources focusing on the Arab-Israeli conflict, grounded in the disciplines of history, political science, and international politics, have been pivotal for my research. These include basic volumes such as *The Encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (2008). These sources tend to use the end of the nineteenth century as a starting point, as this marks the beginning of Jewish immigration to Ottoman-controlled areas. They focus almost exclusively on the history of the political and military interactions between two perceived dominant forces, Jews (or Israelis) and 'Arabs' (which, in these accounts, usually means non-Jews). While somewhat broad in

approach, these sources are useful for ascertaining general knowledge about the conflict from a Western perspective, delineating the historical sequence of the conflict.

A complex understanding of dominant socio-historical ideologies such as Zionism and Arab nationalism is vital to a study on Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in music. The particular ideologies and practical realities of Zionism are under continuous and active debate and are perceived as so tied to the contemporary conflict that it is difficult to find a measured account of them.⁴¹ It has been equally difficult to find measured accounts of Arab nationalism, Islamic Imperialism, and pan-Arabism, perhaps for similar reasons. For information on the above areas, I have consulted a variety of sources including traditional accounts of the history of Israel and Zionism, also called ‘Labour Zionism’ or ‘mainstream Zionism’, which is described as ‘underlying the policies and plans of all Israeli governments since the creation of the nation-state’ (Nimni 2003, 43).

Nimni and others (e.g. Ram 2007) propose that traditional Zionist discourse is challenged by two broad socio-political discourses: neo-Zionism and post-Zionism. The latter is a discourse that ‘rejected the nationalist ambition to form a cohesive universal identity, adopting a postcolonial discourse that gave voice to subaltern sectors of the population such as Palestinian Israelis and Mizrahim’ (Dardashti 2009, 3) (also discussed in Ram 2011; Gelber 2011). This discourse resonates among left-wing political groups in Israel. Nimni offers a rather balanced account of the challenges of post-Zionism (2003). Promulgators of post-Zionist histories (e.g. Shlaim, Pappé, Levine, Morris) ‘dispute Zionist historiography and ideological assumption, although the authors do not necessarily identify themselves as post-Zionists’ (Kelman 1998, 47). Traditional Zionist accounts are challenged by the work of a school self-designated, ‘New Historians’, with a ‘new’, supposedly more holistic, vision of history (Morris 2008; Levine 2005; Shlaim 2000; Pappé 2014).⁴²

⁴¹ Indeed, throughout discourse, both formal and informal, on Israel/Palestine, there is a problematic tendency to understand Zionism as a monolithic ideology. For instance, Barbara E. Mann describes the common conflation of religious Zionism and secular Zionism.

⁴² While useful, my main critique of their work (with the possible exception of Morris) is that it tends to be presented in opposition to ‘hegemonic’, traditional versions of history. In actuality, what they actually seem to be refuting, for the most part, are Zionist nationalist mythologies *not* Zionist academic histories. ‘New Historians’ have had their share of rebuttals. For instance, Ephraim Karsh has undertaken an in-depth critique of how Morris deliberately selects and mistranslates Ben Gurion quotations to paint a one-sided version of history (1999).

1.11 Concluding Thoughts

The above review of the literature shows the considerable interdisciplinary array of sources informing my investigation of intercultural communication in grassroots Hip Hop performances in South Tel Aviv. This review by no means accounts for all the types of literature employed in the research and does not include some of the less formal sources of data such as magazine articles, music, videos, Israeli and Palestinian fiction, Israeli and Palestinian films, and most importantly, ethnographic fieldwork.

My goal in this research is to explore the extremely complex dynamics of intra-Jewish, intra-Palestinian, and other identities present in Hip Hop musical practices in contemporary Israel. Hip Hop is perhaps the most researched current musical genre in the context of *both* Israel and Palestine, perhaps because of its appeal to disenfranchised youth and because of its perceived ability to apparently transcend cultural and national boundaries. Yet, I feel that the understanding of the complexity of Hip Hop may have been diminished perhaps due to post-colonial binary thinking. Edward Said articulates this apparent typical lack of nuance when it comes to describing Palestinian identities: ‘There are many different kinds of Palestinian experience, which cannot all be assembled into one. One would therefore have to write parallel histories of the communities in Lebanon, the occupied territories, and so on’ (Said 1994, 179). In the following, I hope to begin to untangle the complexity of interactions at play, suggesting new ways to frame and understand the intricate, multivalent negotiations of identity in Hip Hop performance in South Tel Aviv.

Chapter 2: The History of Music in Israel

2.1 Musical Genres in Israel: The Musical Battle for Identity

To contextualize this research, the following section will describe some of the major genres in Israeli popular music that continue to shape musical practice and consumption. It has been written in many accounts of Israeli music that musical genres are metonyms for competing national identities, a view Essica Marks summarizes in the following: ‘popular Israeli music should be understood first and foremost as a leading sphere in the symbolic representation of “Israeliness.”...an arena in which a number of musical genres and styles, representing the musical cultures of Jews with differing ethnic and social backgrounds, contend for supremacy’ (Marks 2005, 2). Indeed, from the 1880s onwards, musical genres in the *Yishuv* and later, in the State of Israel, have been characterized by ‘clashes’ of different influences produced by the diaspora sources of the music. Edwin Seroussi describes this emergence of musical genres following Jewish immigration to Palestine from the nineteenth century onwards as follows:

As they [Zionist Jews] moved to their old-new land motivated by the multiple social processes, ranging from their disenchantment with European modernity and its racial underpinnings to a renewal of Jewish religious myths rearticulated through modern national discourses, Zionists of all variants looked for a new soundscape. Israeli music emerged then as a convergence, and at times a clash, of voices anchored in diverse musical cultures shared by diaspora Jews with their co-territorial non Jewish societies and brought by Jewish immigrants to Palestine/Israel from the 1880s onwards’ (Seroussi 2012, 278)

Seroussi describes the ‘clash’ between the extant musics, reworked by the ‘Zionist’ immigrants.⁴³ Evident in the description of musical genre is the fact that Zionist perspectives are diverse and were under constant negotiation in both religious and secular contexts (Laqueur 2003).⁴⁴ Seroussi argues that there is the direct link between the construction of musical genre and ideology: the construction of Zionist Israeli national identity was represented by the emergence of a dominant, nationalist musical genre. The suppression or masking of musical influences reflected extant social inequalities between dominant

⁴³ To label all the arriving Jewish refugees Zionists as a uniform category is somewhat of a simplification. Barbara E. Mann views the motivations of Jewish immigrants to Israel/Palestine as complex and describes some as not conventionally ‘Zionist’ but merely fleeing persecution in the only haven available to them (2006).

⁴⁴ Zionist perspectives are often interpreted as emerging in a contemporary nationalist vacuum, served by a modern re-interpretation of ancient mythology (Zerubavel 1995).

expressions of nationalism and more marginalized communities. The demographic stratification of Israeli society is viewed as reflected in the suppression of Mizrahi music (Seroussi, Halper and Squires-Kidron 1989), and the integration of Palestinian and Jewish-Arab music so as not to ‘index any of its specific sources of translation’ (Seroussi 2012, 278). Developing music and even musical genres to reinforce nationalism, whether the nation-state is extant or desired, is nothing new. Indeed, musical genres have been invented and employed to transform social relations, nationalism, and material culture.

I will continue this chapter by relating observations that occurred outside of the formal music-making context that revealed the way in which Israeli musical genres function as metonyms for competing national identities. As seen above, this role of music in Israeli society is often noted in academic scholarship; however, to observe this phenomenon as an ethnomusicologist ‘in the field’, so to speak, was another thing entirely than reading it in abstract form. When I started my fieldwork in Tel Aviv-Yafo in 2011, I typically stayed at an inexpensive but comfortable hostel in the Florentine area of South Tel Aviv. Initially appearing dangerous, the industrial, graffiti-covered neighbourhood (see Figure 1)⁴⁵ actually was a relatively safe, relaxed enclave. The neighbourhood was home to a plethora of different communities including Eritrean migrants and Jewish-Israeli hipsters.⁴⁶ It was filled with little alleys, each with tiny garage-type workshops housing artisans’ warehouses, producing a multitude of miscellaneous products such as wooden toys, brass doorknobs, mattresses, and rocking chairs.

⁴⁵ South Tel Aviv has such an interesting variety of graffiti that Guy Sharett, a local resident, teaches Hebrew and Arabic to tourists through analyses of written graffiti (www.streetwisehebrew.com).

⁴⁶ The term ‘hipsters’ here simply refers to middle class, left-wing Israelis in their 20s and 30s living in urban areas who have adopted a primarily ‘Western’ style of dress and music consumption.



Figure 1: The Florentine Neighbourhood

Note: graffiti, alleys, and little artisan ‘shacks’

Also nestled in the small spaces of the Florentine neighbourhood were informal, gritty art galleries, restaurants and cafes, and a dog-washing venue. The infamous ‘Hoodna Bar’ that showcases live bands (Jewish, Palestinian, and other) by night and appears to be an abandoned shack by day lies on Abarbanel Street. Part of my motivation for staying in a hostel rather than a more comfortable hotel, was to come into contact with people that I would not otherwise meet. Indeed, this choice allowed me to meet many young Israelis, migrant workers, and street performers with relative ease. Meeting Palestinian-Israelis and/or Palestinian workers from the West Bank at the Florentine Hostel was unusual and usually required sojourns in Jaffa (e.g. at the ‘Old Jaffa Hostel’).

The public broadcast of music was an integral part of the hostel experience. From 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. music blasted from the speakers of the Florentine Hostel’s communal area, enveloping the kitchen and terrace in anything from Bob Dylan to Mongolian throat-singing.



Figure 2: Florentine Hostel, Communal Area

From my first visit onwards, I became embroiled in an ongoing musical battle with the young staff at the desk. While in my experience, discussions at youth hostels about musical broadcasts are common, in Israel, the musical selections acquired particular importance. Specifically, I became aware that the music being broadcast was often viewed as transmitting a collective identity. The musical selections emanated from a communal computer shared both by hostel guests and the staff. ‘Skyler’ a Canadian activist living on a commune near the West Bank who was often arrested by the police for pro-Palestinian activism, remained impassive no matter what was selected. However, ‘Ronit’ in particular, who is young, secular, Jewish, and of Yemenite origin, often expressed consternation at my musical selections and would often angrily rush to the computer and change the music.

The Israeli staff tolerated the music of Hip Hop groups such as System Ali and DAM, although they were not interested in their political message and, as a young man from Jerusalem ‘Ilan’ complained that ‘their music sucks’ and ‘I don’t understand them’. Classics from Egypt like Oum Kalthoum and Palestinian and/or ‘Arab’ classical music and even Western ‘art’ music was tolerated with some grumblings coming from the intercom. When I would broadcast 1980s music by Zohar Argov, the ‘King of Mizrahi music, for instance, ‘HaPerach Begani’ (‘The Flower in my Garden’) (1982), Ronit and her friend Lili were a bit put off, stating that this was ‘kitschy stuff that my father loves’. However, they told me that they were of Mizrahi origin and I noticed that, by showing an interest in Mizrahi music, I gained a special status in their eyes. Following my broadcasting of Mizrahi music, they began

to greet me by name and to talk to me about their parents, although they threatened to change the Mizrahi selection almost immediately.

The staff's receptiveness to my musical selections ended when I began to play Israeli religious music. For instance, I broadcast Ashkenazi Chasidic religious music such as Mordechai Ben David's 'Mashiach' ('Messiah') (1991). The first time that I broadcast religious music, I heard curses over the intercom. Next, some of the staff ran out of the office stating 'Never, not now, not in this hostel! Ever!' Modern religious music by Mizrahi artists (e.g. Gad Elbaz) was more tolerated but also vigorously spurned. The visitors from overseas who often listened respectfully to my choices or even danced appreciatively to them, looked shocked at the staff's reaction. When asked to elaborate about their disdain of the music, the staff members said that this music was 'religious', as if that was explanation enough. This reaction fits in with the much-discussed rift between secular and religious communities in Israel. Regev and Seroussi suggest that the 'deliberate limitations' imposed on the accessibility of popular religious music 'reflect the oppositional stand of the ultraorthodox Jews...towards secular Israeli culture' (2004, 237). Perhaps this 'opposition' explains why the relatively secular staff were affronted even by the musical sounds, to the point that it was not even tolerated when the staff were otherwise extremely anxious to please. Perhaps they associated the music with the stereotypical view that that religious people were bigoted and responsible for many of the ills of the country. In Israel, one can technically avoid the mandatory draft if one is 'religious', hence, perhaps, the perception that religious people are living off the hardship of others.⁴⁷ Overall, my experience with the staff reflected the way in which 'music' is perceived as representing certain larger segregated groups based on the ethnicity or identification of the artist. After witnessing these altercations, some young hostel-dwellers would deliberately put on religious Jewish music in order to see the secular Israelis storm out of the reception.

My dispute with the staff over music shows the complex negotiation of identities and/or communities that is part of contemporary life in Israel. Vertovec's notion of 'superdiversity' is an interpretative post-colonial theoretical frame for understanding our identity interactions,

⁴⁷ Noah Efron discusses the rift between secular and religious Jews in Israel in *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra-orthodox - The Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel* (2003). Historically, ultra-orthodox men are exempted from the mandatory draft into the Israeli army if they are pursuing religious studies (e.g. in a Yeshiva). This, and other factors, seem to have led to a common perception of the ultra-orthodox Jews as draft-dodgers and non-productive members of society.

a theoretical term describing a dynamic of identity variables such as nationality, language, migration (2007). The altercation can be viewed as a conflict between my diaspora (Canadian)-Jewish-practising-older self and their Israeli-Jewish-Mizrahi-secular younger selves. As an outsider, my music selection was a symbolic imposition of a national identity, which they vehemently rejected.

2.2 *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* (Songs of the Land of Israel)

In the context of the State of Israel, long before its official establishment in 1948, European folk songs imported from Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were revived and transformed to form a pantheon of nationalist songs. In the nineteenth century, Zionist ideologies and social practices prescribed the formation of a homogeneous, distinctive secular Jewish identity, musical and otherwise. This resulted in the formation of ‘Songs of the Land of Israel’ (*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*), also called ‘Israeli Folksong’ and ‘The Hebrew Song’ (Eliram 2001), a canon, that is, an official body of works considered genuinely Israeli, originating from folk songs of mostly Eastern European origin. Songs of the Land of Israel (SLI) were performed and composed approximately between the years between 1920 and 1980. Much has been written regarding SLI, including discussions on whether the genre should be divided into sub-genres and whether it should be defined as folk music (Cohen and Katz 1977) or popular music (Regev 2004). However, scholars have generally agreed on a typography of characteristics that unite examples of SLI. The songs were generally created by well-known poets and composers in the Israeli and pre-state establishment, supported by official agencies such as the Jewish National Fund (Shahar 1993). In terms of content, they tend to use Jewish/Israeli literary tropes to evoke specific places in the Israeli geographic landscape. The songs often employ the first-person, plural pronoun ‘we’ to express Jewish unity. They were often composed in the Dorian mode and usually had simple melodies and accompaniment, facilitating their use in group-singing contexts.

Regev and Seroussi (2004) make use of Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh’s theoretical divisions of the different ways in which music represents and articulates sociocultural identities (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000, 35-36) to compare SLI to other musical forms. Regev and Seroussi determine that SLI’s role in crystallizing an emergent nationalist identity can be most associated with Born and Hesmondhalgh’s second theoretical category, namely, a music ‘imaginary’ that works to prefigure potential emergent forms of

sociocultural identity. Arguably, the term ‘musical imaginary’ could be viewed as sufficiently vague to side-step the complexity of music’s relationship to nationalism. Nevertheless, it can be persuasively argued that the SLI song-collective envisioned hopes for the future of the country that had not yet been realized: ‘The genre of “songs of the land of Israel”...is predicated upon the notion that the nation state can be sung into being through the naming of its most beautiful or significant places’ (Brinner 2009, 293). Musicologist Yotam Baum summarizes SLI’s role as follows: ‘SLI depicted satisfaction from manual labour, the beauty of the land and surroundings, and the sanctity of Israel as the true home for the Jewish people’ (Baum 2011, 15). In fact, the reality was that much of the land remained uncultivated and/or arid desert, and, while the songs often speak of a utopian Jewish homeland, the fate of the Jewish immigrants in Palestine was actually far from secure.

Classic examples of early SLI include ‘Shir boqer’ (‘morning song’) composed by Daniel Samburski and written by Natan Alterman (1934). The following excerpt from the lyrics exemplify the themes of SLI:

We love you our homeland
In joy, in song in work
From the slopes of Lebanon to the Dead Sea
We will cross you with the plow [*sic.*]
(in Stern and Davidovich 2009, 152)

Later examples from what Regev calls ‘the classic period’ of SLI, songs composed by Israeli-born artists until the 1960s, include ‘Erev shel shoshanim’ (‘evening of roses’). This is one of the most successful songs from Israel in terms of its popularity and dissemination. It is a love song with biblical references (see for example Song of Songs 14:4 for the reference to myrrh, spices, and frankincense), as well as its agricultural references to the ‘*bustan*’, the Middle Eastern citrus grove. More recent examples of SLI include songs by Naomi Shemer such as ‘Yerushalayim Shel Zahav’ (‘Jerusalem of Gold’) (1967) and ‘Lu Yehi’ (1973). The latter was meant to pay homage to the Beatles’ ‘Let it Be’ (1970) and promoted solidarity amongst Jewish Israelis during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Interestingly, ‘Lu Yehi’ was specifically composed for ‘sing-along’ groups, a characteristic of much of the SLI repertoire, often understood as a secular alternative to the ritual, communal singing of ultra-orthodox Israelis (Regev 2004, 67).

2.3 Palestinian Traditional Music

Despite the initial pressure for a peculiarly ‘Israeli’ music, in actual fact, Israeli popular musical culture continuously draws in a vast array of Jewish and non-Jewish global musical idioms. For instance, Palestinian traditional music was a label used by Cohen and Katz (2006) to describe the many oral folk music traditions of Palestinians residing in Israel. The label encompasses several different sub-genres that, according to Cohen and Katz, rather than conforming to *maqamat*,⁴⁸ are differentiated by ‘musicopoetic’ themes (Cohen and Katz 2006, 3). Ultimately these diverse local musics are united by the following characteristics: a.) coming from an oral tradition b.) characterized by performers as ‘folk music’ c.) vocal-centric, with a particular importance placed on text d.) primarily improvisational.

Contemporary practitioners in Israel include Amal Murkus, Taiseer Elias and Samir and Wissam Joubran. Apart from Cohen and Katz’s important typology written some years ago, very little has been written on Palestinian traditional music within Israel that focuses on musical characteristics and repertoire. Arguably, this genre has received insufficient scholarly attention perhaps inviting new explorations of Palestinian traditional music in future academic research.

2.4 Mizrahi Music

Mizrahi music was a label used to describe all musical output of Jewish immigrants from the ‘Arab’ world. The music was originally considered contentious because of the cultural (and physical) proximity of its performers and practitioners with Christian and/or Muslim Arabs. Galeet Dardashti describes the challenges faced by Mizrahi musicians:

in spite of the country’s [Israel’s] large Mizrahi...and Palestinian populations, Middle Eastern musical traditions were marginalized and almost entirely excluded from dominant musical media for decades after the birth of the state (2009a: viii)

Thus, Mizrahi heritage was often suppressed from mainstream cultural idioms: ‘Mizrahim have...been forced to erase their cultural origins and adopt the dominant quasi-Western Israeli culture constituted by Ashkenazi Zionists’ (Saada-Ophir, 2006, 205). Indeed, Mizrahi

⁴⁸ *Maqamat* refers to the systems of melodic modes and improvisation employed in traditional Middle Eastern musics.

music, colloquially dubbed ‘Israeli country music’, is often scorned by some Israelis as being kitschy or sounding ‘too Arabic’.⁴⁹ Previous scholarship on Mizrahi music has focussed on its marginal, minority status within a ‘dominant, European-based Israeli culture’ (Seroussi, Halpern and Squires-Kidron, 1989, 131). However, more recently, Mizrahi music has been accepted into Israeli culture at large. The music is now part of mainstream Israeli music through changing performance practices and musical fusion, arguably part of a broader global process of musical changes.

Mizrahi music can be viewed as a deliberate blend of both ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ elements.⁵⁰ It emerged in the 1950s, with the massive influx of Jews that had emigrated and/or been expelled from many Middle Eastern countries following the establishment of the State of Israel. Sizeable populations came from Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Yemen, bringing with them their musical traditions. The origins of Mizrahi music are associated with grassroots performers in the neighbourhoods of Israel, most notably the predominantly Yemenite neighbourhood of Tel Aviv called Kerem Hatemanim and also the city of Ramat Gan, which has a large Jewish-Iraqi population. These neighbourhoods became ‘melting pots’ for musical mixture and experimentation of a variety of Middle Eastern influences due to the convergence of Jewish communities. Initially, Mizrahi music was often played live at weddings and other community events. While the lyrics were usually in Hebrew, the music is described as being in a predominantly ‘Arab’ style. In other words, it often incorporated traditional Middle Eastern instruments (e.g. the oud, the kanun, and the darbuka).

Gradually, Mizrahi music was infused with ‘modern’ instruments. In the 1960s, performers added acoustic guitar and electric guitar, and their sound became more eclectic and current in relation to other emergent genres (e.g. rock). Intonation was typically Western. Singers no longer used the quartertone scales typical of Arabic music. Singers used the occasional quartertone to emphasize important points, but the music did not use traditional maqmat. Lyrics were originally texts taken from classic Hebrew literature, including liturgical texts

⁴⁹ The appellation ‘Israeli country music’ caught my eye on a facebook forum dedicated to Mizrahi music: ‘Musika Mizrahit IS ISRAEL’, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2216227725>. It was such a suitable description that I had to include it here. Mizrahi music is also known by the derogatory term ‘cassette music’ and ‘Central Bus Station music’, ‘referring to the central bus station in Tel Aviv where most of the music is sold’ (Seroussi, Halpern and Squires-Kidron 1989, 131).

⁵⁰ The term *Muzika Yam Tikhonit* (Mediterranean music) is often associated with *Muzika Mizrahit*, however the former usually connotes more of a Sephardic and/or Ladino influence (Sheleg 2012, 124).

and poems by medieval Hebrew poets. Later texts by Israeli poets were used as well as original lyrics. An example is the song 'Hanale Hitbalbela' ('little Hannah was confused'), which was released in the 1970s. Arguably the most popular version was sung by Rami Danokh (1975). Set to a traditional klezmer tune, the lyrics are by the Hebrew poet and lyricist Natan Alterman (written in 1933), a social commentary reflected in a love story between an Ashkenazi boy and a Mizrahi girl. Stein and Swedenburg consider the Mizrahi appropriation of the song 'retuned' with Greek and Arab influences, to confuse and shift 'the grounds of power' (Stein and Swedenburg 2004, 211). However, more generally these 'counter-appropriations' can be understood as reflecting Mizrahi musicians growing influence and popularity beyond Mizrahi communities.

The advent of cassettes in the 1970s allowed low-income practitioners of *Muzika Mizrahit* to easily disseminate their work, resulting in an increasing awareness of it outside of Mizrahi neighbourhoods. At first, *Muzika Mizrahit* was not marketed in the mainstream but was produced independently and sold 'underground' at the central bus stations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and played there on boomboxes or broadcast from small shops or cars. Thus it came to be known as *muzika cassetot*, or 'cassette music'. However, since the 1980s many of the songs have been considered Israeli classics. Zohar Argov was arguably the most famous performer of *Muzika Mizrahit* with hits like 'Elinor' (1980) and 'HaPerach Begani' ('the flower of my garden') (1982) both written by the well-known lyricist and arranger, Avihu Medina (b.1948). Amy Horowitz describes the development of this music exemplified by Argov and others as '*Muzika Yisraelit Yam Tochnit*' ('Israeli Mediterranean music') a mediation between 'Israeli nationalism and Mizrahi ethnicity' (Saada-Ophir 2005, 207).

Since the mid-1980s, Mizrahi music became more mainstream, perhaps in part due to the sheer number of Mizrahim in Israel. Indeed, while there is now no neat division between demographic groups since, for one thing, there are many people of 'mixed' heritage. Even so, statistically, Mizrahim now outnumber the Ashkenazim, that is Jews originating from European countries. Recent popular sub-genres of Mizrahi music include 'Dika'on' a genre described by some of my informants as 'like Mizrahi music, only heavier'. Recent examples of Mizrahi music that have a Western pop feel and religious content include the work of singer Eyal Golan with songs such as 'Melech Malchei Hamelachim' ('King of Kings') from the album 'Nigat BaLev' ('you touched my heart') (2012).

2.5 *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* (Israeli Ethnic Music)

Muzika Etnit Yisraelit (Israeli Ethnic Music) is a non-mainstream genre utilizing traditional instruments that originated in the 1970s and was performed primarily by musician Shlomo Bar. It gained prominence and interestingly, international rather than national, recognition starting in the 1990s. The genre in the 1990s was characterized specifically by Arab-Israeli musical collaborations that Benjamin Brinner describes as: ‘unprecedented interaction between Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze musicians in Israel and the West Bank’ (Brinner, 2008: 41).

Outside of Israel, Israeli Ethnic Music tends to be marketed in the ‘world music’ category. One of the pioneers of the genre, Yair Dalal, has performed and conducted workshops in Israel and internationally, the majority of which embody his explicit message of peace and coexistence. Dalal advocates peace between Israelis and Palestinians and equality for Mizrahim, particularly Iraqi Jews. Musically, *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* includes Jewish-Arab and Arab traditional musical influences, and also contains elements of Western ‘art’ music, Indian, Balkan and jazz musics. Brinner argues that *Muzika Etnit* exemplifies music as a unifying force that transcends cultural identity and that encourages intercultural dialogue. (Brinner, 2008: 41; Dardashti 2009a). Dardashti points out that *Muzika Etnit* is as much a political movement as a musical one, a declaration of the left-wing stance of those performing it. In some cases the feeling that musical excellence should be the goal no matter what the situation. According to Palestinian oud player, Taiseer Elias, the best players should be sought out be they Jewish or Muslim (discussed in Dardashti 2009a). While *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* tends to focus on promoting Jewish-Arab dialogue through musical encounter, there are many other important genres that promote dialogue between other relatively segregated elements of the population in the South Tel Aviv urban space. These include *piyyutim*, spiritual hymns, that Dardashti argues bring together members of the Jewish religious and secular communities (2007).

Dardashti considers Arab-Israeli musical collaborations in the Israeli Ethnic Music genre to be motivated by hopefulness brought about initially by the Oslo Accords of 1993. This pivotal event revived an Israeli interest in Arab culture, albeit one ‘stripped of threatening traces of Palestinian ethnonationalism’ (Dardashti 2009a). As a result, Arab-Israeli collaborations, while certainly not mainstream, became possible, and encouraged by

international peace initiatives. In the early 2000s, following the violence of the second intifada, many of the collaborative musical groups were forced to disband, mainly for practical, rather than ideological, reasons.

2.6 Other Genres:

Israeli rock has been an important musical influence in the Israeli urban scene since the 1970s, with artists such as Yehuda Poliker (b.1950) (a blend of rock, pop and Greek traditional music), Shlomo Gronich (b.1949), Barry Sakharof (b.1957), and younger artists such as Aviv Geffen (b.1973). Israeli rock can be viewed as overlapping slightly with Israeli pop, and Mizrahi music. Pop music is also a thriving genre in Israel with artists of a variety of backgrounds such as Sarit Hadad (also considered Mizrahi), Harel Skaat, and Achinoam Nini. Pop music is manifested in various global and local competitions such as Eurovision song contest and *Kochav Nolad* ('Israeli Idol', literally 'a star is born'). There are also groups performing Afro-Caribbean musics such as reggae and Dub and diaspora musics such as traditional Ethiopian music. There are also performers of heavy metal music, a genre also called 'oriental metal' by the locals, exemplified by the left-wing group Orphaned Land (1991- current) and other groups such as Salem (1985-current) and Melechesh (1993-current). Of course, outside of popular music genres, other Israeli musical genres include a thriving tradition of Western art music performance (discussed in Hirshberg 1995; Sheleg 2012) and jazz, with state-sponsored institutions dedicated to their instruction.

Further, an influx of 'new' musics has occurred due to the recent arrival of many legal and illegal migrants, primarily from the South Sudan, Ghana, and Eritrea who have settled in South Tel Aviv, bringing with them their unique musical traditions and culture. I first became aware of these musics in Tel Aviv during fieldwork in 2011. At times, I would find myself surrounded by refugees young and old carrying boomboxes playing their favourite cassettes, or pass by a music shop with hand-made Amharic signs advertising some latest hits. In formal academic contexts, Galia Sabar and Shlomit Kanari have investigated the music of migrant communities in their examination of African Pentecostal music in Tel Aviv (Sabar and Kanari 2006).

2.7 Hip Hop

As discussed by Dorchin (2012; 2013), the Hip Hop scene in Israel is relatively fragmented and therefore, it is perhaps inaccurate to understand all practitioners as connected. It is important to note that it is a genre performed by many individuals and groups residing in Israel, in both formal and informal contexts, and that it emerged in the 1990s (Dorchin 2013). Like *Muzika Mizrahit*, it was originally considered contentious and gained prominence due to its beginnings in urban ‘deviant’ locations in South Tel Aviv such as the New Central Bus Station. As Hip Hop is the genre of focus in this thesis, it is discussed in detail in the forthcoming chapter.

2.8 Music and ‘Anti-Normalization’

In order to understand over-arching socio-political conditions that shape Hip Hop production in South Tel Aviv, it is imperative to mention the topic of anti-normalization and the way in which it affects local musicians. Anti-normalization designates a polemical discourse that discourages ‘collaborations’, musical and other, between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians (including those with Israeli citizenship), considering them inherently ‘normalizing’ unequal relationships. While ‘anti-normalization’ as an informal strategy has been present in the region for some time, the anti-normalization discourse was in the last two decades formally introduced by the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement), a global movement that aims to put political and economic pressure on the State of Israel.⁵¹ The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), a sub-group of the BDS, defines anti-normalization as follows:

⁵¹ The movement was started by Qatar-born Omar Barghouti in 2005. Many opponents of the BDS and of anti-normalization point out the irony that, even while advocating the BDS’ goals of anti-normalization, Barghouti himself was completing a PhD program at Tel Aviv University. Among his critics, and a critic of anti-normalization in general, is Palestinian-British writer Samir El-Yousseff (for an example of an article critiquing Barghouti’s stance see: https://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-debate_97/against_2934.jsp).

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) has defined normalization specifically in a Palestinian and Arab context “as the participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people.” (PACBI Website 2011).

According to this definition of normalization, any collaboration that does not define as ‘resistance’ to ‘Israeli occupation’, renders the reality, e.g. a situation of political inequity and social injustice, invisible. The problem here is that ‘Israeli occupation’ is defined in many different ways by those who follow PACBI’s proposals: while for some, it refers to the military presence and the Jewish settlers in the West Bank, for many informants ‘Israeli occupation’ refers to the existence of Israel itself or even the presence of Jews in the Levant. For the last two categories of informant, any interaction with Jewish-Israelis is perceived as validating unjust political policies. Ironically, the logic of this discourse, while not called ‘anti-normalization’, is used to justify segregating and oppressing Palestinians as well as Israelis. For instance, many Jewish-Israeli or Jewish-British respondents stated that they would not initiate intercultural dialogue with Palestinians and Palestinian organizations because of the anti-Semitism⁵² and explicit advocacy of Jewish genocide in the Hamas charter. This logic assumes that all individual Palestinians and Palestinian organizations are equally responsible for the charter.⁵³

The main motivation of the anti-normalization discourse, promoted by the two mainstream organizations who promote it - PACBI as well as the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS), promotes boycotts/segregation in the selective area of Israel/Palestine as a means of acquiring three stated goals a.) the end of occupation b.) the right of return for Palestinians c.) equal

⁵² For instance, article 22 of the Hamas Charter of 1988 describes a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world, blaming the Jews for the French Revolution, the communist revolution, and most world revolutions for the purposes of corrupting humankind and amassing all the wealth in the world (quoted in English in Cohen 2009, 348).

⁵³ It is also relevant to point out that intercultural alliances between Israelis and Palestinians are often actively discouraged by both advocates of anti-normalization and extremist, right-wing Jewish-Israeli groups. For instance, in 2015 the Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day uniting Jewish-Israelis, 48 Palestinians and Palestinians from the West Bank (discussed in Chapter 9) was disputed by a.) advocates of the anti-normalization discourse b.) The Samaria Residents Council, a right-wing Jewish-Israeli settler group.

rights for Palestinians in Israel (bdsmovement.net). The anti-normalization discourse is two-pronged, proposing both a.) an economic boycott of Israel b.) a cultural boycott of Israel.⁵⁴

Arguably, excluding certain artists/groups based on their country of citizenship legitimizes segregation based on ethno-religious identity, not accounting for the many liminal identities that do not fall into either the categories of ‘oppressor’ or ‘oppressed’.⁵⁵ The result is that the anti-normalization discourse bypasses important issues of human rights concerning gender, class, finances, race and sexual orientation to a top-down, nationalist-driven vision of working toward social equality. This is perhaps because certain categories of identity do not directly concern the nationalist agenda.

Another effect of the anti-normalization discourse, in practice, is that it is often used as an excuse to shun individual musicians.⁵⁶ For instance, while conducting this research, an academic body at an Ivy League institution in the USA chose to boycott the scholarship of Israeli academics, operating in the name of the BDS. The Israeli academics in question were Jewish-Israeli women who taught music to Bedouin girls in unrecognized villages in the Negev. The choice of these particular American academics could be viewed as antithetical to the ‘social justice’ values supposedly espoused by the anti-normalization movement. The boycott of individuals who are from far less privileged backgrounds, simply because they are located in Israel, originate from Israel, or are Jewish, can be viewed as problematic. Moreover, the distinction between individuals and organizations is a slippery slope in the way in which it is employed in practice. Are musical groups organizations or people? Does someone participating in a group necessarily represent all of its values? Should System Ali and DAM members be shunned because they performed at relatively mainstream venues in Tel Aviv such as the Tzavta Theatre? The complexity of this discussion cannot be unravelled

⁵⁴ It is important to note that anti-normalization is a contentious and complex topic that cannot be fully analysed here, not least because of the polarized views related to it. For example, while the BDS’s goal is to ‘end the occupation’, many residing in Israel-Palestine do not consider there to be an occupation. Further, to some BDS followers, ‘ending the occupation’ means no Jewish settlements and Palestinian independence in the West Bank. However, to others it means taking over Israel as well as expelling all the Jewish inhabitants. This difference of interpretation characterizes many initiatives related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

⁵⁵ For instance Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are often affected adversely by the discourse in practice. However, there are other liminal identities that are undermined by the discourse: where does a Western, Jewish ethnographer with Bedouin ethnicity figure into this vision of inequality? An Eritrean-owned organization based in Tel Aviv? Judeo-Muslim families?

⁵⁶ In fact, the boycott of individuals is not officially condoned by the discourse.

here; however, it is important to note that it is something that musicians in Israel, whatever their ethnic origins, must take into account.

The anti-normalization discourse prompts many conflicting views. It was seen by some as problematic, and by others as the only possible solution to a desperate situation. The discourse was often regarded as useful in local, specific contexts, as long as the decision to not participate was ultimately up to the individual. The main problem that I witnessed in the field, is that applications of the discourse tended to assume that intercultural communication on the microcosmic level (individuals/organizations) always reproduces the real and perceived inequalities occurring at the macrocosmic level (nation/ethnicity). In fact, while popular musical genres practised in Israel are often seen as competing candidates for national identity (e.g. Regev and Seroussi 2004), the process of cultural production involves complex negotiations of power that are far more nuanced than national affiliations. Artists must negotiate multiple, conflicting ethnic/religious identities and/or politics, including overarching systems of power such as policies enacted by the Israeli government at State level, anti-Zionist movements both inside and outside of Israel, including large-scale initiatives such as the anti-normalization discourse.

It is important to note that anti-normalization affects Israeli musicians of all ethnic backgrounds in various ways, including many of the artists discussed in this work. Arguably, Hip Hop practitioners deal more directly with over-arching systems of power than with practitioners of other genres of music due to the lyric-dominated texture of the music, which is often overtly political. As such, Hip Hop artists' negotiations of identity and intercultural communication take on varied and interesting forms, many instances of which will be presented and analysed in the forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 3: Hip Hop: Local and Global Flows

3.1 Hip Hop: An Overview

Recent studies on Middle Eastern Hip Hop have emphasized its global-local interface and its function as a transnational mode of resistance.⁵⁷ Since the 1990s, ethnomusicological research focusing on Hip Hop has moved away from exploring practices bounded to specific locales and cultures. Instead, recent scholarship has analysed its migratory transnational nature, as it takes on new meanings in contexts both inside and outside of its locales of origin. Laudan Nooshin explores this process through a case study of Hip Hop in Tehran which, she argues, is a particularly ‘mobile’ musical genre (2011). Nooshin and others have argued that since its beginnings in the 1970s in US urban centres, Hip Hop has been adopted by people in diverse societies and cultures worldwide, often in markedly different ways than its African American ‘original’ counterpart.

While it is impossible to provide a detailed background on African American Hip Hop in this research, some discussion of its emergence and its influence on Hip Hop in Israel will be of value. Indeed, Dorchin has argued that in the context of Hip Hop, the ‘Black body’ is a cultural text from which Israeli rappers construct their own reality (2012). Whether or not one agrees with this premise, Hip Hop is undeniably an increasingly global genre. In the context of Israel-Palestine, African American Hip Hop was the catalyst for many Palestinians and Palestinian-Israelis to start composing raps and performing. Moreover, I maintain that the particularly American origin of Hip Hop has special resonance for Israeli audiences due to the many citizens and visitors of American-Jewish origin who will have experienced Hip Hop and various manifestations of Hip Hop culture closer to its African American ‘origins’.

There has been some disagreement about the locale in which Hip Hop originated. However, scholarly consensus holds that Hip Hop emerged as an African American musical performance genre in the 1970s in the South Bronx, New York City (Spencer 1991). Fabian Holt divides contemporary US Hip Hop into four main generic categories: old school, East Coast, West Coast, and gangsta rap (Holt 2007, 16). Early 1980s and 1990s discussions of American Hip Hop were imbued with negative criticisms of the music, emphasizing its

⁵⁷ Examples are too numerous to itemize here but some examples include Solomon 2005a, 2005b.

simplicity and the vulgarity of the language of the lyrics.⁵⁸ However, as Hip Hop's apparent ability to empower disenfranchised youth became more apparent, its redemptive qualities became the focus of academic study.

By practitioners and academics alike, Hip Hop became seen a means of escape from impoverishment and discrimination through performance and self-representation. Thus, Hip Hop became recognized as a way of getting young people 'off the streets...a rhetorical device designed to combat juvenile violence and drug abuse' (Stephens 1991, 29). This view of both American and global Hip Hop is reflected by artists, activists, and academics alike. In the Middle East, and particularly with regard to Palestine, Hip Hop, and musical performance in general, is often regarded as a medium that can divert attention from violence and offer an alternative to the attractions of religious extremism. This view was documented in Salois' research on Moroccan Hip Hop:

DAM [the Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop group] was "giving the kids something besides Molotov cocktails and suicide bombs," she [a journalist] said. Rappers were the only people speaking truth to power in "these closed societies" across the Middle East and North Africa, she said. And their music was the only thing keeping at-risk youth, kids from slums where Islamist mosques provided services and social ties, from joining violent extremists (Salois 2012, 18)

The idealization of Hip Hop as providing an escape for impoverished youth is a global phenomenon. A little known example is Hip Hop in the Canadian territory of Nunavut.⁵⁹ The northern territory is populated and self-governed by indigenous Inuit tribes. The population has one of the highest percentages of substance abuse and depression in young people. In response, 'Blueprint for Life', an Ottawa-based Hip Hop workshop programme, recruits members of Inuit communities, young and old, for musical performances. A combination of Hip Hop, breakdance, and local Inuit musical traditions (throat-singing, Inuit drum-dancing) have been harnessed by the group for social transformative ends. No formal analyses of the impact of Blueprint for Life on Inuit demographics have yet been carried out. However, several testimonies of Inuit participants describe their participation as being liberating and

⁵⁸ Adam Sexton describes early criticism of Hip Hop in *Rap on Rap* (1995).

⁵⁹ Apart from the fact that I have done research on Inuit Hip Hop, I include it here to show that even in cases in which the Hip Hop product is hardly known outside the areas in which it operates, it still has been used as a practical, social resource for local disenfranchised youth.

life-affirming.⁶⁰ This Hip Hop-dance-local/traditional music combination is very similar to that employed by the group System Ali. This combination is probably employed to reach a broad spectrum of youth and to promote some sort of continuity with local, traditional genres.⁶¹

3.2 Hip Hop and Resistance

Global emphasis on Hip Hop's potential emancipatory power and its association with global youth culture has reinforced its equation with subcultural resistance. Representing a common view of Hip Hop in academic literature, participation in Hip Hop, according to Ibrahim must be understood as 'an act of investment, an expression of desire, and a deliberate counter-hegemonic undertaking. The choice of rap... must be read as an act of resistance' (1999, 365-366). In Israel, the equation of Hip Hop with resistance is even more pronounced in certain groups since, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Hip Hop groups must define themselves as 'resistant' to Israel in order not to be shunned by anti-normalization initiatives.⁶² Indeed, studies on Hip Hop in Israel tend to focus on Palestinian-Israeli resistance and that of other minorities, including the Jewish-Ethiopian community (Ben Elizier 2004; Egeiq 2010; MacDonald 2009, 2013, 2014; Massad 2005; Safieh 2013; Shabtay 2001; Stein and Swedenburg 2004; Webster-Kogen 2013). These studies examine how the genre empowers marginalized groups against the restrictive policies of the nation-state through affirmative representations of minority identity: 'The few studies on hip-hop in Israel focus almost exclusively on Ethiopian Jews and Palestinian Israeli citizens and have been analysed through the prism of the construction of ethnic group identity' (Dorchin 2013, 80). David McDonald articulates this point in his description of Hip Hop by Palestinian-Israelis in Lod: 'Through rap, communities of artists and performers like Tamer Nafar [from DAM] 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' (McDonald 2009, 117).⁶³ Thus, Hip Hop's perceived function as 'resistance' to an oppressive hegemony and its empowerment of minority identities is often a scholarly point of focus.

⁶⁰ These discussions have been included on the group's website: <http://www.blueprintforlife.ca>.

⁶¹ System Ali's use of traditional genres is discussed in Chapter 7.

⁶² Obviously, this is not applicable to 'Zionist' Hip Hop groups. However, these also tend to identify as 'resistant', often in response to a perceived pan-Arabist hegemony (Ben-Ari 2013).

⁶³ Whether DAM's music has actually resulted in concrete changes in the life-styles of certain populations has yet to be examined in detail. However, it could be argued that DAM's music has brought the difficulties of Palestinian minorities in Israel to the attention of fans in international contexts.

Hip Hop studies focusing on minority identity and ‘resistance’ have made great contributions to their field. However, other recent scholarly contributions attempt to break away from understanding Hip Hop primarily as a musical expression of subcultural resistance. For instance, Swedenburg has recently argued that the academic tendency to reduce Palestinian Hip Hop to a resistance genre, focusing primarily on politics rather than aesthetics, takes away from experiencing it as the product of talented artistic expression. He undertakes a sophisticated analysis of the stylistic methods employed in several DAM songs that demonstrate lyrical skills and musical virtuosity (Swedenburg, 2013). Dorchin has also argued for a nuanced examination of Hip Hop, arguing that practitioners’ emphasis on resistance is part of an authenticating process, allowing them ‘to enact essentialized perceptions of blackness and make claims for their “natural” participation in a global hip-hop nation’ (Dorchin 2013, 80). Perhaps the propensity to analyse Hip Hop as resistance is due to contemporary demands for ‘authenticity’. Indeed, Holt comments that ‘another way to approach the convention of genre is to find shared values’ (Holt 2007, 23). Thus, outside of nationalist concerns, the emphasis on ‘resistance’ might be to establish the authenticity of Hip Hop emergent in Israel, since Hip Hop had traditionally been a genre that had been ‘rather exclusively identified with African American artists’ (Holt 2007, 23).

I argue that, when analysing Hip Hop one should differentiate between ‘resistance’ (individual motivation) and ‘Resistance’ (the response to an oppressive hegemony). The idea of resistance requires that one ‘resist’ something, but it need not always be something that is large-scale or fixed; in Foucault’s terms ‘[p]ower is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations’ (Foucault 1994, 90). Therefore, understanding Hip Hop artists and products as ‘resistant’ inevitably requires highlighting a particular point from which power is exercised, against which the resistance is enacted; but this focus should not result in the omission of other important nuances. In other words, the resistance communicated in Hip Hop performance cannot be understood solely as a response of minorities within the nation-state. The following discussion treats Hip Hop as a ‘space where different truths were being conveyed and contested, lyrically and stylistically’ rather than merely a monolithic, subcultural product (Dorchin, 2013, 81).

3.3 Hip Hop ‘Resistance’: Being the ‘Underdog’ is Relative

Osumare uses the term ‘connective marginalities’ (2007) to describe Hip Hop’s role as an expressive tool for minority communities to protest injustice. Osumare’s description aims to find commonalities in Hip Hop cultures globally. However, the way in which performers ally themselves with communities and/or present themselves as stigmatized is relational, not an absolute, and in the context of Israel-Palestine particularly so. Political scientist Isacoff comments that ‘[i]t hardly takes a regional expert to perceive that the way the “story” of the Arab-Israeli conflict is told is vastly dependent upon the perspective of the storyteller’ (Isacoff 2006, 1). Indeed, representations of subcultural identity in Israeli or Palestinian Hip Hop often reflect competing relational perspectives of the overarching conflict. What all forms of Hip Hop discussed here have in common (‘Alternative’, ‘Zionist’, ‘Palestinian’, ‘African American’), is that they all tend to identify on some level as the ‘underdog’ or ‘victim’. In fact, many artists can be viewed as polemically laying claims to the identity of the ‘true underdog’ in performance.

That is not to say that artists’ affiliations with the subcultural do not represent social reality. For instance, DAM’s work was pivotal in bringing an awareness of the difficult situation of Palestinian-Israelis to a national and international audience. The group became a role model for suppressed Palestinian youth. One of DAM’s most popular songs ‘Min Eerhabi?’ (‘Who’s the Terrorist?’) was pivotal in bringing awareness to the stereotypical association of Palestinians with terrorists. The lyrics highlight the oppression of Palestinian communities, identifying Israelis as ‘oppressors’ and ascribing the identity of the underdog to Palestinians. Indeed, McDonald documents Tamer Nafar’s consternation that Hip Hop was performed by Zionist rappers like Subliminal whose identities he saw to be in conflict with Hip Hop’s normative subcultural messages: ‘It’s insolence that people who are part of the majority take the music of minorities’ (cited in Dorchin 2013, 83). In contrast, SHI 360 (Shai Haddad) challenges the Palestinian claims of being the minority by identifying them with a larger Arab Nationalist majority. He asks ‘Who’s the oppressor? Please, you’re like a hundred to one’ in his rap ‘Forgive and Forget’.⁶⁴ Thus, DAM focuses on its minority status within the context of Israel/Palestine whereas SHI 360 and Subliminal focus on the larger context of the Levant

⁶⁴ SHI 360’s lyrics are arguably moderate, condemning extremism and advocating peace between Israelis and Palestinians by unification through shared values. These views are articulated in his recent song ‘Imagine’ (2014): ‘peace, love, and freedom, the same values shared by two peoples, seeking the same happiness’ (my translation from French) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6A1dtptAow> [accessed 16 January 2015]).

or possibly the Middle East to locate their relational underdog identity as Jews.⁶⁵ Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto describe the manipulation of scale to reinforce contentious political points: '[s]cale is conceptualized as a relational, power-laden and contested construction that actors strategically engage with in order to legitimise or challenge existing power relations. In the course of these struggles, new scales are constructed, and the relative importance of different scales is reconfigured' (2008, 231). The emphasis on different power-relations by Israeli rappers of different ethnic backgrounds allows them to better construct their identity as 'underdogs'. The manipulation of scale allows rappers in Israel of different ethnic backgrounds and political persuasions to construct narratives of resistance, reflecting their connection with African American authenticity based on narratives of oppression (Dorchin 2013).

It can be helpful here to use an example outside of Israel of how Hip Hop artists emphasize specific power relations to authenticate their identity as 'oppressed' or 'underdogs'. A similar paradoxical relationship of power structures can be viewed in Hip Hop performance in Quebec, Canada. There, competing 'underdog' identities are embedded in the relationship between minority Anglophones/allophones⁶⁶ and majority French-language Quebecois citizens. Low and Sarkar discuss how a type of Montreal-based multi-lingual Hip Hop has been employed by minorities (mostly Haitian immigrants but also others) to speak out against the Quebecois, French-speaking hegemony within the local context of the province of Quebec (2012). Yet, the French-speaking community is a minority in the context of Canada as a whole. In 1989 the organization 'Le Mouvement Rap Francophone' was established by Kool Rock (Ghislain Proulx) as a liberation movement for the French-speaking minority to emancipate French-speaking Hip Hop artists in the English-speaking Canadian hegemony outside of Quebec. Therefore, although French-speakers constitute a minority in Canada as a whole, Quebec has a hegemonic function in relation to its minorities, challenged by Montreal-based Hip Hop that defies state-imposed French language laws.⁶⁷ At the same time, North America's Anglo-centricity and English Canada's historic suppression of French-

⁶⁵ Again, both represent 'resistance' through identities. Just as DAM must be analysed in the context of the difficult situation of Palestinians with Israeli ID cards, so must SHI 360 be analysed in the context of Israel in the Middle East. Arguably SHI 360 could also be understood in terms of his Tunisian-Moroccan origins.

⁶⁶ An allophone is a Quebecois term to designate a person whose mother tongue is neither English nor French.

⁶⁷ The Charter of the French Language, also known as Bill 101, dictates the supremacy of the French language in Quebec. In the charter, there are specific laws to ensure the dominance of the French language such as requiring that all public signs are in French and no other language and requiring that school-age children attend school in French.

speaking communities (until c.1980s) also constitutes a hegemonic structure against which French-speaking, Quebecois Hip Hop artists contend (e.g. Ghislain Proulx, Jean Tarzi, Jay Tee).

Hip Hop in Quebec on the part of French-speaking Quebecois separatists often includes lyrics that protest against the Anglophone federal government. These protest songs have been used to mobilize large groups of Quebecois youth against what they feel to be tyrannical impositions against their Francophone culture and society. The rap song 'Libérez-nous des Libéraux' ('Deliver us from the Liberals') (2004) by the popular local Hip Hop group Loco Locass, became a huge hit in 2005 and won the local 'best song of the year' award. Salée describes the song as follows: 'The lyrics raked Charest [the premier of Quebec] and his government over the coals for betraying Quebec's social democratic achievements of the past forty years, for selling out to the narrow interests of the private sector, and for giving in to the federal government' (Salée 2005). The song articulates the artists' identity as the underdog in relation to federal tyranny: 'Ça fait qu'émasculé, pis enculé, le calcul est pas compliqué. On va reculer. Devant tant d'unifoliés déployés à tous les paliers' ([they] emasculate us, fuck us up, the calculation is simple. We will back away. Surrounded by Canadian flags at every level' (my transcription/translation).⁶⁸ Here, Loco Locass describes a situation in which Quebecois cultural distinctiveness and freedom is being stifled in a sea of mono-foliaged (mono-lingual) 'Canadian flags'.

The parallel example of Quebec elucidates how a critical examination of Hip Hop practices requires an examination of the large and small-scale power structures surrounding the performers.⁶⁹ Whatever the particular situation of the group, the construction of a subcultural identity allows groups authenticate themselves and justify their stances. In the context of Quebec, a uni-lateral focus on a single power relationship is rarely mobilized for politics. However in the context of Israel/Palestine choosing to emphasize one power relationship over another in performance often becomes a way to put forward political commentary.

⁶⁸ The word 'unifoliés' ('one leafs') is a derogatory term for the Canadian flag.

⁶⁹ It should be noted that in this analysis of competing power-structures, I have omitted to include Native Canadian rap (e.g. Inuit Hip Hop) which adds another dimension of complexity to the relationships discussed here.

3.4 Dogmatic Resistance: Homiletic Hip Hop?

Monica R. Miller discusses the way in which current scholarship examining the relationship between Hip Hop and religion has understood religious practice largely in opposition to Hip Hop as a “sanitizer” of “deviant” cultural productions’ (Miller 2013, 6). She suggests that such understandings place religion in binary opposition to cultural resistance movements, understanding religion as hegemonic, dominant and morally-guiding. This is in contrast with Hip Hop which is non-hegemonic, enlightened and liberating.⁷⁰ In fact, Hip Hop can be viewed not only as resisting oppressive hegemonies, but as offering its own replacement ideologies that can be understood as similar to the ideologies that they resist, as dogmatic in their own right. I suggest that this ‘religious’ quality is often in Hip Hop products, a directed integration embedded in the often dictatorial, scriptural quality of their lyrics. Perhaps these homiletic characteristics, particularly of the lyrics, are partly responsible for the appeal of Hip Hop groups and artists to like-minded ‘followers’.

Hip Hop’s homiletic qualities (e.g. ritual aspects, sermon-like articulation to an audience) have caused Hip Hop to be compared to religious practice (Neate 2003; Miller 2013). The method of the lyrical delivery has been viewed by Miller and others as akin to religious preaching – whether by a pastor, rabbi or an imam. Indeed, scholars have looked at Hip Hop’s usage in Christian African American churches in the USA and the ways in which it has often been used as a tool to promote religious zeal or even to evangelize young people (Barnes 2008). The affirmative audience response in Hip Hop also has roots in African American and more broadly American, evangelical preaching style. And of course, the lines between Hip Hop, rap and religion are blurred by movements such as the ‘Nation of Islam’ in the USA, which may in part account for Hip Hop’s success in the Middle East as both part of and/or a substitute for religious practice.

The homiletic, scriptural quality of rap is reflected in its origins. When Hip Hop first emerged in North America, rap ‘battles’ were commonplace in urban centres of the USA (1970s-c.1990). ‘Rap battles’ involved one rapper being pitted against another in a verbal ‘fight’. Famous battles include the infamous 1981 battle between Kool Moe Dee and Busy Bee

⁷⁰ Miller and others attempt to debunk what they consider to be problematic assumptions about the way in which Hip Hop has been understood in relation to religion in such works as *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader* (2015).

Starski at the club Harlem World.⁷¹ Edwards describes battling as the trading of insults, a faceoff competition for the best verses (2009). This verbal exchange is not dialogical, but rather a relational positioning between the two rappers, involving the immediate participation of the audience. This is much like African-American sermon preaching in Pentecostal American churches in which the audience actively responds to animated, inspiring prompts by the preacher. Recently, Hip Hop has lost this ‘live’ component for the most part – although there are some ‘battles’ hosted on radio shows. Now, this dialogue takes place indirectly when North American Hip Hop artists respond to each other’s insults to critiques of their music through their lyrics.⁷²

Homiletic characteristics, it can be argued, are also extant in Israeli, Arab, and American mainstream rap and subversive rap. For instance, Kendra Salois’s work ‘Jihad against Jihad’ describes how a young female Moroccan rapper, Soultana, creatively challenges the male-dominated Islamic hegemony through her lyrics (2012). As a Muslim female performer operating in Morocco, her message as a woman is that of a disempowered demographic; nevertheless, her Hip Hop performances enact her own ideologies or politics using an oration-style, repetitive sensory overload. The message of the emcee/rapper is final within this performative microcosm and this captive audience. No religious Muslim response is permissible. No Imam with a microphone is present to counter Soultana by saying ‘well actually, in our community, we do not oppress women’. Hip Hop then, attracts not just audiences who like ‘the music’ but often audience members who already agree with and support the political message being performed.⁷³

It is possible to conclude that Hip Hop’s ideological message, ritualized performance and the ‘way of life’ associated with performance and consumption, makes it a form of secularized religious practice, and perhaps a popular alternative to traditional religious life in Israel-Palestine. However, little has been written about this connection in this particular geospatial sphere. In the context of this thesis, it could be reasonably argued that Hip Hop’s religious

⁷¹ A live recording of the battle was released on vinyl in 1983. Part of the recording is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86XG7gw4RIA>

⁷² The most famous of these ‘delayed’ Hip Hop debates is the ‘Bridge Wars’ (1985-c.1991) in which a variety of artists argued about the true birthplace of Hip Hop.

⁷³ Of course, there are some exceptions in which scholars describe clashes between Hip Hop lyrics and the beliefs of the audience. For example, Uri Dorchin describes his mixed responses at various Hip Hop performances in Israel (2013).

qualities and explicit lyric-dominated structure imbue the genre with transformative properties possibly beyond those of less obviously homiletic musical genres.

3.5 Hip Hop and Finances

A discussion of financial motivations is required to explain some current musical phenomena, how finances shape the performance choices and content that local musicians make both locally and internationally. The role of capitalism might be usefully employed in discussions of Hip Hop in Israel.⁷⁴ For instance, Tamer Nafar's initial participation in Subliminal's 'Zionist' performances is little discussed because a rapper of Palestinian origin performing in 'Zionist rap' makes little sense from a subcultural 'resistance' perspective. However, from a financial perspective, Tamer Nafar's initiatives can be understood as necessary concessions made to function both locally and globally as a successful professional. The music market is tiny in Israel and even the most successful artists cannot survive unless they branch out to other markets, as rapper Subliminal states in a recent interview 'the fact that it's such a small market, you have to cross over everywhere just to be the king of Hip Hop is really not enough' (interview on globalgrind.com, 23 July 2012).⁷⁵ These other markets – often the UK and the USA – often have standards, conventions, and audiences that are quite different from local ones, resulting in the changing of the music product for practical purposes.

Palestinian performers residing in Israel such as DAM have even more difficulty in becoming successful due to stigmatization. They must therefore strive to reach out to transnational commercial markets. DAM's varied sponsors and initiatives exemplify the choices that a marginalized Palestinian-Israeli musician must make in order to be 'heard'. However, in global contexts, sometimes an interest in marketing their product resulted in detracting from their popularity. For instance, an organizer of a Middle East Hip Hop workshop in London conveyed surprise that, DAM members attending the workshop seemed interested in using

⁷⁴ This discussion might also be usefully employed in the context of Israeli music in general. For instance, recent articles have argued that Israeli musicians such as Idan Raichel, 'pretend' to portray secular tolerance but are actually cow-towing to progressive-Zionism (Webster-Kogen 2014; McDonald 2012). However, it can be argued that the polyvalent qualities of Raichel's oeuvre are motivated by the need for subsistence or commercial success.

⁷⁵ A full transcript of the interview is available at: <http://globalgrind.com/2012/07/23/subliminal-israel-dominate-us-market-video-interview/>

the opportunity to connect with the commercial American Hip Hop artists in attendance.⁷⁶ This colleague seemed to assume that Palestinian performers' concerns should be about 'resistance', isolated from financial dependency. Perhaps this interpretation is due to a romanticising of Palestinian Hip Hop performers. In *Theory of Shopping*, Daniel Miller discusses the propensity of Western perspectives to interpret non-Western 'primitive' and/or oppressed communities as devoid of financial interests. In fact, ethnographic specificity reveals that said societies are just as concerned with economic subsistence as large-scale and/or Western societies (1998).

Overall, Hip Hop artists may be motivated by the need for self-protection from social marginalization. During fieldwork I noted that identification with a group, Israeli or Palestinian or Russian or other, often was enacted due to peer-pressure or for the purposes of self-protection. Indeed, sociological surveys show that many Palestinian-Israelis tend to identify with and support Palestinian nationalism, yet most would also prefer to stay in Israel in the event of an independent Palestinian state. Ghanem and others argue that this is a response to growing discrimination in Israeli society (2004; 2011). In this social-political climate, an anomalous identity or ambivalent political opinions can endanger the success of musical performance. Hence, it is not at all surprising that artists express pragmatic views in response to over-arching politics and practical concerns like finances.

Being a successful musician in Israel requires negotiating a set of ideological associations and political labels, often shaped by essentialist preconceptions of identity. Salois describes these labels in her discussion of a female Hip Hop artist in Morocco:

[I]f a Muslim artist reaches a certain level of visibility, eventually she will be asked to choose a side in a discourse whose terms she can't control. Just answering the question—just being a hip hop artist, and a female hip hop artist at that—puts you in the “moderate,” “reasonable” camp. Essentialization, even with the best of intentions, becomes the price of success (Salois 2012, 18)

⁷⁶ My own informal reaction was 'why didn't you hook DAM up with the Americans?' I was supportive of DAM's apparent efforts to make connections with American Hip Hop artists, which I did not consider to compromise their music.

The word ‘Muslim’ above can easily be replaced with any of the other terms used to categorize an artist politically based on reductionist notions of their identity. Arguably, artists are market-savvy and aware of categorizational tendencies associated with their identity or positionality. Thus, Hip Hop artists in Israel-Palestine are able to achieve success because they have mastered how to emphasize aspects of their identity that will be advantageous in the space in which their music is performed. When analysed from a financial/marketing perspective, the flexibility of Hip Hop practices investigated in Chapters 4 -7 can be understood as being, in part, due to the need to cater to a variety of audience members.

3.6 Local Flows: Hip Hop Styles in Israel

Analysing Hip Hop practices in Israel presents its special challenges. Unlike the *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* (Israeli ethnic music) scene, which is held together by strong networks, the Hip Hop scene is relatively fragmented, divided along lines of diverse and even openly inimical ideologies and national identities (Dorchin, 2013: 80). The eclectic rock band Shabak Samech had already introduced MCs and rap into left-wing Jewish-Israeli subculture in the mid-1990s. However, it was not until the late 1990s that Hip Hop emerged in Israel as an independent genre (Dorchin 2013). Like most initially marginal Israeli musical genres, Hip Hop practices originated in liminal urban locations in which the music could be clandestinely disseminated, such as local bus stations. Indeed, Hip Hop in Israel emerged at the Tel Aviv New Central Bus Station in South Tel Aviv.⁷⁷ Dorchin, one of the leading researchers on Hip Hop in Israel, documents his ethnographic encounter with emergent Hip Hop networks starting in 1997 (2012; 2013). He was invited to ‘Mad Men’ a clothing shop located in the mall precinct of the winding underbelly of South Tel Aviv’s massive bus station. There, he encountered a group of teenagers from diverse backgrounds. An individual, known on the streets as ‘Chulu’, ran the shop and used it as a Hip Hop studio. Dorchin notes that the individuals that he encountered at Chulu’s ‘studio’ were ‘divided along ethnic, ideological, and stylistic lines’ (Dorchin 2013: 80). They were all drawn to the shop by their then unusual love of African American Hip Hop music. The youths provided Dorchin with some

⁷⁷ The bus stations in Israel are of particular significance, constituting third-space sites in which non-mainstream music can be disseminated. Musicologist Edwin Seroussi argues that the Ashkenazi majority in Israel originally considered Mizrahi music ‘contentious’. For that reason, it was initially sold and broadcast in the central bus stations of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv (Seroussi, Halper and Squires-Kidron 1989).

‘homemade’ samples of their raps, including an album entitled ‘Pissed-Off Israelis’ (*‘Israelim Atzbaniim’*) containing experimental tracks. This recording is now popular and ‘recognized today as the cornerstone of the Israeli hip-hop scene’ (Dorchin, 2013, 80).

Since those early days, several subcategories of Hip Hop in Israel have developed: a.) Zionist Hip Hop b.) Palestinian Hip Hop, and c.) Alternative Hip Hop (my designation). Zionist rap constitutes mainstream Hip Hop in Israel, and embodies messages of Jewish-Israeli nationalism and a critique of Anti-Semitism in the Middle East and in the West. Zionist Hip Hop typically is performed by Jewish-Israeli artists and largely operates under the TACT label (Tel Aviv City), started by the rapper Subliminal (Kobi Shimoni, b.1979). Performers of Zionist Hip Hop include Subliminal himself, the Shadow (Yoav Eliasi, b.1977), and SHI 360 (Shai Haddad, b. 1978). Other Zionist Hip Hop artists are: Fishi HaGadol (Adam Levinson b. 1977), Sagol 59 (Chen Rotem, b.1968). According to Dorchin, Subliminal produced the label TACT that brought together several practitioners of ‘*rap tzioni*’ (Zionist rap) in an attempt to ‘explore the congruence between Israeli and American urban spaces’ (Dorchin 2013: 82).

Palestinian Hip Hop typically conveys messages of Palestinian liberation and nationalism, bringing attention to the discrimination against Palestinians in Israel and in the Palestinian territories. Palestinian Hip Hop includes the group DAM (formed in 2000), a group that is discussed substantially in this research. DAM was founded in 1999 and is a group based in Lod, Israel. The group is composed of three Palestinian-Israeli (or ‘48 Palestinian) members, two brothers, Tamer and Suhell Nafar, and their friend Mahmoud Jreri. It should be noted that although members of DAM have Israeli citizenship, they tend to identify with the greater Palestinian collective of Hip Hop artists in the West Bank such as Arapyat (Safaa Hathot, b.1986, Nahwa Abed Al’Al), Saz (Sameh Zakout), and in Gaza including Palestinian Rapperz (Mohammed El –Farra ‘the Dynamic Rapper’, Mahmoud Fayyad ‘Kanaan’, and Moataz El-Hewaihy ‘Mezo’) and MWR (Mahmoud Shalabi, Richard Savo and Wasseem Akar).⁷⁸ These groups tend to challenge Zionism, advocating for the rights of Palestinians and in DAM’s case, the Palestinian minority residing in Israel.

Both Zionist and Palestinian Hip Hop subcategories usually identify their particular community’s struggle as the struggle of the subcultural against hegemony. Such stances

⁷⁸ I have included the year of birth for these artists only in cases in which it has been made public online.

mirror Hip Hop's African American origins as a subcultural protest genre in the US. Dorchin argues that this tendency to mimic African American protest discourses reinforces stereotypes rather than challenging them: '[i]nstead of appropriating blackness as a means to draw more sophisticated views of their reality, they [the artists] enacted it in a way that turned the world into black and white, good versus bad' (Dorchin 2013:93). In contrast with Zionist and Palestinian rap, Alternative Hip Hop usually conveys messages of inclusivity and is characterized by the inclusion of many different musical genres. My designation Alternative Hip Hop includes groups who tend to identify with the Israeli left-wing politically and tend to critique the Israeli establishment in their lyrics. These practitioners typically utilize a variety of musical influences, including but not limited to, rock, klezmer, and reggae music. Examples of alternative Hip Hop groups are Hadag Nahash ('the fish is a snake'), Parvarim Refugeeez (now disbanded), and System Ali. Alternative Hip Hop groups are usually composed of several members and tend to communicate explicit left-wing, anti-racism, anti-capitalism stances. These practitioners often critique mainstream Israeli Hip Hop (Zionist rap), as having become conventional and commoditised. These groups are explicit about their stance as indicated in Parvarim Refugeeez' description of their product: 'For all of you that look for an alternative hip hop that does not revolve how many cars or money the mcs got then this is the music for u! Basically parvarim is a israeli rap group and its the shit' (<http://israelmusicexport.com>). My reading of this description is that the grammatically flawed English is a kind of emulation of Ebonics (African American vernacular English). This identification with English-language Ebonics, rather than Hebrew, enhances their identification as alternative and their disdain for mainstream Hip Hop groups in Israel.

A distinguishing characteristic of alternative Hip Hop crews is not only their heterogeneous sound, but also the heterogeneous appearance of the band members. Dorchin describes the alternative Hip Hop group Parvarim Refugeeez as follows:

On stage, members wear their ordinary clothing as though each one is in his private room. This makes the group's look uncoordinated and odd: one wears sandals and the other wears slippers, one wears a blazer and the other is bare chested, one wears freaky Bedouin pants and the other square reading glasses. My own interpretation of the visual messiness is that non-standardization is the only accepted standard here. (Dorchin 2013, 85)

I noticed that during System Ali's album release concert on 25 July 2013, they resembled the Parvarim Refugeeez, donning widely divergent casual attire, similar to what they wore in

rehearsal. While two wore non-descript t-shirts and jeans: one wore an elegant, black shiny dress with hair stylishly coiffed as if she were going a dance. One sported a small Mohawk, and wore a tight, sleeveless shirt and workboots; one wore a black tank-top, jeans, and a purple top-hat. One looked smart in a suit shirt, dress pants and cowboy boots, hair slicked back, dressed for going on a date. Ben Shalev a journalist for *Haaretz* describes this sartorial heterogeneity as follows:

[W]hat's so terrific about the “conglomerate” of System Ali's rappers is that each has a separate, distinct identity. The rapper with the accordion looks and sounds like a Russian revolutionary, while the second Russian-speaking rapper, dressed in a jogging suit, resembles an assistant trainer in a Golden Gloves boxing club in Jaffa's Gimel neighborhood (Shalev, 2011)

System Ali members put it more simply:

We wear whatever we want because we want to and it is who we are. And since we are all different people, we wear different things. And that's it. Liba, she wants to wear a dress and me, I like to wear jeans and a t-shirt and Enchik has his sporty look. So what? It's all good, man (Neta, conversation at System Ali House, May 2013)

For Neta, the variety in appearance is about representing what is ‘real’, a trait that Dorchin argues is part of a ‘crisis of authenticity’ in Israeli culture (2012). While I have tended to explain this stance as being due to more immediate, pragmatic concerns (e.g. anti-normalization), I interpreted the heterogeneous ‘non-standardization’, described by Dorchin and Shalev, as reinforcing System Ali’s ideology by embodying their platform of inclusivity. Their visual diversity projects that not only should diverse voices be heard, but also that diverse appearances - and by extension diverse identities- should be able to stand out in public with impunity. This visual and sonic diversity was mostly unique to Israeli alternative Hip Hop groups, but was also present to a smaller degree in alternative Rock groups such as Shabak Samech.

3.7 System Ali

As System Ali forms a major component of this research, a detailed description of the group will be included here. System Ali’s members are as follows: Amne Jerushe (vocals), Enver Seitibragimov (vocals and percussion), Liba Hendler (violin and vocals), Luna Abu Nasser

(vocals and acoustic guitar), Moti Ben Baruch (percussion-drumset), Muhammed Aguani (vocals), Muhammed Mughrabi (vocals and percussion), Neta Weiner (vocals, beat-boxing and accordion), Yehonatan Dayan (bass guitar), Yonatan Kunda (vocals and electric guitar).



Figure 3: Photograph of System Ali from their first album *System Ali* (2013).

Arguably, System Ali embodies their own distinctive genre and is unlike any other Hip Hop groups in Israel. For this reason, it is worthwhile to mention some of their influences. System Ali's presentation has obvious similarities to urban Palestinian Hip Hop crews such as DAM. Indeed, System Ali have modelled their logo after DAM's, perhaps as a homage to the group:



Figure 4: System Ali Official Logo



Figure 5: DAM Official Logo

As can be seen by comparing Figures 4 and 5, DAM's logo is a black on white web of intersecting words in Arabic and English. System Ali's logo is in a similar form, the intersecting words in all four languages spoken by the members of their ensemble, Hebrew, Arabic, English, and Russian. DAM's influence on System Ali extends beyond the logo: in a show of support, DAM's members performed System Ali's signature song 'Building the House Anew' with System Ali several years ago at the Tzavta Theatre in Tel Aviv. DAM prepared their own song lyrics especially for the occasion. System Ali members seemed to fully support DAM's contribution and message, and appeared to feel privileged that they performed with them. In a stratified society in an overarching conflict situation this is an incredibly bold stance, reflecting the relative freedom of behaviour and self-representation permitted in the urban space in which these groups rehearse and perform their music. To summarize, this section has: a.) discussed different approaches to analysing Hip Hop in academic scholarship and b.) outlined the different sub-genres of Hip Hop extant in the urban space of South Tel Aviv. It should also be noted that there are many informal Hip Hop performances that take place in the urban environment of South Tel Aviv that do not necessarily conform to the categories 'Zionist', 'Palestinian', and 'Alternative'.⁷⁹ Some of these, such as a group I have dubbed 'the Russian break-dancers' have been discussed in this research. Forming a large part of my ethnographic encounters, I was at first reticent to

⁷⁹ Some groups can be viewed as belonging to more than one sub-genre. For instance, the Jewish-Ethiopian Hip Hop group from Netanya, Café Sahor Hazak ('strong black coffee'), could be considered both Alternative Hip Hop and Zionist Hip Hop.

include such groups in my analysis due to their impromptu appearances, relatively anomalous formations, and often unidentifiable songs. I eventually decided to include some examples of such encounters due to their importance in understanding the function of South Tel Aviv as an urban third-space that facilitates subcultural Hip Hop performances as well as intercultural encounters. The forthcoming chapters examine a variety of Hip Hop practices in performance spaces on 'borderlands' of South Tel Aviv, utilizing a variety of field-examples and theoretical frameworks.

Part II: The Specifics: Performances and Other Encounters in the Field

Chapter 4: Hip Hop Performances in South Tel Aviv's Third-Spaces

4.1 Hip Hop and Third-Space in South Tel Aviv: Potential and Limitations

Chapter 3 has identified sub-categories of Hip Hop in South Tel Aviv. It has also examined factors motivating negotiations of identity and belonging in Hip Hop practice and performance. Hip Hop in Israel is often examined with a focus on non-Jewish identities, which are represented as subcultures within the contested borders of a Jewish nation-state. The result of this is an emphasis on the ideological binary dichotomy between Jew/Non-Jew (often Arab/Jew and Palestine/Israel). Research with this emphasis tends not to focus on the nuances of other identities in subcultural performance. Hip Hop is of particular interest in this regard, because it sustains fluid balances of power and points of interchange between diverse individuals (Swedenburg, 2013; Ibrahim, 1999). Given the diversity of contemporary Israeli urban populations, the limitations and possibilities of identity negotiations inherent in intercultural encounters must be examined. To this effect, anthropological theoretical frameworks will be used to elucidate the lived realities and experiences of intercultural relations and the means of communication through which such relations occur (White, 2012).

Homi Bhabha's theoretical concept of third-space is an appropriate way to frame growing urban areas that are located outside conventional boundaries of identity and community. Bhabha's idea of third-space draws on Walter Benjamin's work, specifically, the idea of a liminal ideological space that is the consequence of dialectic contradiction (Bhabha in Rutherford, 1990). Bhabha considers third-space to be interstitial, theoretical space that transcends dominant power structures, in which new and divergent interpretations are possible. In his own words: 'the discursive conditions of enunciation to ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew' (Bhabha, 1994, 55). Bhabha's notion of third-space is crucial for understanding intercultural communication in Hip Hop practices in South Tel Aviv. Bhabha's term third-space is essentially 'theoretical space' rather than actual space, and thus is often used by ethnomusicologists to refer to the sound-

product (e.g. Hirji, 2014). Here, I use the term third-space to designate actual physical performance space which, I argue, cannot be divorced from the musical expression of subcultural, unconventional, or multiple identities. In this, I follow Krim's view that the current emphasis on urban space as 'discursive' has resulted in the neglect of the impact of real space (Krim, 2007, 29). The following considers the effect that the actual physical, urban structures, shaped by social, geographical, and historical realities, have on resident populations. These spaces are in-between environments constituting liminal, temporal moments and spatial movements, as well as liminal ideological displays. In concrete terms, performance in such spaces is instrumental in facilitating intercultural encounters. Sometimes the different identities involved in these processes simply co-exist within urban third-space, but often, they become united both through social protest and through different understandings of polyvalent performance. Practically speaking, this third-space is constructed in three ways: 1) through interactions in the locales (both performance-related and everyday); 2) through performers' explicit and implicit negotiations of music, performance space, stereotypes, and markers of identity; 3) through the access or accessibility of the third-space locales in relation to other parts of the city.

The convergent neighbourhoods in South Tel Aviv and the different populations residing within them have created third-space locales enabling intercultural encounters that might not be possible in other parts of the city. These encounters can produce a variety of results, not all of them positive:

The social encounter is a particular kind of meeting from which a wide range of responses may emerge (e.g. confusion, misunderstanding, tension, trauma, and even possibly social change). It is not a situation only restricted to confrontations between different individuals and groups, but also between individuals and materialities. (Fahlander 2007, 15)

This chapter investigates these points of intercultural contact in third-space and the way in which Hip Hop performance influences them. In concrete terms, musical performances are instrumental in creating havens that encourage the coexistence of urban residents, often divided by race, religion, ethnicity, national affiliations, and political positioning. Indeed, the temporary convergence of different populations in this urban space is reflected in Hip Hop practitioners' lyrics and performance videos, but also realized through different understandings of the polyvalent performance by the audience members. As discussed in

Chapter 2, Israeli musical genres are often viewed as metonyms for competing candidates for national identity. If so, third-space sites for Hip Hop performance are doubly significant. While the intercultural encounter is not always positive, these spaces have the potential to be, not only arenas in which diverse individuals converge, but also locales in which undermined or underrepresented minority identities can gain legitimacy and recognition.

It is commonplace that third-space performance sites emerge on the borders of different neighbourhoods containing relatively segregated populations.⁸⁰ Karkabi describes such a locale in Haifa on ‘the historical borderline of separating the Jewish Hadar and Arab Wadi in-Nisnas neighbourhoods in Haifa (Karkabi 2013). Yiftachel argues that third-space can be constructed in locales in which contradictions are already prevalent: ‘Palestinian/Israeli, business/entertainment, private/public, open/closed, and legal/illegal’ (Karkabi 2013, 318). Indeed, co-existent with the actual, physical third-space in South Tel Aviv is the symbolic space in which the Hip Hop artists operate. Fieldwork revealed that there was often a disjuncture between the place with which the artists identified and the physical space in which they rehearsed or performed.

Henri Lefebvre’s categorization of the social experience of urban space is a useful frame in which to discuss the different ways in which Hip Hop artists embed their music in specific locations in South Tel Aviv. Lefebvre suggests that the phenomenological experience of space is fundamental to the way in which people understand the world. He divides people’s quotidian experience of space into three categories: 1) spatial practices (daily uses of space, urban reality); 2) representational space (‘ideal’ space, theoretical space); 3) representations of space (maps, designs). Lefebvre argues that ‘representational space’ is the dominant framework in which individuals understand space, through symbols and abstract representations (Lefebvre 1991, 38-39). These nuances of artists’ relationships with urban space will be discussed with reference to Lefebvre’s categorizations in order to refine the examination of third-space in this chapter.

The following fieldwork examples exemplify how Hip Hop practitioners utilize literal and symbolic performance third-space. The locales investigated here are often characterized by dominant and subcultural expressions of nationalism that both influence and motivate the

⁸⁰ By ‘relatively segregated populations’ I refer to resident individuals of different ethnic, religious, linguistic, political or social backgrounds.

musical performances located within them. Four physical third-space sites for Hip Hop performance in South Tel Aviv will be examined as well as performances and rehearsals within them. These sites were observed systematically during the fieldwork period of this research with the goal of determining normative and non-normative behaviours taking place within them. They comprise a.) The New Central Bus Station; b.) The Block Club, a performance venue located in the bus station; c.) The Old Jaffa plateau; d.) 'Beyt System Ali' (System Ali House).

4.2 The New Central Bus Station (*'Hatachanah Hamerkazit Hahadashah'*)

The New Central Bus Station is a hub for travellers, shoppers, taxi-drivers, and others who reside nearby. It is strategically situated on the border of several diverse areas, including the Jewish Florentine artists' neighbourhood, Neve Shaanan, populated largely by African immigrants (primarily from Eritrea, Ghana, and the South Sudan), and the predominantly Arab neighbourhood of Jaffa. This position allows for the convergence of Jewish and non-Jewish identities in contemporary Israel. Sarah Hankins' work on the sonic dimensions of the bus station considers the locale to be 'an experience of liminality, of movement and transit, of sensory saturation, and of dialectical engagement between representations of familiar Israeliness and those of foreignness' (Hankins 2013, 283).

The experience of the 'in-betweenness' of the bus station, described so aptly by Hankins, is augmented by the fact that, in Israel, buses and bus stations are often the targets of suicide attacks. Since the construction of the first bus station under British Mandate Palestine in the 1940s, bus stations were often a target of terrorist attacks (discussed in Hatuka 2010). In January 2003, right around the time when Israeli Hip Hop was emerging in the form of jam sessions at a clothing store inside the bus station, two suicide bombers blew themselves up in different spots around it. These acts of violence killed twenty-three residents and injured one hundred, brutally transforming the urban space (Haaretz, 6 January 2003). Shortly after the bombings, an interesting incident took place where the bombings occurred. A Hip Hop artist, Chemi, from the group Shabak Samech who was a neighbourhood resident, unloaded some music equipment and began to play loud Hip Hop music in the street. Eventually, some of his friends arrived with alcohol and the group started 'dancing to the beat' (Hatuka 2010, 124). Hatuka calls these behavioural responses 'revising acts', acts that transform urban space ruptured by violence back into a space in which everyday activities can resume: 'These

actions can be understood to be a form of mediation or recovery from the violent events, actions that aim at repairing or improving space, whether physical or imagined' (2010, 3). The music became both a substitute for and a repressor of the violent behaviour. Like the explosions, the music abruptly invaded the space of the urban dwellers. While no recent attacks have been perpetrated in or around the bus station, the memory of violent events has arguably emphasized the perception of the locale as a site of danger and deviance.



Figure 6: The New Central Bus Station (West Side)

Since the 1960s, both the Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv central bus stations have been spots in which music that was rarely disseminated in formal settings (e.g. on the radio) could be appropriately broadcast. The history of Mizrahi music from its humble beginnings in cassette-form at the bus stations, to its acceptance into Israeli mainstream media, is a case in point (described in Chapter 2). With the political empowerment of Mizrahim and the social normalization of Mizrahi culture in the 1980s, Mizrahi music became mainstream, and grows increasingly popular. The process through which cultural products of marginalized social groups becomes mainstream is 'constantly attempting to cross that border imposed and protected by mainstream culture, to seep into a more legitimate area wherein it can gain more

recognition and validity' (Hamamsy and Soliman, 2013, 3).⁸¹ Historically, for both Mizrahi Jews and underground contemporary Hip Hop, the central bus stations of major Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem can be considered locales prompting the gradual acceptance of the music in larger social circles.

My fieldwork at the central bus station in South Tel Aviv revealed that specific cultural overlapping and/or behaviours that would not be usual in most other places in Tel Aviv were permissible in this locale. Describing the daily comings and goings at the bus station with my low-tech pencil and notebook, I noted the overlapping of, not just demographic groups, but of sensory experiences. Examples of these groups/sensory experiences can be briefly summarized as follows:

⁸¹ According to Hebdige, once products of subcultures become mainstream, they are commodified and lose their potential for countering the 'hegemony' (1979).

Figure 7: Examples of demographic groups/sensory experiences at the New Central Bus Station (2011-2013)

Character/ Identity	Sensory Elements / Reaction
At the south entrance, an Eritrean lady sleeps on some cardboard and ragged blankets	rotten vegetables, she snores quietly and a breeze stirs her cardboard blankets
A Druze lady sells flatbreads	singing, strong smell as she ladles batter onto an iron, dome-shaped griddle
And an older Yiddish-speaking lady does something in a bowl with her hands (not sure what it is) and people drop coins in her cup	noise of coins as I drop some in her cup and she shakes her cup as passers-by
Cab and Sherut drivers of various ethnicities look for customers, some slouching against the security railings, foul-smelling cigarettes dangling from their mouths. They often play 'shesh-besh' (backgammon) together.	strong smell of tobacco and sweat, laughter, yelling out of various place-names 'Haifa-Haifa-Jerusalem, anyone for Jerusalem? Petah Tikva, Petah Tikva anyone?'; the clatter of dice as they hit the battered backgammon boards.
Young Ethiopian men listen to pop music	they greet me with friendly, inquisitive eyes and dancing movements
A station manned by pale-skinned Bratslaver Chasid, replete with prayer tracts and DVDs, in search of secular Jewish males so that he can incite them to perform the daily mitzvah of putting on teffilin (phylacteries).	he is wary of me and talks unintelligibly under his beard, but lets me take a photograph of his stall and gives me prayer tracts
A group of three, young, left-wing Jewish-Israelis go into the tattoo shop	They talk quietly and keep to themselves, but are not unfriendly. They examine binders of drawings. One examines a display of tongue-rings. The drone of the tattoo-machine emanates from the shop
A young man who tells me that he is both Muslim and Jewish comes in with his Russian friends to dance and to eat shwarma.	a dance-circle of young men and some of their girlfriends is formed, clapping, strong smell of roasting shwarma meat
Next door, residents who identify as Filipina shop at the ubiquitous 'Kingdom of Pork', one of the few places at which the meat can be purchased.	I think I can catch strains of Tagalog and English as they stream in and out, sometimes with a child in tow

The visibly different identities and ethnicities designated above coexist in the urban environment of the bus station. After some exposure to the area, I became part of the daily exchanges and comings and goings of the bus station. Upon being informed that I was doing a research project, some young women who worked at a kiosk selling mobile phones would accost me whenever I returned. They would stop me to share useful bits of information. At times, minor interactions could be observed between the demographic groups. Jewish-Israeli Ashkenazim might patronize a Mizrahi-owned or Eritrean-owned shop; a Chasid might purchase a phone card from secular Israelis. Indeed, I observed the Chasidim purchase

various products from shopkeepers as they tended to their stall to incite Jewish men to perform the mitzvah ('commandment') of putting on tefillin ('phylacteries').



Figure 8: Religious Stall, Bus Station

Caption reads: 'Tefillin: your direct connection to God'

Directly in front of the religious stall was a tattoo/piercing shop that appeared to be predominantly frequented by lower-class Jewish-Israelis, non-Jewish individuals of Russian origin and some middle-class, left-wing Jewish-Israelis:

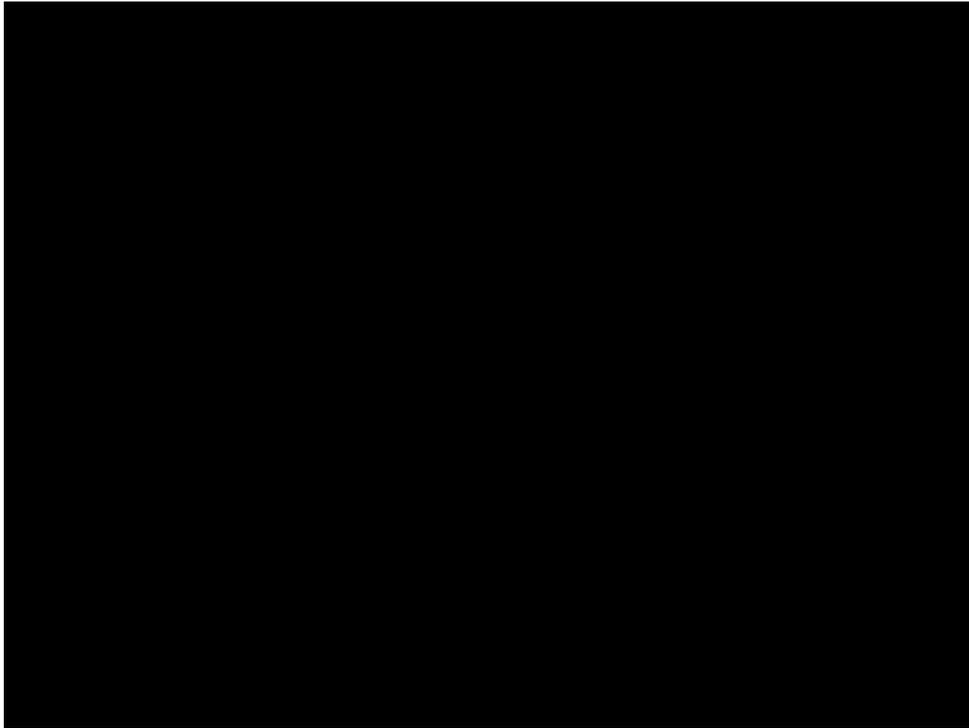


Figure 9: Tattoo/Piercing Shop, Bus Station; Sign Reads: ‘Permanent Makeup’

Overall, interactions of the different communities in the bus station’s urban space revolved primarily around small-scale commercialism. While some individuals of different ethnicities and backgrounds openly purchased from each other, both Jewish and Muslim individuals tended to stay away from ‘Kingdom of Pork’.



Figure 10: Kingdom of Pork Shop

Note the different languages on the sign: Hebrew, English, Greek, and Tagalog

While the business-oriented intercultural communication was limited, the playing of recorded music, responses to it, and the overlapping of sound in general, was an intercultural phenomenon that happened all around. Arguably, the sonic dimension of the bus station made the presence of ‘the other’ unavoidable. Wood describes how residents in local communities engage with sound as part of a fluid, localized way in which individuals make sense of ‘overlapping geographies’: ‘inhabitants and visitors alike invoke interpretative practices that shape everyday power relations’ (Wood 2013, 287). Wood describes how the interactions of transient populations shape the complex power relations in Jerusalem’s Old City through their interrelationships stimulated by the experience of sound. Rather than representing discrepant power-relations, as in Wood’s example, the transient populations interacting in the bus station embody differentiated transient states of marginality in the city at large.

4.3 DAM's Polyvalent Performance at The Block Club

This section explores an urban third-space site within the bus station itself. The Block Club is an underground musical performance venue on the ground floor of the station. The Block Club is fully enclosed by the massive structure housing the bus station. It is therefore a self-contained space within the bus station's unusual 'third-spaceness', 'third-space squared', perhaps. Both the potential and the limitations of Hip Hop performance in third-space in South Tel Aviv are aptly demonstrated by '88 Palestinian Hip Hop group DAM's CD release performance on 16 January 2013 at The Block Club. I attended the concert, notebook in one hand, camcorder in the other, ready to observe and record. I politely greeted the bouncers and asked them if it might be acceptable to take a few videos of the performance. They had no objection, so after paying the 60 NIS entrance fee (approximately £12), I entered the familiar main area of the bus station. Gone were the usual diverse café patrons, evangelicals, cab drivers, and tattoo artists. The upper area of the main floor of the bus station had been transformed into a smoking-room for The Block Club, located under the escalators. Tables, chairs, and sofas from the businesses had been arranged, rather haphazardly, to seat the concert attendees. Two young Palestinian men wearing trendy t-shirts, hair carefully styled, sat behind a table displaying DAM CDs and clothing. The bus station had been transformed from ordinary urban third-space into a venue for a subcultural musical performance.

The use of borderland locales for non-mainstream musical performance correlates with Nadim Karkabi's discussion of Palestinian music events occurring inside and outside the 'Green Line'. Karkabi draws on Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' to describe the musical performances of an alternative Palestinian collective. He describes these performance sites as 'counter sites in that they exist in reality, but they transcend or invert dichotomous divisions in real spaces' (Karkabi 2013, 311-312) He argues that these performance sites are 'grey zones' (Yiftachel 2009) that are geographically 'flexible', providing Palestinian youth with the ability to reconstruct and reclaim space 'without having to abide by the social, political or legal responsibility enacted upon institutionalized activities' (Karkabi 2013, 311). Young Palestinian performers and audience members embrace the marginal location of the event, which permits a subject-centred space open to difference and otherness. However, even in such spaces, participation and freedom is limited. According to Karkabi, the Hebrew-centricity of the Israeli urban space makes it difficult for minority groups to negotiate

performances. This mirrors Karkabi's critique of Israeli multiculturalism, which, according to him, is limited and repressive. Another limitation has to do with who is excluded: only select 'foreigners' and Israeli non-Zionists are permitted to join Palestinians at these events (2013, 326). In other words, the greater Israeli polity represses subcultural events. At the same time, diversity within this subculture is repressed internally when it is viewed as undermining a Palestinian nationalist agenda.

What is interesting about the 'Block Club' that differentiates it from the third-space for musical performance zones in Karkabi's research is that it is not a space like Jaffa or even some spots in Florentine that have traditionally been a locales at which Palestinian performance, normally suppressed, is permitted. I argue that, rather, the day-to-day transience of the space itself and the haphazard overlapping of identities normatively present in the bus station creates an atmosphere in which both local and non-local identities can converge for a performance involving the embodiment of subcultural identity. Indeed, this convergence of different populations is similar to other convergences of populations on the beach or the Jaffa Plateau, discussed later in this chapter, in which my informant Sa'ad, the break-dancers, the Eritreans and other groups participated. However, in this case, the different groups unite in public third-space to hear a specific Hip Hop performance. The performance is the motivating factor for the intercultural encounter, not a haphazard result of the perceived 'freedom' of the space.

The way in which the third-space is accessed is particularly revealing about the way in which it is perceived. When I started off to a DAM performance from the nearby Florentine neighbourhood, a large group of German tourists got into an altercation with my German friend 'Hilde' about whether the neighbourhood around the bus station was dangerous or not. 'Hilde' insisted that it was not, but the group insisted that it was and took a taxi directly to the bus station. 'Hilde' and I walked to the performance, getting into some interesting conversations with older Jewish-Iraqi men who lived in the area and who congregated around the shops smoking 'shisha'. We also encountered a group of young Palestinians from Jaffa on their way to the performance and conversed with them as well. Thus, we encountered groups normally resident in the area as well as groups that were resident in an adjacent neighbourhood who had been temporarily drawn to the space for the Hip Hop performance. Had we taken a taxi from the hostel, through the 'dangerous' neighbourhood, we would have

encountered neither the older men nor the Palestinian youths and thus would not have experienced the social and spatial trajectory in the same way.



Figure 11: The Entrance to The Block Club

Note: The Block Club is situated inside the bus station below some escalators. It has few distinguishing features and, to an uninformed eye, could merely be a storage room.

Scholarly work on '48 Palestinian performances in Israel typically places Palestinian performers' negotiations in contested space, emphasizing the quotidian marginalization that they experience. Such approaches often oppose a Palestinian minority with a Jewish-Israeli majority, causes the elision of other participating demographic groups or those in close proximity to the performances. DAM's performances attract a diverse audience, including members of a specific tourist population, a voyeuristic, mostly secular audience that can

enjoy a musical Palestinian ‘fight’ for equality and the company of its Jewish-Israeli left-wing supporters without having to deal with the oppressive everyday realities of Israeli and Arab nationalism. Ingrid Monson has made a similar argument about audience composition in the context of jazz: ‘white hip’ participation brought segregated communities together, but the participation of ‘white’ performers was limited due to a lack of understanding of the routine stigmatization faced by the African American participants (Monson, 1995). In other words, musical performance can precipitate intercultural encounters; however, this does not mean that the groups or individuals involved understand one another or that their ephemeral coexistence negates the existence of systems of oppression inside and outside of the performance space.

DAM’s performances must carefully cater to different types of audience members. My fieldwork with DAM at the The Block Club suggested that they are well-aware of the likely demographic composition in this third-space and of the attendees’ diverse expectations. Thus, their canny creative energy caters both to the tourist population and responds to community issues important to some of the different individuals present. Thus, DAM caters to disparate audience expectations and local distinctive, and sometimes inimical, collective memories. This polyvalence is evidenced in their name ‘DAM’ which means ‘blood’ in Hebrew, ‘eternity’ in Arabic, and is also an acronym for ‘Da Arabian MCs’ a western Hip Hop designation.

DAM’s awareness of their audience’s diversity can be seen during performance when DAM openly divides the audience into groups. Before introducing the first song, Tamer Nafar asks in Arabic, understood only by the Arabs there and the several Jews who understand Arabic: How many Arabs are here? Then Tamer asks ‘*Kama Yehudim po?*’ in Hebrew (‘how many Jews are here?’) to which the Jewish contingent responds. Although no Hebrew songs were performed, DAM have suggested to McDonald that their address in Hebrew to the Jewish crowd serves a political purpose:

I look out into the audience and see one Jew, I will rap in Hebrew. I do this because Jews are not my audience; they are my target. And I rap to them in Hebrew they have to listen. They can’t dismiss me; even if they don’t like what I am saying, they have to listen to my message. They need to know that I’m here, that I’m not going anywhere. That I’m going to be heard (Nafar 2005 in McDonald 2013)

The Hebrew and Arabic exchanges are generally not understood by the tourist population. DAM finally asked, in English, ‘how many visitors are here?’ to which several tourists from Germany and the UK responded loudly. If taken out of the context of Tel Aviv or even The Block Club, this introduction would appear to be unusual. I can scarcely imagine the emcee shouting ‘how many Muslims are here?’ at a show in London. DAM’s choice of designations identifies groups associated with the overarching Arab-Israeli conflict but, certainly, not all those present in this particular urban space.

It should be noted that DAM’s negotiations are very different depending on the time and place of performance. Uri Dorchin attended a DAM performance in Haifa in which DAM catered to a mainly Palestinian crowd (e.g. not ‘tourists’ and ‘Jews’) and therefore, at times he felt distinctly alienated:

The style enacted here supported a language, culture, and civil status to which I did not belong...If “ana mish hadem” [‘I am not a servant’] was the message they [DAM] wanted to transmit, then at least for me, who sat there feeling totally alienated, the message was heard loud and clear (Dorchin 2013, 91)⁸²

This performance was aimed at a primarily ’48 Palestinian audience; therefore, it was not necessary for the performers to cater to different demographics in the Israeli population. In the performance at The Block Club, after we had been designated into our appropriate categories, the show began in earnest.

While optimal third-space sites such as The Block Club allow for the convergence of fans from different backgrounds, this is not to suggest that the audience members comprising such groups are necessarily politically and socially aligned. I documented many different interpretations of and reactions to DAM’s expressions of nationalism that occurred during performance. These are too numerous to all describe here; however, I will focus on one particular example. The main area of The Block Club is a low-ceilinged, dimly lit chamber, with a small bar at one end and a performance space at the other. Due to the room’s closeness, its lack of windows, dim lighting, and its long, rectangular shape, one gets the feeling of being in an old-fashioned cinema. Indeed, audio-visual props formed a large component of DAM’s performance and the room is optimal for drawing attention to the

⁸² Dorchin’s alienation was not only experienced at Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop performances; he also describes his feelings of alienation at Jewish-Israeli, Fishi Ha-Gadol’s concert due to the performer’s misogynistic comments (2013, 93).

visual elements of their performance. About half way through the performance, the audience was presented with a short interlude. On a large screen at the back of the room, a video began to play. Obama's head filled the back wall and his voice was so loud that the floor shook: 'The United States of America is deeply committed to the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestine for the Palestinian people'. I noted that many audience members that had identified themselves as part of the Palestinian community cheered in response.

During the performance, I documented eighteen different responses to the statement of Palestinian nationalism incorporated into DAM's performance. I opted to divide the audience members into the categories that DAM themselves had designated: '*Aravim*' (Arabs), '*Yehudim*' (Jews), and 'Tourists'. Some notes from my log describe different reactions of the audience members:

1.) '*Aravim*' (Arabs)

During this track there is a young woman standing next to me. She entered the smoking lounge reserved and quiet. She is really enjoying herself and singing along with the lyrics in Arabic. She knows every word. It could be my imagination but feelings of freedom and liberation come from her like waves and I wonder what life is like for her ordinarily. I am astonished, however, when during Obama's 'speech', she and her friends shout excitedly, waving their arms' (field notes, extract from 15 January 2013)

The woman's response suggests that, for her, nationalism represents unbounded emotional joy and personal freedom. Indeed, the goal of music festivals for Palestinian youth is described on Facebook as follows: '[to] create a space for the Palestinian young community where everyone is welcome to enjoy freedom, have fun and be himself' (in Karkabi 2013: 317-318). This woman's reaction implies that, for her, DAM's performance has a similar function. Unfortunately, I could not speak with this young woman or any of her friends to gauge their reactions to the performance because they were continually on the dance-floor near the front of the stage. They did not wear hijabs, but were modestly covered from head to toe in jeans and cotton shirts. They ignored the men who were present and danced together in a tightly-knit group. They did not object when I, of similar appearance and similarly attired, insinuated myself on their group. However, when a drunken German tourist got too close for comfort, they subtly moved away in unison.

I meet Ahmed, Mahdi, and Muhammed from a village outside of Tel Aviv called Jal-Jabr. They go to Tel Aviv University; one is studying to be a nurse, one a dentist, the other, an architect. I ask them what nationalism means to them. 'It means that it has got to get better' Mahdi says 'In Jerusalem it is fucked up, and other places in Israel it is fucked up, in the West Bank it is fucked up and in Gaza it is really fucked up. In Tel Aviv, there are just snobs, but Jaffa is okay, and here' he says, pointing to the club 'here is okay too. Come to our class at Tel Aviv University. We have got lots of strong views about what it means to us' (field notes, extract from 15 January 2013)

It is significant that Mahdi considers The Block Club a place that is not so 'fucked up'. These three young men's vision of Palestinian nationalism is expressed as hope for social and economic improvement, and emancipation. Moreover they consider nationalism an intellectual issue to be actively debated in appropriate places. For instance they engage in debating nationalism in the smoking room of The Block Club and in their classroom at Tel Aviv University. At The Block Club, my friend, Hilde and Ahmed began to converse animatedly about nationalism in German, a conversation of which I understand little. Ahmed had lived in Berlin on a university exchange programme and was reminiscing about his student days there. The encounter between Hilde and Ahmed, a 'tourist' and an 'Arab', was the first direct intercultural encounter that I observed between the demographic categories designated by DAM.⁸³

2.) 'Yehudim' (Jews)

Yotam and his friend, a young woman with purple hair wearing a nose-ring, tell me that they are from the 'ghetto' of the Jewish-Israeli 'left'. The young woman lives in the Florentine neighbourhood and Yotam lives in a flat in Jaffa. They dance to the music. When they see Obama on the screen they wave their hands in the air and grab the shoulders of those nearest to them (field notes, extract from 15 January 2013)

'Yotam' the young Israeli musician who performs in a band with Palestinian men, considers such performance to grant his friends liberation from daily stigmatization and to provide a protest for housing demolitions faced by lower class Palestinians and Jews in his home neighbourhood of Jaffa.

⁸³ Other than the intercultural encounters that my presence as a researcher inevitably instigated during the course of fieldwork.

Maybe it's dumb,' Yotam said, 'but coming here to support DAM, it just gives you hope, you know. Like makes you think that things might get better.'
(Yotam, Musician, Jaffa Resident, Interview, The Block Club, January 2013).

For Yotam, Obama's speech symbolized hope for the future and by attending the performance he felt that he was able to contribute to the potential for social improvement in a situation in which he otherwise felt powerless. 'Gitit' a young Jewish-Israeli woman of Ashkenazi background who identified as 'left-wing' had similar reasons for attending the performance. However, her reasons were more ideologically-motivated:

'I mean, I've always like their music [DAM's] ever since 'Min Eerhabi?' [DAM's song 'Who's the Terrorist?'], so of course I'm going to come to a concert, especially if it's happening right next to my neighbourhood [Florentine] But it's also to show solidarity. Not solidarity on a Jewish level or a Russian level or whatever, but on a human level. Everybody's rights need to be respected in the state and it's just not like that now. And we live here, pretty much together. These [gestures to crowd] are my neighbours, even if we don't talk much or we just say "hello" or smile. And there's evictions and the police will harass people just because they're Arab and it's not right, you know?' (Gitit, Student, Florentine resident, The Block Club, January 2013)

Gitit was motivated to attend due to appreciating DAM's music on an aesthetic level and because this particular performance was located close to her home. However, her desire to attend was also motivated by inequalities that she perceived around her. This social injustice was not directed at her personally, but at other residents within and adjacent to her neighbourhood.

Perhaps the most varied types of responses were those of the 'tourist' population in the audience. Most of the tourists did not express their political views, but showed enthusiasm for either DAM's message or music. The responses of the tourist attendees can be divided into three main categories: 1.) those who come to enjoy the music and do not know or care about politics; 2.) those who enjoy DAM's music and are also politically motivated; 3.) those who are almost exclusively politically motivated. Karen Abi-Ezzi divides audience members in a similar fashion when examining Gilad Atzmon's political commentaries in his eclectic jazz oeuvre:

Atzmon's listeners can be divided into at least three categories: those who appreciate and enjoy his music on the level of the aesthetic, being totally oblivious to the political message being carried in his music; those who enjoy his music, understand the political symbolism with which he imbues much of his music and are enraptured with his music precisely because it chimes with their own political views; and thirdly, those who enjoy his music but are put off because they disagree with his politics' (Abi-Ezzi 2007, 101)

Abi-Ezzi's observation suggests that it is appropriate to categorize audience responses to musical performances that are overtly political in nature, such as DAM's performance at The Block Club, along a spectrum of different responses. Indeed, the most interesting aspect of the tourist responses was the variety of responses. Each individual had their own motivations for attending the performance that did not always match my initial expectations of the 'tourist crowd'.

Many attended the concert to experience inexpensive, live entertainment that caters to young people and because they are fans of Hip Hop in general. One attendee told me he did not know that DAM was a Palestinian group. Others stated that while they were politically conscious, they had come to simply 'enjoy the music'; this was the most common response of the tourist participants interviewed. Other responses were more overtly political:

3) Tourists

'Free Palestine!' chants a young man, Jonathan, from Paris, who is on a backpacking holiday with his friends, adding a coda to Obama's words. He punctuates his words with his fist in the air. (Jonathan, French Student/Tourist, January 2013, The Block Club)

Some weeks later, I bumped into Jonathan at a café in Florentine. He asked me what my political stance was. I told him that I thought that my political views were complicated. He then qualified his response to me at The Block Club:

'I know, I know it's complicated,' he responded, and hung his head sheepishly, 'Obviously, I have strong opinions about injustice, but at the performance, you know, I just got caught up in the moment. It's like when you listen to Tupac or something. I was also a little bit drunk, you know.' (Jonathan, January 2013, Florentine Café).

Jonathan's response indicated that, having stayed in the region for an extended period, he understood the politics to be complicated, but while enjoying the DAM concert he responded

in a simple way, a way that now seemed to cause him some embarrassment. His reaction is particularly relevant because it suggests that the music as well as the space in which it was performed caused him to react to political statements in a way that he would not have done elsewhere.

Some tourists were motivated to attend the concerts for sexual opportunities. Another young tourist from my hostel, Sofia, approached me during the performance as I sat in the smoking room taking notes. She had an earnest look on her face.

‘I’m on the lookout for a hot Palestinian guy,’ she said. I am not sure how I reacted, because she then said: ‘Did you know that in the Negev, the IDF has secret jails where they torture Palestinians?’ (Sofia, Canadian Dance-Instructor, The Block Club, January 2013)

Sofia’s statement implies that the sexual attractiveness of the Palestinian male for whom she is searching is directly related to his identity as a ‘deviant’ (incarcerated) oppressed object, the victim of militant Zionism. Perhaps it is the ‘deviance’ associated with Hip Hop that brings her to this particular place out of many where young Palestinian men can be found, to conduct her search.

‘Peter’, a young man from London, communicated a variety of motivations. These included social displays of masculinity and attention-seeking, as well as political ideology. Unlike the other tourists, he approached me. He volunteered that he is a big fan of DAM and that he travels regularly to the West Bank because he is making a documentary film.

‘What’s the film about?’ I asked him.

‘Secret,’ he said, flipping his long, wavy hair ‘Top secret.’

‘Are you filming in Ramallah?’ I asked him.

‘Ah, you try, but you won’t get it out of me!’ he says, ‘Look I’ve got a gas mask in case the IDF tries to stop me from getting the footage I need.’ (Peter, English Film Student/Film-Maker, The Block Club, January 2013).

He showed me a shiny, new gas mask that he had been carrying around with him. Some young English girls looked at him with awe and admiration. Peter seemed more concerned about politics than DAM. He deliberately sought me out in the smoking room to express his political views, talking vaguely about his film (top secret) and showing me his gas mask.

Another category of audience member that could be included under the umbrella of ‘tourist’ is the field-researcher. At this particular performance, there were several researchers such as myself who were collecting information about DAM. I was informed by Sofia, and other audience members that there were far more researchers present at DAM performances in the West Bank than at The Block Club:

‘It’s like...so full of anthropologists, researchers and stuff. It’s like you can’t even see DAM performing and its really weird, because it shouldn’t be about that.’ (Sofia, January 2013, The Block Club)

In ‘The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine’ (Furani and Rabinowitz 2011), the authors remark the increasing interest in Palestinians as the objects of ethnographic inquiry. They maintain that this growing interest is due to two main reasons: 1.) ‘the demystification of nations and the ethnic groups that formed them’; and 2.) a ‘crisis of representation’ in the field of anthropology. Ironically, they do not include ‘Palestine’ in the definition ‘nations and ethnic groups that formed them’, but use this to reference changing attitudes towards Israel as a place ‘no longer beyond moral reproach’ (476). Nevertheless, the researchers present at DAM concerts, a group of which I myself was a part, illustrate the trend described by Furani and Rabinowitz. Interestingly, even though The Block Club brings diverse elements of the population together, apparently, it attracts fewer researchers than performances in the West Bank, a fact that is worthy of investigation.

Evaluating audience responses, with the exception of Ahmed, Mahdi and Muhammed, who viewed nationalism as an intellectual engagement, the attendees tended not to speak about of the pragmatic realities that would be the outcome of a Palestinian state. Most tended to view nationalism as a possibility to transcend the experience of the political suppression of language and culture in Israeli urban space. Dorchin argues that identification with African American cultural suppression inherent in Palestinian Hip Hop allows DAM to ‘bypass the primacy secured for Hebrew and native Hebrew speakers in the local space’ (Dorchin 2013, 91). If so, then the validation of a nation-state by an ostensibly African American male leader (Obama) could have a similar validating function. Arguably, the performative ‘liberation’ triggered by expressions of nationalism is also part and parcel of the catharsis triggered by the enjoyment of DAM’s musical performance. Literature on the subject is too numerous to

itemize here, but many scholars have commented on Hip Hop's ability to provide a cathartic release from difficulties (repression, anxiety, etc.) in everyday life (e.g. Nooshin 2011).

Many of the audience members observed and interviewed in my fieldwork reacted strongly to the support for the Palestinian state by the African-American president of the United States, a display carefully and dramatically interwoven into the performance as utopian and positive. However, other responses are possible; indeed, images and speeches of the leaders of Western superpowers might also be regarded with great suspicion. If I use an auto-ethnographic example, my own view as a 'tourist' rather than an 'objective' researcher, my experience correlated with Abi-Ezzi's third categorization of audience members who enjoy the music, but are put off by the politics. In my own case, it was the lack of complexity, the naiveté of the nationalist statement to which I objected, not necessarily the statement itself. For instance, my immediate reaction to Obama's speech interwoven into the DAM performance, was to associate his speech with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, 'His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people' (in Laqueur and Rubin 2003). Thus, while many audience members reacted to Obama's speech as supporting the emancipation of oppressed communities, I responded by viewing it as a hegemonic superpower's validation of a nation-state based on ethnicity. In any event, Obama's declaration of support for the Palestinian nation-state is semantic and theoretical; his statement precludes any concrete commitment to helping form a state (e.g. military and economic support). And if concrete support was provided by the United States, what will be promised to whom? Who will 'redraw' the boundaries and who will be expelled from their homes? Will more bloodshed ensue while Western superpowers condemn it on television? Will this 'deserved' state be 'from the river to the sea', a description often chanted at protests referring to a Jew-free zone, an effective ideological and physical erasure of the Jewish right to self-determination? Who will lead the new state and how will its formation impact the treatment of women, the LGBTQ community, Jews, Copts and Bedouins and others? In other words, it is easy to be enthusiastic about theoretical statements of nationalism detached from any practical outcomes. I am largely unaffected by the current discrimination, often a result of Israeli governmental policies, experienced by many of the attendees, nor do I consider the Palestinian Authority to be a happy alternative to the Israeli government. Therefore, my own response to nationalist fervour is mitigated with pragmatism and worry about the effects of political and social instability that almost always accompany revolution,

far removed from Obama's declarations of support.⁸⁴ My own experience explicitly perceives the divide between the local, practical life of the collective, of which I am very firmly a part, and the vague transnational, ideological construct, triggered by the performative use of Obama's speech.

Scholars have often examined how musical performance is utilized to interrogate nationalism and nationalist policies that exclude, repress and diminish people.⁸⁵ Conversely, music can evoke potential nationalism that, unrealized in concrete terms, cannot yet repress people in the same way as an extant nation-state. While this nationalism is in our minds, it is still a utopian dream, in that every audience member's notion of Palestinian nationalism is, practically speaking, entirely possible. After all, Israeli pioneers 'sang' their country into being with Songs of the Land of Israel: dispossessions, bloodshed and 'security' walls did not enter the lyrics.⁸⁶ The intangible nature of musical meaning makes music a perfect vehicle to express a potential nationalism unfettered by practical realities. In all cases, such nationalism expressed through music can be viewed as being prompted by ideology rather than practical concerns. In this fieldwork context, music expressed a multivalent ideology of nationalism without a permanent social basis located in contested space. Performance in third-space allows this polyvalent nationalism to exist and to be experienced by the audience. Arguably, DAM is well aware that most attendees will respond like Jonathan or the young Arab women in the dance-circle. The context of a Hip Hop concert encourages social and political cheering for nationalism and self-determination, not unravelling its complicated realities.

While DAM is motivated to perform to be recognized as equal citizens within Israel (McDonald 2009a; 2013), much of their later work is more explicitly Palestinian nationalist and is motivated by financial considerations. Their music explicitly aims to attract, not just Palestinian nationalists and the Israeli left wing, but also those with an identity that the

⁸⁴ Laudan Nooshin discussed a similar disjuncture between international musical 'support' and local realities (Talk at City University London, May 2012). Nooshin focussed on the role of music in the Iranian elections of 2009. Nooshin described a Bono performance sending support for protestors in Iran during the time of crisis. Questions were addressed such as: how does a highly successful western musician relate to the tragic death of an Iranian woman in the demonstrations, through the performance of a past hit? Are such performances helpful or are they merely publicity stunts?

⁸⁵ This literature cannot be itemized in this document, as it is too vast. In the context of Israel/Palestine and anti-nationalist music some publications include: Levine and Shafir (eds.) (2012); McDonald (2009a); Stein and Swedenburg (2004).

⁸⁶ Marie Saunders, a PhD student at City University, researching Scottish folk music articulated a similar use of music by the Scottish diaspora in London who support separation from the UK. She explained that for some, music represents and constructs a future Scottish utopia in which the day-to-day reality of independence is not necessarily relevant (Saunders, informal communication 2012).

western audience prescribes. This trend does not reflect ideological concerns, but is a common marketing move in any current musical endeavour, manipulating stereotypes to be commercially successful. DAM must successfully create a balance between funding opportunities and potential audiences. Before the group became popular outside of Israel, it had to carefully tailor their self-representation to enable demand for their performances. Part of this process is achieved by scheduling performances in optimal sites such as The Block Club. Overall, their choice of themes and venue is caused by large and small-scale power-balances resulting in possibilities and limitations, as well as the desire for nationalism and self-determination.

In the context of the global Hip Hop music market, a competitive market with origins in African-American protest, commercial success requires performers to appeal to as many audience types as possible, treading a thin line between bridge-building, subculture and commodity. To this end, DAM and other Hip Hop groups often both explicitly and implicitly use cultural and musical behaviours that are interpreted differently by the different demographic groups present at concerts, performances, and rehearsals. In DAM's case, they have constructed a sophisticated way of, in Saussurian terms, utilizing 'signifiers', the form that the sign takes, which can be translated into variant 'signifieds', the concepts that the sign represents. Arguably, audience members can interpret musical behaviour differently. However, DAM's variant 'signifiers' cater specifically to the major demographic groups present at the concert (Jewish-Israeli, Palestinian, and tourist). Thus, DAM is able to transcend potential stigma and offer a marketable product that caters to a wide range of attendees; dividing the attendees into categories before the concert is part and parcel of this process.⁸⁷ But the construction and utilization of third-space is paramount; without it, these different demographic groups would not converge in the first place. Perhaps a heightened awareness of optimal spaces for bringing different segments of the population together as well as an awareness of polyvalence will be required by the young Russian break-dancers and System Ali in order for their groups to become as commercially successful as DAM.

⁸⁷ Indeed, for a time the group went by the name 'DAM Palestine' when they performed in the Palestinian territories and just 'DAM' when they performed in Israel. This exemplifies the negotiations that '48 Palestinians must make due to 'double' stigmatization often experienced by Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, who, on the one hand are often subjects of racism within Israel for being 'Arabs'; on the other hand, they are often stigmatized by the Arab world for being 'Judaized' and/or traitors. This condition has been well documented by academics. Literature is too numerous to list here, but some examples include Peleg (2004); Ghanem (2011). Also, Hammack (2011) summarizes the literature on the subject and offers his own interpretation, which is grounded in discourses in sociology and psychology.

4.4 DAM's Absent Audiences

Sometimes the people absent from an event are as revealing as the people who are attending it. The third-space of the Block Club functions as a congregating spot for diverse populations located beyond its immediate urban environment. This convergence allows concert attendees to 'flirt' with the different communities in the city, without 'trespassing' into their territory proper. The local residents, who live directly outside the bus station, fall outside the tourist population and the primarily middle class Jewish and Arab populations that attend the performances. These residents cannot actually be present due to financial and ethnic constraints, as noted in my fieldwork log:

I notice that members of the migrant communities (Sudanese, Eritrean, and other) resident in the neighbourhood are conspicuously absent from the concert. Their market takes place one street away until late at night, so presumably they know about it. Maybe they just do not like Hip Hop. However many members of this local community were present for a recent free Hip Hop concert that took place on the roof of a '*miklat*', a bomb shelter. I see one man who looks Eritrean and stop to chat to him. He nods and picks up bottles from the floor and I realize that he is not attending the concert at all but has been hired as cleaning staff, or perhaps he has sneaked in to get money for the empty bottles (fieldnotes 15 January 2013, The Block Club)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, from 2007 onwards a large influx of refugees from the African continent, both legal and illegal, settled in South Tel Aviv in the neighbourhood in which the bus station resides. These refugees are largely non-Jewish from various places such as Eritrea, the South Sudan, Ghana and Nigeria, often having escaped the horrors of genocide. Somehow these migrants have ended up in the conflicted urban space of South Tel Aviv (Hatuka 2010). Many of them have replaced the Palestinian workforce following the restrictions imposed after the Second Intifada of 2001.

The Block Club performance space is relatively inaccessible to these types of local residents. Cost is a major factor for this exclusion; it is unlikely that individuals from these communities can afford the 60 NIS ticket to attend DAM's concert (approximately £12). In addition, they may feel intimidated by attending such concerts due to their experience of alienation from the primarily middle class attendees. Also, they may feel disconnected from the themes dominating DAM's performance, such as the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. While additional fieldwork would be required to determine the reasons for the

absence of local people at these concerts, their absence significantly reveals the limitations of the third-space of The Block Club. This is particularly relevant as I noted that many members of these demographic groups were present at concerts at outdoor venues that were free to the public.

While my observations focus on African refugee communities, the DAM concert is also relatively inaccessible to the lower-class Palestinians living in the West Bank for a number of reasons, some of them related to finances. Indeed, my correspondent ‘Sarah Fairchild’, (who is also a native Jaffan and fellow ethnomusicologist), commented that when doing research in the West Bank, she was shocked at the general discrepancy in income between Palestinian communities there and the Palestinian community in Jaffa, who tended to have a higher standard of living (telephone conversation, Liverpool, 2012). McDonald comments that the members of DAM themselves, prior to being moderately commercially successful, were of a far lower social/financial class than the middle-class Jewish-Israeli audience members for whom they performed in Lod (McDonald 2013). These observations suggest that there are complex negotiations of class and social status at play that DAM must negotiate when performing in Israeli urban space.

4.5 ‘Russian’ Hip Hop on the Old Jaffa Plateau:

During my fieldwork process, events that I thought would be particularly fruitful in terms of data-retrieval often came to nothing, while my everyday exposure to the South Tel Aviv locale proved far more revealing. Moreover, attempting a clear-cut analysis of such events revealed the complexity of the fieldwork encounter. Such encounters, I discovered, could not always be made to fit into one interpretative theoretical frame or another. My observation of the Russian break-dancing group will be discussed here as it exemplifies the possibilities and limitations of third-space utilized by Hip Hop in the South Tel Aviv area in an informal, rather than formal, context. I had initially met members of this break-dancing group at the bus station where they met for an impromptu performance (see table, p. 89). One of the group members, ‘Omar’, had invited me to come along to their outdoor rehearsals and busking sessions.

Arguably, multiple theoretical frameworks could be used to elucidate the dynamics of these sessions. I have included this example of the break-dancers in this chapter on third-space because it exemplifies Bhabha's notion of how growing urban areas form spaces outside the conventional boundaries of identity and community. Moreover, the particular third-space area that I call the 'Jaffa Plateau' is of particular interest. The location is a courtyard and green-space in front of the Arab-Hebrew Theatre in Old Jaffa (Figure 12), which is itself a Jewish-Arab 'cooperative space' (Sa'ar 2006), a spot for the Jewish-Arab activism, theatrical productions and other joint ventures. The Plateau is also just below the 17th century Church of St. Peter and borders South Tel Aviv to the North-East, Jaffa proper to the South and the beach to the West.



Figure 12: The Arab Hebrew Theatre of Jaffa

One of my visits to this spot was especially revealing. I visited this site on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, with a Palestinian-Israeli informant, Sa'ad. An hour before the visit, Sa'ad and I had been sitting on one of the benches adorning the Jaffa boardwalk promenade. Constructed in the 1990s, the boardwalk extends from Jaffa's Ottoman seawall. The boardwalk was designed by the Tel Aviv municipality to 'bring the local populations together', and, on the surface, at least, it appears to have done just that. Sa'ad, one of my

many informants in the South Tel Aviv area, is a middle-aged Palestinian musician and shopkeeper from Jerusalem. He is tall and pale, with a mop of greying hair, and perpetually dark circles under his eyes that he says are caused by the stress of his daily life. I first encountered him sitting at this same bench. We began conversing first in English and then, unconsciously perhaps, in simple Hebrew, as our ability in that language was more or less comparable. Sa'ad had offered me some flatbreads with zatar as an ice-breaker. Indeed, the offering of food seemed to be a typical overture of friendship enacted by Jews and Arabs alike in this urban space. The day before I met Sa'ad, a young Jewish-Israeli soldier, curly-haired and red-cheeked, with two AK-47s slung across his back, had offered me some olives before engaging me in conversation about 1990s American grunge bands.

Sa'ad had been helpful and informative in the fieldwork process, but as with many of my informants, I tended to keep him at arms-length. As with many men of his age, if I behaved in too informal a manner, he would interpret my behaviour as an invitation to a romantic liaison. Although I wear a wedding ring and identify as married, the fact that my husband is in the UK was often interpreted as a sign that he is less than desirable or that he had abandoned me. So I was viewed, for all intents and purposes, as single when I was in Tel Aviv. This was a perception on the part of many informants that led to awkwardness and could only be rectified by keeping a formal distance, which likely diminished my potential for gathering information.

When I would meet Sa'ad by the beach, he was often was visibly tired: 'I come here just to relax, you know?' he told me, grabbing a handful of sunflower seeds and offering me the bag, 'just to get away from things. In Jerusalem, it's so stressful. So much stress, always the tension, but here,' he gestured towards the ocean. The light of the sun reflected on the brilliant blue of the sea and a single sailboat drifted peacefully in the calm waves. I knew that Sa'ad lives in a small dwelling space in East Jerusalem with other family members, but I did not ask him to elaborate because I could see that such questions made him uncomfortable and anxious. 'It's just so peaceful. And the people. Lots of different people.' Sa'ad gestured toward the middle-class Muslim family with their children, the large group of Chasidic boys dropping pebbles in the ocean and the young secular Israelis who are sunbathing in skimpy bathing outfits. 'Here, it's okay to be yourself. It's not perfect, I'm not saying that. But it's better than where I live, much better.'

Sa'ad's comments correlated with observations that Hatuka has made about the beach area in Tel Aviv:

[T]he beach, a leisure area, is a space contested by city, state, and citizens alike. Although, having clear structural boundaries and functional organization, the beach is extra-territorial, a place where the body can temporarily escape social-spatial limitations...[f]or the individual, the beach provides an escape from day-to-day social and cultural routines. (Hatuka 99)

Hatuka describes how, from its earliest days, Tel Aviv has characteristically been understood in terms of its changing relationship to Jaffa: 'while in the 1930s, Jaffa and Tel Aviv were perceived as binary entities, and in the 1960s as a unified entity, by the 1990s, they had become fragmented communities structured according to economic logic' (Hatuka 2010: 95). In the 1990s, however, city-planners were 'very critical of the modernist attempts of the 1930s and 1960s to erase the Arab landscape by assuming that place has no memory' (Hatuka 2010: 95). She describes the construction of the promenade in the 1990s as inadvertently creating an urban space facilitating the overlapping of traditionally segregated communities: 'the modest promenade has changed the area irrevocably, increasing the Jaffa-Tel Aviv connection by inviting constant use of the area by Arab and Jewish families alike' (Hatuka 2010: 95). The use of the Ottoman sea wall that had been previously covered further emphasizes the historical importance of Jaffa, making a conflicted past visible in the present shared communal space. I remarked the negotiations of power in the overlapping of communities in my fieldwork experiences in this part of Jaffa, particularly the area bordering the beach.

Sa'ad and I went to meet the young artists on the Old Jaffa Plateau. Particularly on this day, a Saturday, which is the Jewish Sabbath, people tend to converge on the Old Jaffa Plateau for a variety of social events. While, unlike in Jerusalem, most shops stay open on Saturday in this part of Tel Aviv, there is still a relative feeling of calm that pervades the area. Sa'ad provided an ongoing commentary as we approached the site: 'I'll go with you,' Sa'ad said, 'don't mess around with those guys [the rappers]. Those Russians. They think they're so professional, but they never leave Jaffa. They'll never make it. They'll just take advantage of you and tell you bullshit. That's it.'

Sa'ad seems perpetually concerned for my well-being and voices worry that people who he always categorizes according to ethnicity or religion, will deliberately give me false information. Perhaps his living in Jerusalem, in a situation that he calls 'tense', shapes his view that the musicians are 'ne'er do wells'. He views the immediate area on the border of the beach, the main road and the beginnings of 'Old Jaffa' as a relative Shangri-La, in which inter-ethnic tension is absent. Local residents tend not to share this perception. Nevertheless, Sa'ad considers that the musicians will never leave what he regards as a safe haven. Thus, in his eyes, the musicians will never face 'the real world', and remain in a situation that undermines their ability to be successful artists.

As we passed the Jaffa clock tower on Yefet Street, one of Jaffa's main thoroughfares, we saw a group of about thirty soldiers in dark green uniforms standing in a circle. Not one of them seemed to be more than twenty years old. I had been in this urban space long enough to know that whenever one sees a large group of unified people such as soldiers, Mizrahim, Russians, or young Arabs, this can be a sign of danger and my heart began to pound under my ribs. However, the soldiers appeared to be relaxed. They disappeared in single-file down one of the many Jaffa alleys. Sa'ad did not seem to see the soldiers and pointed out interesting facts about the Jaffa clock-tower, which dates from 1903 and is one of seven that was constructed during the Ottoman period in honour of Sultan Abed El-Hamid II. When we passed the pristine back-entrance of the Mahmoudiya mosque, I peered inside as I always do, listening to the chanting on the loudspeaker. The Imam came out and glared at me, as he always did. This had become a sort of ritual exchange as I came here on a daily basis; despite my modern dress and propensity to speak English, he appeared to think I was an undesirable Bedouin-type who should be shooed away. I wondered whether the Imam would miss my appearances at his backdoor when I returned to the UK.

'Don't mess with him either,' Sa'ad, said gesturing towards the mosque, 'I know it's a little blasphemous to say, but those religious people, those Muslims, they'll also tell you bullshit.'

When we got to the plateau, the soldiers were also there. One of them saw a religious Jewish family walking by and, laughing, swept their eight-year-old boy up into air, much to the child's delight. A large group of Eritreans were directly next to the soldiers and the family and were conducting what appeared to be a wedding ceremony. The wedding party were

splendidly-attired: the men wore white cotton suits and hats; the women, colourful cotton dresses and the younger ones wore stylish satin gowns. They mingled on the hill to the side of the stones. We also saw the young people who are the object of my fieldwork break-dancing on the flat stones of the plateau. The music from their old-fashioned boom-box merged with the traditional singing of the Eritrean wedding party. If the religious Jews objected to the recorded music due to the prohibition on the use of electronic equipment during the Jewish Sabbath, they do not show it.

I met briefly with the rappers and dancers, a group of young ‘Russians’ who live in the non-gentrified parts of Jaffa, Bat Yam and Lod. The designation ‘Russian’ is of particular significance in South Tel Aviv due to the influx of immigrants who arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union.⁸⁸ My ethnographic observations revealed that even while it could be pragmatic to draw attention to individuality, identification with a larger community was often necessary for the purposes of de-stigmatization. This communal identification was particularly necessary for individuals such as Omar who occupy a liminal status due to being able to technically claim a ‘Jewish’ or ‘Arab’ heritage. In an interview Omar explained:

‘My father is half Muslim. Half Muslim meaning he is pure Tartarian, not Jewish at all, praying to the Koran. My mother is Jewish, you see, Polish, so if I were to return to the Uzbekistan, I would be a Muslim, a Tatarian! But when I am here, I am Jewish.’ (Omar, Lod resident, Jaffa Plateau, 3 August 2013)

To me, the researcher, Omar acknowledges the complexity of his own identity, and even the complexity of his ‘half-Muslim’ father’s identity. Yet, in his everyday life and in the lyrics of his raps, he self-identifies as ‘Russian’, communicating the stigma faced by Russians in the South Tel Aviv community. The binary distinction between Jew and Muslim forces him to adopt either a Jewish or a Muslim status or to find a new identity that is acceptable within the social categories of the city, hence, his identification as ‘Russian’, as expressed in some of his rap lyrics:

⁸⁸ Immigration peaked in the 1990s.

‘I came to my new school HaYarden,
The first reaction was ‘the Russians stink’,
No language and no friends in the neighbourhood of hope...
The Russians, the Russians, the Russians, trying to survive’

(Anna Lerman’s translation from Russian)

Omar repeats the words ‘the Russians’ so that there can be no mistaking about with whom he is identifying. In these brief lyrics, he describes the experiences that caused him to identify with the Russian collective.

Omar’s identification with the ‘Russian’ community ties him to a large urban community made up of both Jews and non-Jews. A native of Uzbekistan would not intuitively identify as ‘Russian’. Yet, after arriving in Tel Aviv from Tashkent, Omar bonded with the communities that would accept him. This process can be understood as a self-preservation strategy necessary for survival in this contested urban space. In this case, linguistic identity supersedes other considerations, highlighting the importance of language as the dominant factor in the formation of identities. Thus, language and self-preservation, as well as other factors, influence the formation of new communal identities. Interestingly, this can happen to the detriment of the individual and to the nuances of their complex identities. In Omar’s case his Uzbekistani Judeo-Muslim identity has been subsumed by the overarching category ‘Russian’. Overall, I note that there are a variety of ways in which he chooses to summarize his ethnic identity – from the specific to the very general category Russian – that he reserves for different situations.⁸⁹

The Russian break-dancers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, practice their moves alongside next the other groups in the immediate area: the soldiers, the religious family and the Eritrean wedding-party as well as some new-comers, tourists visiting the Church of St. Peter. Some of

⁸⁹ There is an interesting paradox in the distinction between the Jewish and non-Jewish identities present in this group that characterizes many of the South Tel Aviv population and is therefore worth mentioning here. Many ‘Russian’ individuals were permitted to immigrate to Israel by the Israeli government due to having experienced Anti-Semitism. Individuals could immigrate by proving that they had a Jewish parent or grandparent; however, under Israeli and Jewish (orthodox) law, one is only Jewish if one has a Jewish mother. Therefore, these individuals were not legally Jewish, but had been allowed to immigrate due to being victims of anti-Jewish discrimination. Many young people who I interviewed who fit this category stated that they had not immigrated because of Anti-Semitism, but because of the possibility of social mobility.

the performers tell me that they like the alternative Hip Hop group System Ali. Omar tells me that this spot is his 'high' where he comes to escape and practice his raps and his dancing:

'This...' he gestures to the whole area, 'this is my extreme. It's where I come to challenge myself. My moves and my raps. For me it's the ultimate challenge. And I come here to escape the tensions at home. And like, it's better to come today, isn't it? Because it's like, Shabbat for the Jews [Jewish Sabbath] and so when we practice, like we don't hear the construction noises like on other days. Sometimes we hear the muezzin over there, but that...that's sort of like accompaniment, you know?' Omar laughs, 'and basically, people are more relaxed.' (Omar, Lod resident, Jaffa Plateau, 3 August 2013).

I ask whether he did mandatory army service because he is twenty-one and just starting university.⁹⁰ He states that he did and that it often caused conflicts with his break-dancing/rap group and with more formal gigs with which he was involved. He hails from the town of Lod, a place that he calls a 'notorious ghetto'. Omar says that he often comes to the beach and Jaffa to escape the gang and police violence in Lod as well as the confines of the small two-bedroom estate flat that he shares with his single mother.

'I come here because I feel free, well, not free, but more free than in other places, like around, you know? And some people like me and some don't, but they leave you alone. Also, if I can do my moves and my raps here in front of all kinds of people without getting distracted then I can do them anywhere. More or less.' Omar, Lod resident, Jaffa Plateau, 3 August 2013)

Omar's words resonate with me because they reflect my own experience as a musician. While some artistic activities are motivated by politics, and by geo-spatial environment, there are some rehearsal practices related to chosen spaces for musical rehearsal or performance that transcend these limitations and distinctions. I tell Omar that I often practice my horn by my bay window to deliberately practice not being distracted by passers-by. Or I practice with my children in the room to improve my powers of musical concentration: 'Exactly, man. That's what I mean' Omar replies, 'if you can keep your moves tight even when all this shit is going on, then you've really got them down'

⁹⁰ Men are usually required to serve in the army for four years. However, Palestinians often do not serve. In some instances, I did not ask participants about it because it could be a sensitive issue.

I found that, beyond making small-talk, I could not communicate with the other rappers present. They only spoke Russian and/or other Slavic languages and were not fluent in Hebrew or spoke Hebrew with a strong accent. I mentioned this to Sa'ad who rolled his eyes and took a beige-and-white pack of 'fake' Marlborough Lights out of his pocket, the kind you can get at the nearby shuq (market) for a couple of shekels. He muttered something under his breath that sounds like 'stupid Russians', but offered them some cigarettes and sunflower seeds. According to Omar, these practice sessions are a routine escape from the pressures of everyday life. Out of respect for the group's leisure time, I did not bother them with any more questions on the many days that I returned, but merely observed their interactions in public space. The raps of the group are mostly in Russian; one member carries a boom-box that plays loud beats, amplified by the courtyard of the public space. While raps (usually about themselves) form part of their performance, they appear to be subservient to urban break-dance. The dominant dance-component of their interactions requires skill, speed, and agility. Despite his stocky appearance, Omar is able to dance with grace, even spinning on his head with ease on the flat stones of the plateau or on the mats that he spreads on the ground.

While most people in the area ignored the performers, or merely glanced amusedly in their direction, some engaged with them directly. Two Jewish-Israeli women in their fifties were present and admired the 'moves' of the young, Russian break-dancers. Both had closely-cropped grey hair and wore jeans, trendy t-shirts and Converse trainers. One had a rainbow flag stitched onto the knee of her jeans. I had seen these ladies out and about in South Tel Aviv on many occasions and interviewed one of them during a performance at a nearby site called the Hebrew Arab Theatre. During that interview 'Iris', one of the ladies, informed me:

'Many people would say that the South is a bad place and Jaffa is a bad place, that it's not wholesome, it's dangerous and that it's a bad place to raise children. But me, well for many people, it's the only place I can really stand in this country. Yeah, for me it's the only place I could really live. Because of the politics, you know.' (Iris, Interview, Hebrew Arab Theatre, July 2013).

Iris' statement represents a view shared by many left-wing Jewish Israelis to whom I have spoken, who move to Jaffa or spaces in South Tel Aviv to escape what they consider to be oppressive 'right-wing politics'. On this occasion, some days after the initial interview, Iris greeted me with a smile and said confidentially: 'Aren't those guys great?' she said about the Russian break-dancers, 'just great.'

Overall, my meetings with Sa'ad, my interactions with the ladies, my meetings with Omar and the other young artists on the Jaffa plateau reveals that certain spots in the urban landscape can embody 'gray space' a locale in which, responding to urban colonial relations, subjects teeter between states of legality and illegality due to the precepts of the 'ethnocratic state' (Yiftachel 2009, 240). The situation can certainly also be understood to exemplify both Bhabha's third-space. My observations revealed that people tolerate the presence of 'the other' in this shared urban space. This potential for the coexistence of incommensurate identities characterizing third-space is highlighted by the negotiations of the physical space used for performance. Communities and individuals inhabiting this space even tolerate musical performance of others when it is forbidden to them (religious Jews) or when it disturbs their wedding (Eritrean group).

Although this thesis does not examine locales in Jaffa proper, spaces such as the Old Jaffa Plateau resonate with Amalia Sa'ar's description of Jewish-Arab cooperative spaces in Jaffa. According to Sa'ar, these spaces are characterized simultaneously by the desire for inter-ethnic communication along with strong group identification, an 'odd mixture of appreciation of ethnic diversity alongside aggressive factionalism' (Sa'ar 2006, 107). While not an example of Jewish-Arab activism, the intercultural dynamics between the Russian breakdancers and their 'audiences' evidence some of the seemingly conflicting behaviours so aptly described by Sa'ar. While some attendees were indifferent to the dancers, the older Jewish-Israeli women showed an intense interest in supporting the 'young Russians'. Yet, the women remained firmly entrenched in their own social group, language and class. Nevertheless such encounters suggest that sites that are ordinarily used for certain types of binary intercultural encounter (Jewish-Arab) often facilitate other kinds of unusual intercultural communication.

Arguably, areas such as the Old Jaffa Plateau that are situated on the border of different neighbourhoods (Jaffa, Neve Tsedek, Florentine) and that contain different types of spatial zones (beach/boardwalk/plateau) exhibit an enhanced capacity to accommodate different musical experiences and identities. Most importantly, perhaps, the freedom articulated by visitors to this place is in direct contrast to the gentrification process affecting members of the local community. Amne Jerushe, a System Ali band member and Jaffa resident, aptly

describe this process. She described gentrification as beginning in Old Jaffa and making its way southwards to where she lives:

Go now over to Ajame [neighbourhood in Jaffa] and see what's happening. They're building these homes. If I show you in the newspaper, it says it's only for millionaires. They gave the money to push people out, just like that. People need money over here. This place [her block of flats] is totally run down. There are a lot of people whose situation is 'on the edge' ['sucks']. There's no way out, no food in the house, no money ['out of pennies']. We just had windows put in a few months ago. The situation in the house is the worst. We have no food. We are not receiving help from the Israeli government or the Palestinian government. Both sides hate us. On the Israeli side, we are terrorists and on the Palestinian side, we're classed as Jewish. We don't know what we are anymore, Arabs, Muslims, Jewish, nothing. On both sides, shit and violence. (Amne Jerushe, Channel 2 News, 8 March 2010, my translation/transcription from Hebrew-Arabic)

Amne's description specifically describes her feelings of 'double stigmatization' as a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship and as an occupant of a poor neighbourhood undergoing a process of gentrification. This process influences Jaffa and arguably, South Tel Aviv as a whole, transcending the ethnic identity of most of the area's inhabitants since many of its occupants live below the poverty line. Thus, while temporary coexistence is possible in this third-space, inevitably perhaps, its inhabitants are still affected by overarching structures of power. Moreover, the occupation of third-space generates limited communication between the visibly different demographic groups; it is as though they are in the same physical space as a matter of necessity, but they are psychologically removed from one another and many do not even share the same language. While it is beyond the scope of this current research, it might be worthwhile to investigate to what degree the combination of practical coexistence with an almost total lack of intercultural communication is a global urban phenomenon or whether it is particular to this part of the world.

4.6 System Ali Negotiate third-space in Rehearsal

Continuing this investigation of how Hip Hop performers negotiate identity in third-space venues in South Tel Aviv, this section considers the alternative Hip Hop group System Ali. This example investigates interactions in System Ali's rehearsal space in the neighbourhood

of Bat Yam. This discussion reveals a tension between what Lefebvre terms ‘spaces of representation’ and ‘representational space’ in the way in which System Ali members negotiate between how they want to be and the realities and limitations of the urban environment in which they operate.

System Ali’s initial coming together in 2006 was prompted by an immediate response to the gentrification of Jaffa. This gentrification is evidence of the increasing neoliberalism that has been affecting Israeli urban centres in the past decade. According to System Ali band members, the gentrification of the neighbourhood denies original residents affordable housing and evicts families who cannot meet the increasing rental prices, affecting Palestinian-Israeli citizens in particular. During fieldwork, System Ali members often expressed a general sense of dissatisfaction with living standards and displeasure with the social stratifications within Israeli society. Band members expressed outrage to me in response to the destruction of old housing. The houses had been demolished to make way for the construction of new, shiny condominiums.⁹¹ Gentrification is indeed one of the biggest social problems affecting the Jaffa community.⁹² Whether Jaffa’s gentrification will affect its historical significance and current function as a third-space remains to be seen. Yet, these changes in the urban landscape caused System Ali band members to come together to sing about a common cause. Journalist for *Ha’aretz*, Ben Shalev, describes System Ali’s concern for their Jaffa community as the unifying factor in their performance:

The microcosm they [System Ali] rap about in four languages...is their city, Jaffa. ‘A great light that somebody has turned into bread crumbs,’ they sing about the place, adding comments like it being ‘under Tel Aviv’s heel’ (Shalev, 2011)

All the members of System Ali, at one point or another have described Jaffa as ‘our city’. Muhammed M. describes the visible changes occurring in Jaffa as increasingly negative:

They turn us - the people of Jaffa who grew up and live here, both Jews and Arabs - into second-class residents. Not only is there no affordable housing for Jaffa’s residents, the authorities also destroy homes and kick families out, like what happened a few days ago on Shivtei Israel Street (Muhammed M. cited in Shafez 2013, 4).

⁹¹ In April 2013, I went to view some of the new condominiums beside ‘Old Jaffa’ and found, unsurprisingly, that the average salary of an academic at a UK university-let alone the average Israeli salary-would not be nearly enough to purchase or rent these luxury flats.

⁹² The gentrification of Jaffa and other parts of South Tel Aviv has been discussed in detail in various sources, including Monterescu (2009) and Fenster and Yacobi (2005).

In their expression of anxiety about the gentrification of Jaffa, Muhammed M. and Amne, both Palestinian-Israeli members use the social categories 'Jewish' and 'Arab' to describe those affected by the demolitions. Such observations correlate with sociological studies revealing that the poorest social groups in Israeli urban communities such as Jaffa are religious Jewish and Muslim constituents. This is in part, because the families tend to be large with only the father being employed (Dardashti 2009a).

System Ali members do not only express their ties to Jaffa in interviews; their music is imbued with symbolic ties to Jaffa. For instance, an early amateur music video (c.2008) in which the group perform the song 'System Ali Ala Bali' ('System Ali on my mind'), is set in a sandy square shaded with trees. The avenue is in Jaffa and is frequented both by System Ali and the primarily Palestinian residents whose houses open out into the sandy, communal area. In the video, System Ali start to perform together spontaneously, as though the performance were a natural part of the neighbourhood framework. As they rap, a group of children playing football join the group, looking at them with curious eyes and even involving the band in their games. A hijab-clad woman hanging up laundry looks on in amusement. Thus, the music video symbolically places its setting as the neighbourhood, presented as living space. The visual locale establishes the authenticity of the band's union.⁹³ The space represented in the video is representational space according to Lefebvre's definition: it is an aspect of System Ali's imagination depicting an organic connection to Jaffa.

⁹³ This video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-oY48VfUq4>.

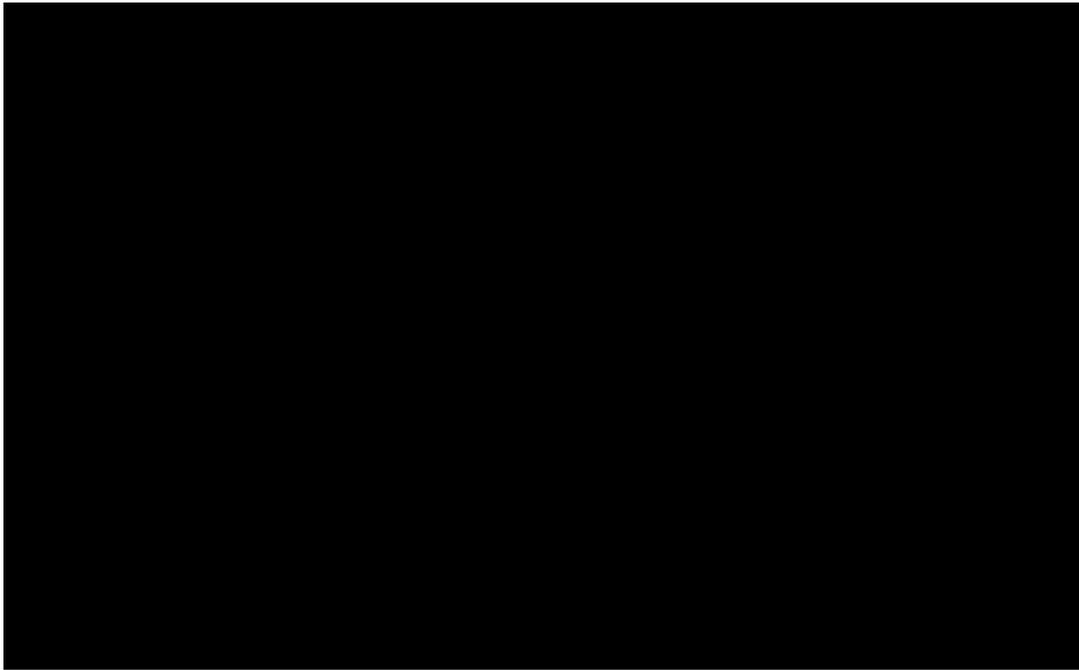


Figure 13: Still from ‘Ala Bali’ Music Video

The symbolic organic connection to the ‘land’ in the video resonates with ways in which Swedenburg has identified that members of the Palestinian community reinforce their legitimate claims/attachment to land through identification with a ‘peasant’ signifier: ‘Peasants seem to be particularly useful for making claims about the distinctiveness of national identity. Their “closeness to the soil” can be used to “naturalize” a people’s historical links to a territory’ (Swedenburg 1990, 18). The sandy area in the music video and the group’s immediate connection with each other and their neighbours portray them as sort of intercultural, urban versions of the rural peasants described by Swedenburg. Here, System Ali reinforce their ‘claim’ in a similar fashion, but, controversially, as a group made up of both Jewish-Israelis and non-Jewish Palestinians and others.

However, the urban realities, the spatial practices according to Lefebvre’s definition, are very different from the organic connections to Jaffa presented in the music video. System Ali’s rehearsal studio, to which they had already moved when I commenced my fieldwork, is located in the middle of Bat Yam. It is a tiny house that they call ‘Beyt System Ali’ (‘System Ali House’) sandwiched between the huge Ayalon highway barrier and a large school serving Jews, Arabs and others. The highway, to the east of their rehearsal space, which also runs behind the bus station and The Block Club, is particularly important in the construction of

third-space. Bat Yam is a neighbourhood directly South of Jaffa that has yet to be gentrified. It is a relatively ‘new’ neighbourhood, with many dwellings that are reminiscent of British council homes. The area is full of gaudy shops, Russian signs, and gang activity.⁹⁴ In my fieldwork experience, identifying with Jaffa meant identifying with the Israeli left and/or with a proud and old tradition of Palestinian survivors of an ancient city. This identification often was connected with an element of nostalgia. Moreover, ‘hipness’ or rough glamour was associated with identification with Jaffa: rappers from Jaffa are hard, no-nonsense people who see violence in their everyday lives. By contrast, although identification with Bat Yam is also ‘deviant’, it is not ‘cool’. Bat Yam is associated with poor families, gang-affiliations, prostitutes or ‘Russians’, rather than nostalgia or cutting-edge urban chic. System Ali members who converge in Bat Yam for their rehearsal seldom travel through the neighbourhood itself. Leaving Bat Yam rehearsals in their cars packed with people, instruments, and equipment, they turn left on Nitsana Street and then left again on Kakal Street to access the Dov Hoz interchange on the Ayalon Highway. Then they drive directly to Jaffa at the next exchange or to parts of the city in the north. They thus remain removed from Bat Yam in terms of their identification although they use the area for rehearsal space. Indeed, System Ali was evicted from their original rehearsal space, a bomb shelter in Jaffa, some years ago. Yet, the band still aspires to be ‘the leading Hip Hop crew in [not ‘from’] Jaffa’ (systemali.com).

My quotidian experience travelling to rehearsals is very different from that of System Ali members. As I do not drive in Israel, I walk from the Florentine neighbourhood or from Jaffa, depending where I am staying, passing through Bat Yam itself for about a mile and a half before I reach my destination. I walk south, along Yerushalayim Boulevard, the road that separates Jaffa proper from South Tel Aviv. The stone houses and apartments are gradually replaced by housing estates on both sides of the road and there is a large public playground. Amidst the suburban sprawl, I sometimes glimpse dirt tracks and shacks, reminiscent of photographs of the area that I saw in the Tel Aviv Municipal Archives of Jaffa in the early 1900s. Many of my informants often blame ‘Zionist colonialists’ for the way the suburbs look. They often evoke a time when the area was bucolic, inhabited by peasants with orchards of orange trees. But I wonder actually to what extent ‘Zionists’ are to blame and to

⁹⁴ One of my informants, ‘Nataniel’, grew up in Bat Yam across the road from where System Ali rehearse. In an interview at ‘Bassar’ restaurant (Florentine), he told me in detail about how ‘unhip’ the neighbourhood is perceived to be. He also discussed the gang activity in the area and what he considered to be the positive and negative affects of this activity on the area’s residents (May 2012).

what extent the urban transformation is part and parcel of the global phenomenon of city-growth.

On my way to System Ali's rehearsal space, I often see the same group of Jewish-Ethiopian teenagers roaming the housing estates. Sometimes they tag along behind me, riding their bicycles. When my friend Anne accompanies me, they make fun of us because we converse in French. Gradually, the housing estates are replaced by garish neon signs in Russian, tacky hotels, stalls with produce and cheap clothing. Working class religious families, drug dealers, and prostitutes are easily visible on the streets as the Bat Yam marina approaches. Along the thoroughfare is Kikar Hameginim (Defenders Square), a roundabout adorned with a Zionist war monument honouring the soldiers who have defended the country. The monument is a huge white-brick arch crowned by a menorah, with an anti-tank gun on one side of it. This landmark reminds me to turn left into the neighbourhood to get to System Ali's rehearsal space. I walk down the winding streets with their fruit shops and small bungalows. In the winter months, I wade through torrents of monsoon rain coming down the small hill. In the summer, I stop in front of groups of men conducting business, a Mizrahi mother with her children in tow to refill my water bottle at a public tap in the stifling heat. Reaching a muddy field with abandoned buildings, I know that the rehearsal space is not far-off. Behind some medical buildings is a school, and sandwiched between the large buildings of the school and the sound-barrier for the highway, is the small house where System Ali rehearses.

Participation in System Ali rehearsals at Beyt System Ali (System Ali House) involves day-to-day spatial interactions that require constant intercultural negotiations regarding practical communication, composition choices and performance. System Ali rehearses in a square formation, with everybody facing each other. During a rehearsal when they were practicing a particularly difficult transition in the song 'Yaffawie', trying to streamline Muhammed M.'s rap with an entrance by the electric guitar. Moti the drummer, who acts as the expert in musical technique, motivated fellow performers by giving them clear suggestions, referring to their sections as '*habayit shel Muhammed*' or '*habayit shel Yonatan*' ('the house' of a particular member).⁹⁵ While '*bayit*' is a totally standard way to refer to the verse of a song in Hebrew, I argue that in the context of System Ali that the term '*bayit*' has gained a greater significance. On one occasion, a band member left rehearsal because of a dispute about

⁹⁵ As well as meaning 'house', 'bayit' in Hebrew also means 'verse' or 'song section'

politics: from what I understood, there was not sufficient emphasis on the conflict in Syria in a particular song. The band continued to rehearse without the band member and Moti and Neta began to discuss the ‘*bayit*’ of the particular member. Apparently his ‘house’ was suffering and did not have enough ‘*ruach*’ (‘spirit’). To my surprise, ‘*bayit*’ in that context referred not only to the band member’s contribution, but had unconsciously become a metonym for the band member himself and his current state of being.⁹⁶ Moreover, unlike other Hip Hop groups, System Ali’s compositional process often involved individual members bringing their separate contributions ‘*batim*’ (‘houses’) to rehearsal. Such contributions were often unknown and even not understood by other members due to linguistic differences. Nevertheless, they were accepted as valid contributions and often incorporated into a song. Thus, ‘house’ in System Ali’s discourse has become both a metaphor and a metonym (in the sense that one ‘house’ represents a whole network of ‘houses’) for individual contribution to community. This dwelling-metonym is particularly relevant in the context of housing demolitions and nationalist land-ownership narratives. The Hebrew cognate to the word ‘*beyachad*’ (together) is particularly relevant given the unity of divergent identities in System Ali (discussed in Belkind 2013). Each house ‘*beyt*’ or ‘*bayit*’ is a dwelling that must be able to stand on its own; if it does not, it jeopardises the collective. The ‘house’ is thus a representational space in an extreme sense, the mind and the body of the individual member as well as the collective.

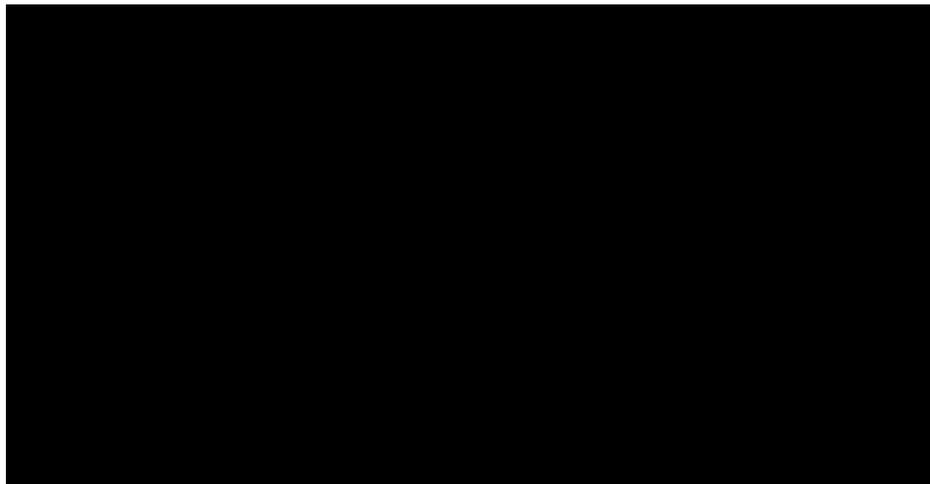


Figure 14: System Ali in rehearsal

⁹⁶ I may be reading too much into it, but I also suspected that this process was an indirect way of critiquing the band member’s behaviour.

Fieldwork revealed that System Ali House is a third-space in that it was a forum for difficult negotiations between the Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian members of the group, negotiations that did not typically take place outside of it. For example, there was a particularly tense time in the winter of 2012 when politics, coupled with the usual stresses of everyday life, overwhelmed the band's equanimity. This occurred a few months after a particularly bad skirmish between Hamas and the Israeli military right before the Knesset elections.⁹⁷ The anxiety and tension in the room was palpable. One of the band members in particular lay slumped in a chair, texting on a mobile phone, refusing to participate and, when asked why, complained that the song 'sucked' and that there were no people to vote for in the election. In response to this member's anxious complaints, another member responded '*lo poteach et hadelet lamilchama*', literally meaning 'do not open the door to war' (fieldwork observations 2012). The interesting choice of words as well as the juxtaposition in their discussion between songs and electoral candidates (that 'suck') show that while the band's discourse is ostensibly about music, it also often encompasses anxiety-producing topics such as discrimination and/or politics.

As mentioned earlier, Lefebvre divides uses of urban space into three categories: 1) spatial practices; 2) representational space; 3) spaces of representation. System Ali's everyday encounters (e.g. rehearsals) are conducted in the Bat Yam studio, a relatively low-rent spot accessible by a large superhighway. These encounters can be viewed as 'spatial practice' according to Lefebvre's definition, a space that 'embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure)' (Lefebvre 2014, 291). Yet, the band does not ideologically or practically associate with the place in which they rehearse. Conversely, Jaffa can be viewed, according to Lefebvre's definition, as a space of representation, a conceptual space that is communicated and represented through verbal and conceptual signs, signs that are worked out in advance by its users (e.g. the way in which System Ali represent Jaffa in various ways in their work).

The presence of other residents using the space of System Ali House suggests that the rehearsal space could also be understood as third-space in that groups of people separated by age, ethnicity, and religion, share it with impunity. The studio is also shared with a

⁹⁷ There was an eight-day conflict between Israel and Hamas during which the IDF launched 'Operation Pillar of Defence' namely, severe military strikes in response to hundreds of rockets fired from the Gaza strip.

religious/hippy Jewish sculptor in his sixties. The sound of his drilling as he works on his various sculptures often mingles with System Ali's music. A Muslim girls' youth association (a bit like girl guides) also shares the space with the band and the sculptor and are often finishing up their pep talks as System Ali arrive for rehearsal. These residents of System Ali's rehearsal hut reflect 'spatial practices' according to Lefebvre's definition in that they also use the space on a day-to-day basis, but do not necessarily identify with the neighbourhood in which the house is located. In this case, it seems to be that the third-space is a sort of island that is used for practical purposes by different groups, but no identification with the greater neighbourhood is required.

4.7 Hip Hop and third-space in South Tel Aviv: A Conclusion

Bhabha's notion of third-space describes a space in which different cultures meet, hybrid identities are created and, through this process, hegemonic authority is challenged. Bhabha argues that all social collectives, whether national or smaller-scale, are caught in a continuous process of hybridity that creates this third-space:

The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences... (Bhabha, 1994:218)

The applicability of Bhabha's notion to the uses of space described in this chapter is clear; his emphasis on hybridity does not indicate binary opposition, rather, it indicates the relational elements present in the intercultural encounter. Indeed, Fahlander suggests that Bhabha's use of the term 'hybridity' indicates the non-definability of cultures as monolithic entities:

They [the groups] all have developed in relation to a larger context and therefore consist of elements of different origins which they to varying extent have in common. The process of hybridity thus makes the idea of cultures and ethnic collectives as homogeneous entities inconceivable, or...elusive' (Fahlander 2007, 19).

The above can be applied to my discussion of third-space on borderlands of different spaces in South Tel Aviv. In my field examples, both social and material encounters took place in

musical performance revealing complex inter-relations in the South Tel Aviv city-space. The complexity of these interactions demonstrates that the Jewish-Zionist versus Palestinian nationalism binary, ubiquitous in many western perceptions of Israel, has become outdated, requiring a way of viewing the situation that includes all of the area's inhabitants, particularly in the context of urban spaces.

To summarize, this chapter has investigated urban third-spaces produced by the convergence of different neighbourhoods or other geo-spatial borders, such as the beach, the plateau, the highway, and the promenade. In the context of Hip Hop, these spaces permit intercultural exchanges and performances often considered 'deviant' or subcultural by normative Jewish-Israeli society, such as DAM's performance at The Block Club. Thus, third-space can be understood as both an ideological and concrete space that enables the transformation of boundaries of identity and belonging. Specifically, this chapter has considered the performance of Hip Hop in Israeli urban space, with a focus on the way in which '48 Palestinian performances utilize are able to transcend prevalent social stigma by utilizing third-space performance locations. As far as DAM performances are concerned, ethnographic fieldwork spanning January 2013 to August 2013 revealed nuanced differences between demographically diverse communities attending them. This examination has also revealed, not only the existence of local communities that are excluded from the performance for various reasons, but the complex negotiations of individuals attending the concert and the limitations of the cross-cultural encounter.

Henri Lefebvre's categorizations of the social experience of urban space has proven a useful frame in which to discuss the symbolic and literal uses of third-space in South Tel Aviv. My analysis of urban third-space usage in the context of DAM (formal Hip Hop performance), the 'Russian' Break-Dancers (informal Hip Hop performance) and System Ali (rehearsal for performance), reveals a dichotomy or a tension between the Israeli urban space itself and the communities living within it, and the representations of the space by the Hip Hop artists. In DAM's case in the performance under scrutiny, The Block Club was a spot that was practically convenient to enable access to a variety of audience members: Arabs, Jews and tourists. Like System Ali House, The Block Club is located directly next to a major highway exit and is therefore accessible to locals without their having to go through the neighbourhood in which the bus station is located. Yet, both System Ali in rehearsal and DAM in performance identified symbolically with a space other than the one in which their

music-making took place. System Ali identified with Jaffa, symbolizing a deviant location, threatened by extinction due to gentrification; but Jaffa also symbolizes a Jewish-Arab cooperative space, an interethnic composition reflected in the identities of the group's members. In DAM's case, the transience of the third-space of The Block Club, allowed them to transform it into a symbol of Palestine, at least in an ephemeral sense. At the very least, DAM were able to present a potential nation-state that many present at the concert saw as embodying a better future. In contrast, the Russian break-dancers utilized the third-space almost entirely for practical and aesthetic purposes with no apparent symbolic representations of space attached to their performances. Rather than identifying with a physical location to unite their different identities, they identified with the demographic group 'Russian' as well as their common interests in music and dance, to instil group cohesion. The Old Jaffa Plateau was a pleasant spot in which they could co-exist with other people. It was also a space in which they had room to perform and could use the public space without being chastised or bothered by drug or gang warfare as they might have been in their home areas (e.g. Lod, Bat Yam). Ironically, it is precisely the gentrification transforming Jaffa and some parts of South Tel Aviv that is responsible for the space being free of many potential conflicts. Overall, uses of space by Hip Hop performers in South Tel Aviv constituted a blend of the pragmatic and the symbolic. The symbolic transformation of space can also be viewed as ultimately pragmatic. The spatial transformations reflect a flexibility of positionality. Such negotiations of literal and symbolic identities can be viewed as necessary to operate within a space that is so contested and characterized by overarching inter-ethnic tension. Thus, DAM transforms The Block Club into a future Palestine for the duration of its performance, just as System Ali transform their Bat Yam hut into 'Jaffa': the obstacles to the realization of these places in 'the real world' remain in place, even as practitioners try to transcend them in various ways in the musical third-space.

Chapter 5: Collective Memory, Hip Hop and Identity in South Tel Aviv

5.1 Collective Memory: Local versus National

This chapter focuses on some theoretical ideas that emerged from my fieldwork relating to the role of collective memory in the construction of group identity and cohesion. Music is an especially potent means of constructing and reinforcing collective memory, as Stokes describes in his introduction to *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*: ‘The musical event, from collective dances to the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine, evokes and organises collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity’ (Stokes 1994, 3). For some time ethnomusicologists have been concerned with identifying the connection between musical practices and collective memory.⁹⁸ Not only does music have a special power to evoke the collective memories of participants in musical performance, it can serve as a tool for both reinforcing and transcending social dichotomies. In the urban space of South Tel Aviv, musical performance has been used increasingly to represent collective memory in order to bring together Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians in particular.

My theoretical understanding of local, collective memory is informed by Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), the original formulator of the concept, specifically his work *La Memoire Collective* ([1941] 1992). Although Halbwachs, a student of Émile Durkheim, published his seminal, theoretical work *La Mémoire Collective*, before World War II, it is still the main work on the topic. Halbwach’s work has been recently used extensively in Sociological Studies, Cultural Studies and Memory Studies (see p. 20), but it has been used only sparsely in ethnomusicology and not in the context of negotiations of identity in Hip Hop practices in Israel. I think it particularly relevant to develop Halbwach’s discussion about the extent to which the physical composition of quotidian urban space shapes group memory. For Halbwachs, collective memory can only be transmitted on the local level of real, living communities, neighbourhood, village, or city, but not the level of the nation. According to Halbwachs, a nation is a political body that transcends local community boundaries rather than a community proper. Differentiating from both history and autobiography, Halbwachs

⁹⁸ A study of music and Jewish collective identity especially worthy of mention is Kay Shelemay’s work that investigates Syrian Jews living in diaspora. Shelemay explores the construction of group identity through the performance of liturgical hymns (*pizmonim*). She highlights the synthesis of collective memory and history negotiated by the process of musical performance (2006).

argued for the 'cadre', the existence of 'group memory' that is memory created by specific social frameworks within a community that transcends individual experience. Collective memory is created and transmitted in the context of human groups who share living space, both spatially and chronologically. It involves the overlapping of generations of communal memories within a shared space, primarily shaped by family experience but also by other events in which the child participates as he/she matures into adulthood (Halbwachs 1992 [1941], 52). The scope of Halbwachs' concept of collective memory is aptly paraphrased by Jewish studies scholar Natalie Polzer: 'according to Halbwachs, the different social groups to which an individual belongs construct and embed overlapping collective memories that merge in the individual consciousness: the immediate and the extended family, a school class, fellow workers, one's religious community, contemporary residents of a neighbourhood or a city' (Polzer 2014, 276). Thus, collective memory is reinforced throughout the individual's life by consistent exposure to the testimonies and actions of the people around him/her. As a child, the individual experiences these more or less unconsciously. As an adult, one begins to make sense of them as part of his or her collective existence (discussed in Halbwachs [1941] 1992, Chapter 5).

While Polzer discusses collective memory in relation to collective trauma, Halbwachs himself did not use this framework to understand collective trauma; in fact, he avoided the topic entirely.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Halbwachs' concept of collective memory is particularly useful to this research since it functions on a local, not a national, level. Indeed, according to Halbwachs, 'collective memory' cannot articulate nationalism, since the national level is a scope far too large for it to work effectively: 'according to Halbwachs, national and transnational "collective memories" cannot exist, since these entities are too large to be social groups capable of constructing memory through direct, shared experience and belonging' (Polzer 2014, 276). The local context of Halbwachs' notion of collective memory makes it a useful frame in which to understand how the individuals and communities in South Tel Aviv, both inside and outside the sphere of Hip Hop, interrelate.

Localized collective memories challenge rigid nationalist discourse by narrowing the demographic scope of the collective identity both localizing it, and paradoxically, making it more inclusive. Everyone existing in a local space, be it a neighbourhood or a performance

⁹⁹ Scholars suggest that he himself was traumatized by his experience of World War I and as a result, he avoided discussing his ideas on group trauma (Kosicki 2007).

venue, is by definition part of the local collective. Halbwachs describes how different collective memories can coexist in the same urban space, according to the demographic groups contained within it. For instance, he describes the divergent experiences of collective memories of aristocrats and nouveau-riche Parisian communities, including those of disenfranchised Jews, in France at the turn of the twentieth century (Halbwachs 1992 [1941], 154-155). However, Halbwachs fails to predict the possibility of the formation of new collectives, united by collective memory, yet composed of quite distinct ethnic and social collective groups living in close proximity in the same urban space, participating in shared communal activities. In South Tel Aviv, localized collective experiences of dispossession have been used to unite communities, informing various events and initiatives in the locale. Such initiatives often both challenge and affirm Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli nationalist narratives that is, collective memory at a national level.

Although this localized collective memory is vital for the construction of identity, two modes of collective memory are in operation in the music-making studied in this research: local (social) and national (ideological). A theoretical concept beyond Halbwach's concept of local, collective memory must be used to describe the creation of memory at the national level. Yael Zerubavel, a scholar in memory studies with particular expertise in contemporary Israeli society, uses the concept of collective memory to describe Israeli national consciousness at the national/ideological level. Zerubavel argues that the creation of collective memory requires re-shaping communal understanding of historical events to construct a national future. According to Zerubavel, 'collective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas. And in the process of referring back to these records, it shifts its interpretation, selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of that record' (Zerubavel 1995, 5). Zerubavel describes the political force of collective memory at the ideological level that reformulates historical events to (re)construct national solidarity. It is important to distinguish between Zerubavel's description of large-scale collective memory, manipulated for nationalist, political purposes and Halbwach's notion of a community-based collective memory. Both local and national modes of collective memory operate simultaneously in the contemporary urban space, informing each other spontaneously. Their configuration will depend on the nature and context of the individual experience and how local and national identities of individuals are emphasized. Both can be viewed as perpetuating social conditions yet the national mode is political, more intentional, and detached from the reality

of local communities. In contrast, local collective memory refers to a more spontaneous, organic social process embedded in shared, communal space.

While discussing the collective memories of Israeli and Palestinian demographic groups, Ihab Saloul contrasts informally-expressed Palestinian collective memory with Norman Finkelstein's understanding of Holocaust commemoration as 'Jewish self-aggrandizement' (Finkelstein in Saloul 2008, 5).¹⁰⁰ Correlating with how Shoah studies have facilitated 'the rise of trauma as one of the key interpretive categories of contemporary politics and culture' (Kansteiner 2004, 193), recent studies of Palestinian national memory stress it as a product of a routine re-enactment of the *Nakba*, hence, as a socially-constructed practice rather than an ontological 'fact'. Academic accounts of Palestinian collective memory have become intrinsically connected with the collective trauma of dispossession in 1948 from what is now Israel. Sa'di and Abu Lughod's *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (2007) gives perhaps the most comprehensive account of this phenomenon. Saloul also has discussed Palestinian collective memory based on the concept of collective trauma at length, dealing mainly with its expression in film and other art-forms (2008, 2009, 2011, 2012). Other scholars describe how Palestinian collective memory is used to generate solidarity among displaced and dispersed Palestinian communities in recent times (Saloul 2009; Abu Lughod and Sa'di 2007).¹⁰¹

To summarize, the notion of collective memory has been used by scholars to describe a process stimulating the cohesion of individuals and communities on both local and national levels in Israel/Palestine. However, few comparative analyses of the function of Palestinian and Jewish collective memory, specifically collective trauma, have been made.¹⁰² In fact, unification through collective dispossession has been well-documented by Turino and Lea who describe the experience of exile or diaspora as providing cultural 'models and resources from a variety of places which cohere to a relative degree because of shared dispositions and experiences – dispersion and sometimes persecution key among them' (2004, 6). For instance, according to traditional Zionist narratives, Jewish diaspora communities were

¹⁰⁰ I consider this to be a problematic juxtaposition, but draw attention to Saloul's work to evidence how the frame of collective memory is being used to understand Jewish-Israel/Palestinian intercultural communication.

¹⁰¹ There are many notable examples in fiction (both novels and film) that project the collective memory of Palestinian dispossession on many levels (e.g. Kananfani's *Men in the Sun and Other Stories*, [1962] 1999).

¹⁰² According to Saloul's webpage at the University of Amsterdam, his work in progress is provisionally titled *Contested Memories: Homeland's Rhetoric in Palestinian and Israeli Third Generations' Narratives* (www.uva.nl/over-de-uva/organisatie/medewerkers/content/s/a/i.a.m.saloul/i.a.m.saloul.html).

perceived as returning to a homeland in the first part of the twentieth century; however, this projection did not always reflect their own experiences. According to Mann there was an inherent contradiction in the experience of Jews who immigrated for ideological reasons and those fleeing from persecution: ‘immigrants who voluntarily settled in a new land out of ideological belief in Jewish political autonomy and refugees who fled an oppressive regime, had radically different attitudes towards the meaning of Tel Aviv as their new home’ (Mann 2006: xii). She describes many of the Jewish ‘exiles’ as experiencing their new life in Tel Aviv as a new form of diaspora or exile, ironically similar to that of the displaced Palestinians.

Collective memory is pivotal to understanding intercultural encounters in the urban environment of South Tel Aviv in which System Ali and other Hip Hop practitioners operate.¹⁰³ I use Halbwachs’ notion of local collective memory, in contrast with national collective memory, to illustrate the way in which the musicians construct a ‘local’ collective memory based on shared urban space to challenge conflicting national collective memories. My aim here is not to offer a comprehensive account of Hip Hop and collective memory in South Tel Aviv, but to look at instances that enabled new ways of looking at how collective memory is utilized by artists to reinforce both group solidarity and intercultural communication. As I conducted my fieldwork, I became aware of the importance of collective memory, in particular narratives of dispossession, in constructing local identities. These narratives were part of identity construction by both members of the musical groups that I researched and their audiences. I ascertained that the engagement with collective memory to understand one’s personal circumstances was a fundamental way to discreetly reinforce solidarity in both Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian communities. In some cases, local collective memory enabled the creation of empathetic bonds between individuals from different ethnic, religious and other backgrounds dwelling in the same space. Significantly, throughout the performances researched here, there is evidence of a tension between two modes of collective memory, local and national. While these two modes of collective memories can certainly be viewed as overlapping, I argue that in the case of the populations

¹⁰³ As a reminder, by ‘intercultural’ communication, I refer to encounters not only between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians, but also intra-Jewish intercultural encounters such those between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews.

residing in South Tel Aviv, they are sometimes deliberately separated for social or political agendas.¹⁰⁴

In the following section, I use my term ‘converging dispossessions’ to describe the temporary unification brought about in the process of music-making by evoking collective memories and collective experiences of trauma. I will focus on two examples of representations of collective memory in Hip Hop performances, both at the national and local level, occurring in the same liminal ‘borderland’ location. Both examples take place at The Barby Club a performance venue in South Tel Aviv situated in the middle of a semi-industrial area bordering the Neve Shaanan and the Florentine neighbourhoods. Located at 52 Kibbutz Galyot Road, the Barby Club is a long-established music performance venue in South Tel Aviv. Historically, it also has been an important locale for Hip Hop performance. Since 2000 it has been the main hub for annual Hip Hop festivals in Tel Aviv. The venue is far larger than most performance spaces, comfortably housing about six hundred audience members. During talks with local residents, I discovered that it had a reputation for making up-and-coming Israeli artists known on national level.

My first example in the Zionist Hip Hop genre will focus on practices employed by the artist Subliminal in the early 2000s. This discussion will highlight his use of collective memory in performance. This section will also consider the importance of the particular social and ethnic origins of Hip Hop artists in the category ‘Jewish-Israeli’. My second example will contrast Subliminal’s performance with System Ali’s musical representations of ‘collective memory’ at The Barby Club ten years later in 2013. System Ali utilize the musical embodiment of ‘convergent dispossessions’ to attempt to bridge, or at least acknowledge, the incompatibility of competing narratives of dispossession. This process of localization and diversification is part of a larger discourse prevalent in the urban space in which they operate. Finally, I will contrast these examples with a current ethnographic example outside of the genre of Hip Hop to explore how collective memory of dispossession is used more broadly to stimulate cross-cultural cohesion in a zone characterized by inter-ethnic tension and disagreement.

¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the transcendent experience of collective dispossession on the local level forms the ideological bedrock of the group System Ali.

5.2 Subliminal: National Collective Dispossession and Jewish-Israeli Solidarity

In the late 1990s, Subliminal founded the group TACT (Tel Aviv City) a ‘family’ of Jewish-Israeli rappers led by him. According to Dorchin, the group sought to ‘explore the congruence between Israeli and American urban spaces’ (Dorchin 2013, 82). Before he became commercially successful, Subliminal began using sites in South Tel Aviv strategically to articulate points of view that were considered subcultural by normative Jewish-Israeli society. Like many other Israeli artists, once he achieved success, he was able to branch out into alternate, more mainstream venues. The latter observation is based on a.) discussions I had with TACT artists and their audiences and b.) media of, or related to, shows performed in the Tel Aviv area. The initial marginalization of Subliminal and other practitioners of Zionist Hip Hop seemed directly related to the fact that Hip Hop was not widespread in Israel.

Subliminal’s performance does not immediately spring to mind as an example of Hip Hop’s unification of diverse populations through references to collective dispossession. Indeed, the views articulated in his lyrics are often proudly Zionist and therefore associated with Jewish-Israeli hegemony (Ben-Ami 2006). Yet, arguably, Subliminal’s stance articulated in his music, can be viewed as subcultural. His proudly Zionist lyrics did not conform to mainstream music-making at the time of its inception.¹⁰⁵ While he has become popular and made his way into the mainstream Israeli music market, he first emerged as an artist out of the optimism generated by the Oslo Accords, an optimism that soon abated in the aftermath of the violence of the Second Palestinian Intifada (2001).¹⁰⁶ In recent years, the political status quo in Israel has moved to the right; however, blatantly Zionist Hip Hop did not reflect the political standard at the time of Subliminal’s post-Oslo emergence. Since his first album, ‘The Light from Zion’ (*‘Haor MeZion’*) was released in 2000, Subliminal has been dubbed ‘right-wing’ and even ‘radical’ by Israeli newspapers for his right-wing politics and the unapologetically nationalist views articulated in his lyrics. Some of his songs have even been banned from being played on the Israeli radio due to their being ‘too extremist’. Indeed,

¹⁰⁵ In the late 1990s, I was resident in Tel Aviv and working at a restaurant on the boardwalk (Café London) close to the Barby Club. Within the entourage of the mostly secular young people with whom I worked (Jewish-Israelis, Palestinians, tourists, Thai workers and others), I can personally remember the general mood of optimism preceding the Second Intifada and the dismissal of right-wing Zionist sentiments that were seen as antithetical to peace.

¹⁰⁶ Some accounts consider the Second Intifada (also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada) to have started on 28 September 2000 with Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount (Laqueur and Rubin 2008).

Subliminal's lyrics can easily be interpreted as overly binary and nationalistic. For instance, the title of his early song '*Banu Choshech Legaresh*' ('We came to drive out the darkness') (2002) can be interpreted as a metaphor advocating Israeli military action against Palestinian terrorists.¹⁰⁷ The song's lyrics present a black and white scenario that can be understood as right-wing: 'I came to drive away the darkness, not afraid, I use the light, bass and fire the forces of light against the forces of darkness' he raps (my translation from Hebrew).

With the notable exception of Uri Dorchin's work (2012, 2013), scholarship tends to consider Subliminal's music as evidence of Jewish-Israeli hegemonic political discourse. Recent studies often contrast Palestinian Hip Hop with Zionist Hip Hop identifying the former as subcultural resistance and the latter ('rap Tsioni') as hegemony (e.g. Ben-Ami 2006).¹⁰⁸ Several scholars base their analyses on Anat Halachmi's documentary film *Channels of Rage* ('*Arotzim shel Za'am*') (2003). In her film, Tel Aviv-based Halachmi illuminates the origins of Israeli Hip Hop and the complicated personal relationship between the Palestinian-Israeli Tamer Nafar (DAM), from Lod, and the Jewish-Israeli Kobi Shimoni (Subliminal), from Tel Aviv. Halachmi chronicles Subliminal and Nafar's friendship, musical collaborations and subsequent disagreements. She shows how DAM's Tamer Nafar owes his first gigs and recognition to Subliminal most likely due to a lack of other earlier opportunities, probably due to discrimination. After his initial gigs with Subliminal, Tamer Nafar formed DAM and eventually, DAM's music was brought to national awareness due to being showcased on Israeli television in collaboration with left-wing Israeli rock icon, Aviv Geffen. Halachmi's film was intended for Israeli as well as Euro-American audiences and is in Hebrew and Arabic with English subtitles. Scholars have used the film to analyse Subliminal and DAM's music with some interesting conclusions (McDonald 2013, Rooney 2013).

¹⁰⁷ Many have understood the title to refer to Palestinians in general.

¹⁰⁸ In her thesis, Ben-Ami makes the argument that, unlike African American Hip Hop, Zionist Hip Hop is 'hegemonic', 'pro-police' and 'pro-government'. And while Ben-Ami makes a compelling argument, the values represented by Zionist rappers are scarcely uniform. Some viewpoints expressed by practitioners do overlap with government policies and can be understood as 'pro-police' (e.g. an anti-drug, anti-drinking stance). However, Subliminal has stated that he openly supports the Kadima political party (not Likud, which is currently in power) and, while some represent quintessentially right-wing views, others articulate moderate and even left-wing views in their lyrics (e.g. SHI 360's song 'Shalom Haters').

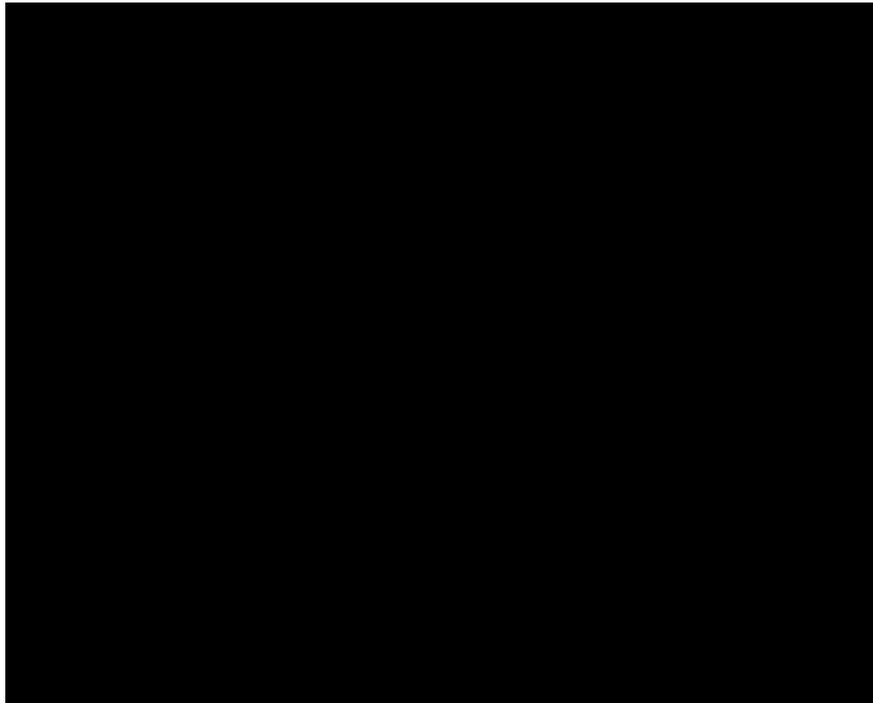


Figure 15: Still from *Channels of Rage* (2003) depicting Subliminal (left) in a discussion with Tamer Nafar (right)

Halachmi presents a clear juxtaposition between Subliminal and Tamer Nafar corresponding to the Jewish-Israeli hegemony/Palestinian-Arab resistance dichotomy. Echoing this juxtaposition, McDonald describes Subliminal's albums as advocating Zionist military violence against Palestinian terrorism following the Second Intifada (2001), articulating 'widespread fears of Palestinian insurrection, existential paranoia, and the illusory desire for national security' (McDonald 2013, 2). Conversely, his corresponding representation of DAM describes the group as embodying a musical discourse that seeks to understand national grief as a means of interrogating all acts of violence committed against non-combatants, 'whether they are wearing a uniform or not' (Nafar quoted by McDonald 2013, 2). McDonald's analysis of DAM's activism and fight against discrimination is particularly critical and sensitive, for instance when he shows how DAM's lyrics enact a form of self-humanization for equal citizenship within a Jewish hegemony. Yet, his interpretation of Subliminal is scarcely as nuanced: Subliminal and fellow-rapper 'The Shadow' are presented as nationalistic and 'paranoid', with particular attention paid to their bodies. Thus, McDonald presents them as strong, potentially destructive Jewish-Israeli alpha-males. Building on McDonald's analysis, I will offer a slightly different reading of Subliminal's performances by isolating his deliberate use of the concept of collective dispossession to stimulate Jewish

cohesion and his strategic use of the locale of South Tel Aviv to stage his early Hip Hop performances.

Subliminal's performances at the Barby Club in 2003 are good examples of how Hip Hop was used to unite a Jewish collective.¹⁰⁹ Although he raps almost exclusively in Hebrew, Subliminal strategically uses the Arabic word 'biladi', meaning 'my country', for a song title. Arguably, he does this to challenge those who might contest the Jewish-Israeli right to the land. Significantly, he uses the same linguistic strategy as Tamer Nafar of DAM who uses Hebrew to interrogate Jewish-Israelis (see Chapter 4). Subliminal's performance promoted his then forthcoming album 'The Light and the Shadow' (*Ha'Or Veba'tzel*), which, he stated in Halachmi's film, would either 'make me, or break me'. In fact, the album was highly successful in part because it promoted 'Jewish unity' and 'Jewish pride'. Although these ideological sentiments may not have been universally embraced by Jewish-Israeli youth during the optimism of the 1990s in which peace with the Palestinians was considered likely, it evoked the mood of the aftermath of the violence of the Second Intifada. Thus, the album was released at a perfect time to promote Jewish unity and resonate with increasingly popular political sentiment.

While I was unable to get an interview with Subliminal, I interviewed a founding member of the TACT crew, SHI 360 (Shai Haddad) who is of a Tunisian-Moroccan background and raps in Hebrew, English and French.¹¹⁰ He was loath to make any direct connections with Subliminal's music and the Second Intifada. But he did state that such a connection was inevitable because of his perception of the role of Hip Hop:

'Hip Hop is reality music; it's the CNN [Cable News Network] of the streets, so it's the things that you see on a daily basis. If you're a rapper and you live in Sierra Leone for example, things about your life are going to get into your music. So for us in Tel Aviv, back then [2001-2003] it was the terrorism, the bombings. That would have had to get into the lyrics and what we were about.' (SHI 360, phone interview, Montreal, December 2014).

¹⁰⁹ Since I was not personally present at this performance, I rely on the evidence from Anat Halachmi's documentary *Channels of Rage* (*Arotzim shel Za'am*) (2003), academic scholarship, interviews with members of the TACT crew, and conversations with audience members who attended. I also rely on videos of Subliminal's performances in which a similar re-telling of history was enacted. In this, I follow Rooney (2013) and McDonald (2013a) and others.

¹¹⁰ SHI 360 resides in Israel and in Montreal, Canada.

Arguably, Subliminal himself may have made a deliberate move to unite the Jewish collective by conveying a message that would be popular with Jewish young people post-Second Intifada. Performance elements reiterated the message that the Jewish collective was threatened by an outside force and that Jews would have to unite if they were to survive: ‘United we stand, divided we fall’ is a slogan often used by Subliminal. Indeed, this ideological sentiment was heavily embedded in this particular performance and many thereafter. Subliminal and The Shadow would come onto the stage throughout the performance. Subliminal would dangle his large Star of David pendant in front of his face and shout at the audience: ‘United, we stand. Divided...’ to which the audience would respond: ‘We fall!’ This routine was repeated several times during the course of the performance until Subliminal was satisfied with the audience’s response. The responses were very loud and very animated since a throng of about 600 young people attended the performance. An examination of Halachmi’s footage of DAM’s Tamar Nafar navigating through the crowd, attempting to buy tickets, reveals that most of the audience members were Jewish-Israeli and below the age of twenty.

Subliminal’s performances of his album ‘The Light and the Shadow’ have strategic theatrical and narrative elements that reinforce the message of Jewish-Israeli unity through collective memory. Either at the beginning of the performance or during the middle ‘pause’ section, the stage is cleared to convey a specific message. Halachmi chronicles this moment in her documentary. The lights dim and all is quiet. The only things visible on the stage are the sound-engineer and his equipment. Halachmi films the young audience members at the Barby Club straining against the metal fences keeping them from the stage. Four strobe-lights, white against the blue stage in patriotic Israeli colours, began to flick on and off like bolts of lightning. A recording comes on, broadcasting sounds of loud thunder. A voice booms over a loudspeaker, a man’s deep voice with a serious tone that resembles the typical voice of a newscaster:

On all the borders of the Land of Israel
The Arab armies are straining
Ready for invasions and murder
1948: the tiny, fledgling Jewish state,
Besieged by enemies from all around

(my translation from Hebrew)

This broadcast projects a narrative familiar to all Jewish-Israelis and people, such as myself, with a Jewish background. This is the stereotypical story of the birth of the State of Israel, which is characterized by a threat to the Jewish collective that is overcome despite all odds. In her film, Halachmi inserts her own politics into Subliminal's introduction. When the words 'The Arab armies are straining' are broadcast, her film switches from Subliminal's performance, to Tamer and his friends walking towards the show, juxtaposing the 'Arab armies' described by the announcer with Tamer and his friends. The group members are thus presented as non-threatening young people struggling for their rightful recognition in the State.¹¹¹ McDonald's analysis of Subliminal's performance correlates with Halachmi's representation. Subliminal is represented as constructing hegemony rather than resistance. However, in contrast, Subliminal clearly views himself as communicating resistance in performance. He 'resists' various forms of discrimination such as the normalization of Judeophobia in Europe and the Middle East. McDonald's analysis perhaps is based on the geographic framework of Israel's contested borders. Therefore, instead, of acknowledging Subliminal's outspoken stance of resistance in relation to the greater Middle East or the Levant, McDonald presents Subliminal and his music as 'paranoid', nationalistic and hegemonic. Whatever scholars and film-makers might choose to communicate, Subliminal's audience certainly views the external threats articulated by Subliminal, as legitimate. The articulation of such threats in this environment is particularly useful in stimulating Jewish, group cohesion. Ben-Ari describes the resulting cohesion stimulated by the perception of an external threat as inherent to Zionist hegemony inside the State of Israel:

Zionism is defined by an external enemy; it eliminates internal cleavages by positing an external foe in order to produce the Zionist subject as homogenous and cohesive. The external enemy enables Zionist subjects to imagine themselves as a unified and victimized whole. Since Zionist ideology produces the Jewish existence in Israel as a David against Goliath, a victim of global anti-Semitism and Arab aggression, it can appropriate and rechannel rap's resistance discourse into Zionism's discourse of resistance and victimhood (Ben-Ari 2010, 19).

¹¹¹ Essentially, Halachmi is cinematographically depicting the contrast between collective memory at the national level (Arab armies) and collective memory at the level of the living community (Tamer and friends). Perhaps she is also suggesting that Tamer and his friends are like the fledgling State of Israel, beset by enemies on all sides.

Subliminal's performative re-telling of this nationalist narrative described above sometimes formed the introduction to his song, 'Biladi'.¹¹² Often, without waiting for the 'newscaster' to conclude the narrative of the founding of the state, both Subliminal and his sidekick, The Shadow, (Yoav Eliasi), a tall, muscular young man, walked onto the stage. In Halachmi's film, both were clothed in trademark 'Gangsta' Hip Hop apparel: Subliminal wore a yellow New York Yankees cap back-to-front, shiny sports clothes, and his trademark 'bling' Star of David pendant around his neck. The Shadow wore similar attire in black and white.¹¹³ The sudden appearance of the Zionist Hip Hop artists on the stage became the glorious, victorious conclusion of the story. But it was not a dry, classic retelling of Zionist mythologies that escaped Subliminal's lips. Rather, it was an innovative, fresh reconstruction of the Zionist narrative in an urban, gangsta Hip Hop style with characteristic low bass and harmonized choruses. In a clear, bass voice, Subliminal delivered the first verse:

¹¹² In fact, the interlude sometimes functions as an introduction for the entire show or as an introduction for a different song. Sometimes the interlude is brought to the present (described in Orr 2011, 3).

¹¹³ For Dorchin, this 'American ghetto' look, a fashion statement, is closely tied to the content of the TACT members' lyrics (2012; 2013).

[REDACTED]

(‘Biladi’, first verse, my translation from Hebrew)

Subliminal’s declamatory style of rap is very different from DAM’s tongue-and-cheek, quick-paced vocal deliveries and System Ali’s varied, but predominantly theatrical narration style. Subliminal raps the first chorus in a low voice, firm and decisive. The opening words ‘*Yma adama sheli*’ (‘Mother land of mine’) compare the land to a ‘mother’, an evocation that is typical in Palestinian nationalist songs as well. Subliminal’s lyrics voice an existential fear, the fear that the state of Israel has been continuously singled out for critique by the international community (‘my country has become an international punching bag’). The fact that Judeophobia motivates this ‘singling out’ does not need to be articulated because it is obvious to everyone there: ‘he didn’t need to say it,’ an informant stated (who asked not to be named). I interviewed several participants who were Hip Hop fans and/or who had attended Subliminal performances in the early 2000s. The male informant, now in his early 30s, elaborated:

‘This “we’re not anti-Jewish, we’re anti-Israel” thing that the Europeans have going on is total bullshit. We all know what it’s about. It’s so obvious that Subliminal didn’t even have to say it. And it was the first time I heard someone stop bullshitting and say it in public, what we were all thinking anyway. And because of that he [Subliminal] was our hero. We were all drawn to him...even some of us who didn’t like Hip Hop that much’ (anonymous, conversation, Café Florentine, May 2013)

According to this man, Subliminal’s identification of Anti-Semitism and his call to unite Jewish people was so attractive and so timely that it united even the local, Jewish youth who did not particularly like Hip Hop. Moreover, Subliminal’s lyrics did not just speak of perceived external hatred, they also spoke of intra-Jewish divides explicitly: the ‘misguided’ people with ‘bleeding hearts’. These people to whom Subliminal refers are clearly the Israeli left, who he perceives as being brainwashed by global propaganda. ‘Biladi’ validates Zionism as a progressive ideology that seeks to unite the Jewish people through nationalism. Overall, the mode of collective memory evoked by Subliminal conforms to Zerubavel’s definition of a transcendent, nationalist narrative at the level of the state.

While the first verse of ‘Biladi’ exposes the need for the unification of Jewish people through nationalism, the chorus to the song suggests something slightly different:

Chorus: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

(‘Biladi’, chorus, my translation from Hebrew)

It is typical for American mainstream Hip Hop to have verses that are rapped and choruses that are sung. Subliminal’s ‘Biladi’ follows this pattern. But there, the similarity ends. The chorus to ‘Biladi’ adopts a Mizrahi music style from the 1970s, sung nasally in a high tessitura, using the usual occasional quarter-tones. It is no accident that a chorus that asks: ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where am I from?’ is sung in a Mizrahi style. Two cultural references

related to resistance are embedded here: 1.) the artist's disparate Middle Eastern origins; 2.) the use of the Arabic word 'Biladi' ('my country') validates Jewish nationalism on a local level by using a word that simultaneously signifies both Jewish and Palestinian roots in the land.

In a way, one can view Subliminal's representations of Jewish solidarity as expressions of his attempts to validate his own complicated identity. As a Jew with Middle Eastern (Tunisian-Persian) origins he establishes an identity within a framework of collective memory and dispossession of which, he and his ancestors were not actually a part in a physical sense.¹¹⁴ Subliminal's music cannot be effectively analysed without taking into account his own ethnicity and class background. Within the demography of the State of Israel, Subliminal identifies as Mizrahi. His middle-class Jewish-Israeli background as well as his Persian-Tunisian background, including his family's minority-status in Northern Africa and Iran and their subsequent experience of immigration to Israel, must be taken into account for a rigorous scholarly analysis of his music. If academic writing considers the Palestinian experience of dispossession and alienation to be key to the work of Palestinian artists, it seems strange that they ignore the parallel large-scale experiences of dispossession of Mizrahim, often occurring decades after the *Nakba* ('catastrophe').¹¹⁵ Similar to many Palestinian artists, Subliminal mutes his specific identity to assimilate to a larger, nationalist collective. But this does not mean that his individual minority status disappears in the process. Subliminal's rap can also be understood as representing a subcultural form of Jewish 'resistance' to the recent increasing normalization of Judeophobia and past and present anti-Semitism outside of Israel.¹¹⁶ In this larger context, his own ethnic diversity becomes irrelevant as Subliminal is speaking out against what he feels to be the suppression of Jewish identity and the right of Jews to self-determination, resulting in his expressions of united Israeli nationalism.

Middle East Studies scholar, Caroline Rooney analyses the part of the performance captured in Halachmi's film in which Subliminal's audience chant 'Death to Arabs'. She then states that Subliminal responds on-stage with words intended to calm the audience for the sake of

¹¹⁴ Of course, Subliminal was born after the founding of the state, but more to the point, the vast majority of Mizrahim did not immigrate until the 1950s well after the War of Independence of 1948.

¹¹⁵ *Nakba* or 'catastrophe' refers to the 1948 exodus of the Palestinian population from what is now Israel.

¹¹⁶ The sources on this phenomenon are too numerous to itemize here. An example is what Salzman and Divine calls 'the new anti-Semitism' (2008).

the camera. This interpretation is problematic since one could just as well argue that everything in the film is ‘for the sake of the camera’ since it was all openly filmed. Moreover, careful attention to the Hebrew soundtrack – not the English subtitles - would inform her that her interpretation was unlikely. Subliminal says: ‘Cut it out, you guys. Not death to Arabs – life to Jews. Whoever says ‘death to Arabs’, fuck you [grabs crotch in defiance of the crowd]. You are wrong, alright? Not ‘death to Arabs’, life to Jews’. Indeed, it is unlikely that Subliminal performs hatred of ‘Arabs’; Subliminal himself has stated on several occasions ‘I have no beef with Arabs, just with Palestinians who commit violent acts against normal people in the streets’ (from *Channels of Rage* 2003, my translation from Hebrew). Rooney analyses Subliminal’s work in the frame of Halachmi’s binary juxtaposition, stating that Subliminal’s stance ‘psychoanalytically...entails a refusal of otherness... [because] security can only be achieved through self-sufficiency together with the elimination of difference as a source of danger’ (Rooney 2013, 37). Rooney’s valid observation assumes that the ‘difference’ that Subliminal refuses is Palestinian, and certainly that is what Subliminal means at face value. Yet, this does not preclude the possibility that Subliminal is also engaging with other types of otherness, for instance, intra-Jewish otherness or differences in class. Arguably, the ‘right-wing’ lyrics expressing Jewish-Israeli solidarity are a direct product of Subliminal’s own sense of ‘otherness’ as a Jew of Iranian and Tunisian origins in the context of the Arab/Muslim Middle East. His stance is influenced by his family’s ejection from Iran, to be re-planted in a new context fraught with conflict and existential strife, in which distinctive Jewish-Iranian-Tunisian identity had to be muted to integrate into an Israeli ‘collective’.

Chetrit aptly describes how Mizrahi Jews experience intra-Jewish ‘otherness’ and oppression within the Israeli nation-state:

Mizrahim of the first generation, deprived of all political power, struggled to survive in alien social and economic structures and found themselves subjected to a socialization process that in essence urged them to erase everything partaking of their identity and culture (2000, 62)

Following an influx of Jews from Middle Eastern countries from the 1950s onwards, the term ‘Mizrahi’ (‘easterner’) was initially used by Ashkenazim to ‘other’ immigrants from Islamic countries. By the 1970s, the moniker was seized upon by people of Mizrahi origin to express solidarity and empowerment, and to distinguish themselves from other groups. Indeed,

Acosta observes that the political empowerment of Mizrahi communities in the 1980s was enabled by cultural diffusion and acceptance in the Israeli social sphere rather than by a political coup:

In 1977, it was the Mizrahi vote that for the first time since Israel's founding brought the right wing Likud party to power, a shift considered paradigmatic...their [Mizrahim's] electoral power has largely remained with right wing blocs since then. (Acosta 2014, 248).

Acosta claims that eventually, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Mizrahi community effected a contemporary redefinition of traditional Zionism that intersected with right-wing politics. The propensity of Mizrahi communities to support right-wing political parties in Israel is corroborated by Belkind (2010; 2013).

Understood against his intra-Jewish socio-cultural backdrop, Subliminal's music and lyrics can be viewed as an expression of this right-wing Mizrahi stance, a product of marginalization both in the Ashkenazi-Israeli and larger Middle Eastern contexts. Subliminal himself describes part of his artistic motivation as a direct product of his alienation in the Middle Eastern context:

‘When we talk politics with Arabs in Israel, they say, “My grandfather used to live in Tel Aviv, and now it's owned by Jewish people -- we want to come back,”...I respond, “My parents came from Iran and Tunisia, but nobody is going to give our property back to us. It's all been confiscated . . . We have this little sandbox we call Israel. We give our hearts and lives to make it a proud country”’ (Subliminal, informal online communication, 2007)

Subliminal's statement, too, can be read as identification with the expulsion described by the ‘Arabs’ in his local, ethnic narrative of dispossession, even as it simultaneously defies their perceived sufferings. Subliminal can be viewed as musically enacting Horowitz's idea that ‘Israeli Jewish musicians with roots in Islamic countries are both insiders and outsiders to the regional sound-space' (Horowitz 2002, 204). An examination of nuance, social complexity and the particularity of his background and its relationship to his musical expression extends to the social networks of TACT (the rap label ‘Tel Aviv City’). The diverse group of Jewish-Israeli performers with whom Subliminal often collaborates such as SHI 360, Booskills, Sivan and Itzik Shamly and others, are focussed on uniting a Jewish collective, which, while formed by nationalist ideology, is also diverse and fragmented.

Thus, although the scholarship on TACT artists normatively considers them as part of a hegemonic Jewish collective, in fact, an analysis of Subliminal's performance reveals the complex ways in which his music also seeks to overcome intra-Jewish otherness by evoking collective memory. TACT performers often identify themselves in an essentialized way as Zionists. Yet, the TACT crew are almost exclusively artists with origins in Middle Eastern countries. As such, identification with the Jewish-Israeli collective cleanses them of their threatening 'Arabness'.¹¹⁷ Thus, the historic past dispossessions experienced by Mizrahim are unacknowledged, or considered subservient to a greater unifying narrative. Zerubavel characterizes this tendency of unification through Jewish collective memory as part of a Zionist commemorative process that synthesizes the disparate Jewish communities of the past into an exilic whole:

[T]he Zionist commemorative narrative accentuated the perception of the "great divide" between Antiquity and Exile...[overlooking] the considerable cultural, economic, social, and political differences in the development of various Jewish communities. Underlying this periodization is the assumption that the exilic condition is more central to the Jewish communities' experience than any other dimension of their lives... (Zerubavel 1995, 17)

Applying Zerubavel's observation to the TACT artists, the suppression of Mizrahi identity occurs because the artists, while they have no shame of their 'Arab' roots, choose to emphasize a common Jewish collective memory. This collective memory is characterized by years of dispossession, ending with the establishment of Israel in 1948.

Many TACT artists opted to emphasize the importance of the Jewish collective, regardless of their individual background or ethnicity. Indeed, SHI 360 incorporates the collective experience of Middle Eastern Jewry as part of a long history of dispossession that characterizes Jews all over the world:

¹¹⁷ This is similar to how Dardashti describes the suppression of threatening 'Arab nationalism' by Jewish 'culture brokers' of Palestinian folk musicians.

‘Look it’s nothing new, this so-called anti-Israel anti-Semitism. It’s against the Jews. It’s been against the Jews for thousands of years. It was the Assyrians, then the Romans, then the Christians. It was the pogroms in Russia, it was the Holocaust and then what happened, what’s still happening to the Jews in the Middle East. It’s all part of it. That’s why it’s important to raise awareness, not just for the Jews in Israel, but for the Jews all over the world. To tell them it’s okay to be yourself and have your beliefs’ (SHI 360, Telephone interview, Montreal, December 2014)

SHI 360’s view that using the shield of ‘Anti-Zionism’ to enact Anti-Semitism is not an isolated phenomenon. According to him using Anti-Zionism to instil hatred of Jews is part and parcel of a long history of Judeophobia. This was a view that was articulated by a vast majority of the participants that I interviewed. SHI 360 explained that, while he currently lives in Montreal, Canada, he gives Hip Hop workshops to combat the depression and lack of self-confidence produced by collective dispossession of various kinds, helping disenfranchised youth combat racism; part of his process is helping Jewish youth articulate ‘who they really are’ without suppressing it for reasons of ‘political correctness’.¹¹⁸ Here, SHI 360 articulates a view embraced by most TACT artists: discrimination is experienced on a global, not on a national level, resulting in both the suppression of his Jewish-Arab identity in Israel and the suppression of his Jewish-Zionist identity beyond its borders.

I interviewed ‘Ydon’ who was present at Subliminal’s early performances and is also a Zionist rapper in his own right and part of the TACT group. Ydon was a young man at the time of the performance and is now in his thirties. His mother is originally from Libya, his father from Morocco. When asked what ‘Biladi’ in particular, and the performance in general, was about this was what he had to say:

‘It’s like, they said, they would drive us all into the sea...that is...the Jews. Us. If you’d have been there, you’d have been killed too ...But we survived despite all the odds. So that’s what it’s about. That’s what we’re rapping about. Surviving despite the odds. Resisting.’ (Ydon, South Tel Aviv, interview, May 2013).

Here Ydon refers to a statement made by Hassan al-Banna, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, in 1948: ‘If the Jewish state becomes a fact, and this is realized by the Arab peoples, they will drive the Jews who live in their midst into the sea...’ (*New York Times*,

¹¹⁸ SHI 360’s efforts are not limited to Jewish-Israeli youth. He enacts a similar process when working with Canadian Jews and with other minorities such as Native Canadians.

August 2, 1948). This statement was re-articulated at the time by the Mufti of Jerusalem and other leaders of the Arab world. It became engrained in the consciousness of many Jewish-Israelis, who see the foundation of the state as a narrow escape from dispossession and possible genocide. It was clear that Ydon's feelings of patriotism due to the past threat of dispossession were compounded by the fact that the interview took place the day after 'Independence Day' (*'Yom Ha'atzma'ut'*), a day commemorating Israel's Declaration of Independence by its future prime minister, David Ben Gurion. The day is celebrated by most Jewish-Israelis by elaborate street parties and decorating public and private space with flags and other patriotic symbols.

Turning back to Subliminal's performances, the second and last verse of 'Biladi' moves the focus from national collective memory to localized collective memory. Subliminal communicates his perception of daily reality for Jewish-Israelis during the Second Intifada. The verse also describes his bleak outlook on the future, which is characterized by instability and external threats:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(‘Biladi’, second verse, my translation from Hebrew)¹¹⁹

The above lyrics describe another stereotypical narrative of Jewish-Israeli collective memory. Following the founding of the state, Israel has seen many violent conflicts. Subliminal situates the Jewish-Israeli in the ‘present’ (’69 revolving to ’96), at the epicentre of conflict and global debate. The final situation presented in the lyrics is one in which life’s blood flows ‘into the sea’, with little promise of emancipation or change in the future. The narrative of collective memory presented here projects a condition in which a return to exile due to the whims of external super-powers is probable if the importance of intra-group solidarity is ignored. In performance, the first word of the verse ‘Yma’ (‘mother’) is shouted like a plea. This appeal can be understood as addressing both the country, the ‘mother land’ of the first

¹¹⁹ The Shadow often raps this verse.

verse, but also an actual ‘mother’, the previous generation of the Jewish-Israeli collective who raised young men and lost them to warfare.

The relationship of Subliminal’s early performances to South Tel Aviv, specifically to the locale of the Barby Club is important. The Barby Club is on Kibutz Galuyot Street: the very name ‘Kibutz Galuyot’ is a biblical term (Deuteronomy 30: 1-5). The name signifies the ‘Ingathering of the [Jewish] Exiles’, that is, the return of the Jewish Diaspora to the Holy Land in the messianic era, an idea central to Zionism in a secular form. Arguably, Subliminal’s performance aims to ideologically ‘ingather’ Jewish exiles who have ‘lost their way’. While the connection with the name of the street is figurative and arguably coincidental, conversations with fans who live in the South Tel Aviv area who attended Subliminal’s performances showed how the performances did bring Jews from different backgrounds together. Jews from lower-class, working-class and middle-class backgrounds spoke about how they (unusually) came together at the Barby Club to see Subliminal perform. This view was articulated by ‘Oz’, of Tunisian-Yemenite origin, who now runs a clothing stall in the Jaffa market and was in his early twenties in 2003:

Oz: Hip Hop, it wasn’t my thing at first, you know. But then we saw this guy was going to rap at the Barby [Subliminal in 2003]

Me: Was The Barby somewhere where you’d usually go?

Oz: No way! We didn’t go to many concerts. Lots of *smolanim* [lefties] usually went to that place. But it wasn’t like it was way up there, with the *tsfonim* [‘northerners’; snobs]. I mean me and some guys from the neighbourhood, we had just finished the army, you know. Maybe we wanted to party a bit. So we just walked up there.

Me: Why did you go to see Subliminal?

Oz: I don’t know. Well, because he’s proud, not only about being from the Middle East, you know, but also about being Jewish. He was a real rapper, just like the ones in America. But he rapped in Hebrew. And it was after the violence, you know. And we had no pride. And then along comes this guy and he’s wearing the Star of David, he is wearing the kippah and he’s saying “it’s okay to be proud of who you are”. And now, I’m like yeah whatever, I just want to get on with life, you know? Because it’s all a game at the end, you know? But then, just a poor Jewish-Arab boy [implied ‘from the wrong side of the tracks] and maybe that’s what I needed to hear.’ (Oz, Tel Aviv Central Bus Station, May 2013)

Correlating with Oz's observations, in many interviews, Subliminal articulates his desire to re-instil Jewish pride in his audience members: 'people should wear the Star of David, the Star of David is cool', he states in many interviews. He has meshed Jewish religious symbols with a sort of Israeli gangsta rap aesthetic in order to make what was un-hip and antiquated to most young Israelis, Jewish religious symbols, desirable and 'cool'. Thus, through Subliminal's influence cultural-religious symbols belonging to a perceived Jewish collective past passed from the subcultural to the mainstream. Oz, with a humble working-class background and Mizrahi origins, spoke of a situation in which he as a young man was attracted to Subliminal's message of inclusion and of Jewish pride as a young man, an attraction which, he implies was accentuated due to his having finished military service. He also describes the strategic location of The Barby Club in the anomalous industrial area, belonging to no single community in particular. Its location close to the boundaries of Bat Yam, tempted youth of lower class Mizrahi backgrounds who could save up for tickets to attend, thus uniting different Jewish demographic groups through shared space.

Another reason for the importance of South Tel Aviv as the setting for Subliminal's evocation of collective memory is that Subliminal's performances are considered 'deviant' as well, but for a different reason than DAM's. Subliminal's performances, such as the one described above, often made direct references to terrorist activities perpetrated against locals, in nearby urban spaces. The performance represented in Halachmi's documentary is of particular importance because it took place when a suicide bombing by a Palestinian Hamas operative that murdered teenagers at Tel Aviv's Dolphinarium Club (1 June 2001) was particularly fresh in the minds of the Jewish-Israeli youths who attended the concert. The attendance of young people at public events seemed characterized by fear that violent events might reoccur, especially since some individuals who had lost their friends in the suicide bombing. Subliminal's declaration of Jewish-Israeli collective solidarity seemed to diminish their fear, allowing the aggressive performance itself to give them a way to vent their anger, a motivation that was embraced by Subliminal himself.¹²⁰ Subliminal's early performances stimulated group cohesion through nationalist narratives in order to unite Jewish-Israelis but also to combat the fear generated by the perpetrators of the urban violence.

¹²⁰A similar process of catharsis/escape takes place in Palestinian Hip Hop performances as evidenced by my discussion of DAM in Chapter 4. This process is also discussed in McDonald 2013 and Greenberg 2009.

In short, Subliminal's performative reconstruction of Jewish collective memory occurs at both the national, ideological level and at the local level. Moreover, the affinity for African American styles of resistance embedded in his Hip Hop product cannot be isolated from the Mizrahi historical context. Since the 1960s, identification with African American culture was one of the ways that Mizrahim became emancipated in greater Israeli society. Frankel argues that the rise of the Israeli Black Panthers in the 1970s was a way in which young Mizrahi protestors reacted to discrimination by the Ashkenazi elites. Frankel described their politically expedient association with the African-American Black Panthers' movement as initiating 'radical analogy', a comparison that 'radically collapsed differences of history, cultural, and place' (Frankel 2012, 82). This pivotal moment in the history of Mizrahim in Israel was based on a declared affinity for an African-American protest movement and was particularly potent because the American Black Panthers had been denounced as anti-Israel and anti-Semitic by the Ashkenazi-dominated establishment. Thus, the cultural background from which Subliminal hails has an established historical pattern of utilizing affinity with African American social movements for subcultural empowerment.

5.3 System Ali's 'Natush': Collective Disposessions Converge

The above example discusses how Subliminal's music unites intra-Jewish identities through the articulation of collective dispossession at the national level. It also describes how a specific performance locale in South Tel Aviv, the Barby Club, is used to encourage Jewish-Israeli solidarity. More recently, other Hip Hop artists have articulated collective dispossession in order to unify local identities outside the sphere of Jewish-Israeli belonging. Specifically, System Ali's musical practices communicate a cultural tradition of shared 'convergent' collective traumas in the South Tel Aviv urban context. System Ali's music and politics of inclusion is evident in the identities of its band members who come together across religious, ethnic, and gender barriers. Abandonment, displacement, rootlessness, and a feeling of being excluded from the outside world are all stances articulated by System Ali's band members, no matter what their backgrounds.

System Ali's evocation of collective dispossession to create group unity was often used during their performances at social protests. System Ali often performed at events related to The Tent City movement. This social movement involved protests against evictions and the

lack of affordable housing in the Tel Aviv municipality. Events manifested themselves primarily in South Tel Aviv areas, including Jaffa. The Tent City Movement began in 2011, initiated by a young Jewish-Israeli video editor, Daphne Leef.¹²¹ She moved out of her home and lived in a tent erected in central Tel Aviv on the upscale Rothschild Boulevard. Through social media, she communicated that her actions were in protest of not being able to pay her rent with her salary. Many like-minded individuals soon joined her. Leef's decisive move from her home was the first time this type of protest occurred in public, urban space in Israel. Belkind considers that Leef's action was a catalyst that triggered mass demonstrations throughout the country:

[Leef's act] ignited the imagination of a whole nation. Hundreds of tent dwellers filled Rothschild Boulevard, and protest tent cities sprung up all over the country. Various public sectors went on strike, and weekly marches and mass rallies were organized by the movement (2013, 330).

Belkind considers these protests to have, on the one hand, 'brought together different constituencies, highly demarcated by class, ethnic, and ethno-national affiliations', yet, on the other hand, the events created a space in which contesting notions of home and homeland came into play (Belkind 2013, 330). In other words, the protests brought together different groups of the Israeli population who were concerned about the evictions and lack of affordable housing, but who also experienced dispossession or displacement on some level. Belkind describes how the convergence of collective post-traumatic memories of dispossession took place at events associated with the Tent City Movement:

[T]he 'diasporized' indigenous Palestinians, exiled and ghettoized on their own land, and the indigenizing immigrants, exiled or driven from their faraway homelands—including the holocaust refugees (primarily from Balkan countries) and the recent Russian immigration. In this context, the multiple citations of the ghetto reference not only the daily price exacted from those living in Jaffa's (predominantly Palestinian) contemporary ghettos, but a whole history of ghettoized experiences (2013, 344-345)

Belkind argues that 'expressive culture', musical and other, both generated the protest and contextualized the 'political action' within it (Belkind 2013, 330). According to Belkind, at

¹²¹ Noah Efron described the 'Tent City Movement' in detail at a talk at the University of Louisville (KY, USA) on 18 October 2012. This movement is also described in detail by Belkind (2013, 2014).

the Tent City Movement, System Ali articulated and developed the themes of ‘exile’ and ‘ghetto experience’ during the performance of their song ‘Yaffawie’. Thus, System Ali united participants through Hip Hop as a protest against municipal policies:

[T]he song’s [‘Yaffawie’]s polyglot aesthetics delivered its inherent meanings nonetheless, including the anger over present and past dispossessions, the multiplicity of identities that make Jaffa home for both Palestinians and Jews assembled at the park, and the collapse of different experiences of ghettoization and exile into a single, joint home in Jaffa, one threatened yet again by neoliberalism. (Belkind 2013: 344-345)

Here, System Ali’s ‘ghetto references’ transcend the discrete collective memories of a socially and ethnically diverse audience. Both Jewish-Israeli participants and their Palestinian neighbours and other individuals residing in the urban space share a ghettoized experience, whether current or in the collective memory of the past. This shared experience enables the convergence of their goals and current situation. However, this convergent, shared trauma sometimes resulted in ideological contradictions. For instance, during protests at the Tent City Movement some participants felt that their nationalist rights were not sufficiently addressed and even ignored.¹²² What is of importance here, is that during the protest System Ali and others were able to utilize convergent experiences of dispossession, both past and present, of the South Tel Aviv residents to create a commonality between otherwise segregated communities, separated by ethnicity, politics and nationalist hegemony. Since that time, the convergent narratives of dispossession of Israeli Jews and Palestinians and others have been apparent in System Ali’s musical performance. Arguably, these references to convergent dispossessions are what unite the diverse members of the group.

Nearly a decade after Subliminal first performed ‘Biladi’ at the Barby Club, System Ali performed collective dispossession through the manipulation of a well-known Israeli popular song. While Subliminal’s performance of ‘Biladi’, firmly in the ‘Zionist Rap’ genre, sought to unify a Jewish collective in the aftermath of Intifada violence, System Ali’s song ‘Natush’ uses collective memory to do something rather different.¹²³ ‘Natush’ begins with a direct

¹²² Mark Levine documents Jewish-Israeli film-maker Udi Aloni’s displeasure at the lack of Palestinian nationalist concerns at one such protest (2011).

¹²³ Please note: all the text from ‘Natush’ is my translation from Hebrew unless otherwise indicated.

quotation from a well-known Yehuda Poliker song ‘Chalon Mashkif Layam Hatichon’ (1988) (‘Window Facing the Mediterranean’). Poliker became well-known, particularly in the late 1980s, with his song ‘Efer Ve’avak’ (‘Ashes and Dust’). Poliker is the son of Auschwitz survivors from the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, Greece, a community that was virtually annihilated during World War II.¹²⁴ The image of the window on the Mediterranean in Poliker’s song is a common one in early Zionist literature both during and after the *Yishuv* (pre-1948) period, signifying hope in the face of hardship. Poliker’s song expresses the difficulties and joys of a young Jewish man coming to Jaffa as a poor immigrant, possibly a reflection on the personal experience of his father, who arrived in Jaffa by boat following World War II. Stylistically, Poliker’s music has traditionally been classified as ‘rock music’, although it also draws on Greek traditional and other Mediterranean musics and has Arab-influenced musical idioms (Seroussi 2012, 280).

The original Poliker song, upon which the song ‘Natush’ is based, is about the collective experience of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust coming to the ‘Promised Land’. As with many of System Ali’s songs, the lyrics of ‘Natush’ differed slightly from performance to performance. However, one thing that remained consistent was the evocation of different collective memories.¹²⁵ System Ali’s transformative version of Poliker’s song unites the different experiences of dispossession occurring in the contemporary Jaffa and South Tel Aviv cityscape. ‘Natush’¹²⁶ explicitly refers to convergent collective memories of inherited trauma and displacement. First, the word ‘*natush*’ means ‘abandoned’ in Hebrew, likely referring to the emblematic abandoned ‘house’ occupied by Jewish refugees in 1948. As well, the title evokes the historical displacement of different Tel Aviv and Jaffa populations and distinct nationalist narratives, Jewish-Israeli, Palestinian, and those of other demographic groups residing in the area.

The song ‘Natush’ presents the dispossession of two main components, Jewish-Israeli Ashkenazim and Palestinian-Israeli, albeit in a rather complex and interesting way. The

¹²⁴ Information about this former community is documented and exhibited in the *Beit Hatfutsot* (The Museum of the Jewish People), situated on the campus of Tel Aviv University. Academic scholarship dealing with the subject includes Karina Lamps and Yakov Schiby’s *Life Once Again: The Flight of the Greek Jews to Palestine, 1945-1948* (Alexandria Publications, 2010).

¹²⁵ It should be noted that this particular example is also a good example of intertextuality explored in Chapter 6.

¹²⁶ This is a live recording of System Ali performing at a music festival in the Negev Desert in 2014. The reason this recording has been included is because it is of slightly better quality than the recordings of performances of ‘Natush’ that I obtained at South Tel Aviv venues in rehearsals and performance.

particular song quoted by System Ali is well-known to all young Israelis from its opening melody. The following words and melody from Poliker's 'Window Facing the Mediterranean' is sung by either Enchik or Neta. In the particular performance that I recorded at The Barby Club, to start the song, Neta sang the Poliker quotation in Hebrew while Enchik interjected short comments in Hebrew, Russian and Russian-Hebrew (Enchik's comments are in bold):¹²⁷

I promised to write when I left you
But I didn't write for a long time

Did you?

Now I miss you so much
Such a shame, shame you are not here
After I arrived in Jaffa

Jaffa, our homeland?

Hopes were born out of despair

Hopes? Ha.

I found myself a room and a half
On the roof of an abandoned building'

The quotation is slow, melodic, and arguably, quite nostalgic. The interjections are not. They are interactive and tongue-in-cheek, questioning the veracity of the persona's point of view and bringing the refugee-narrative to the present. Following the sung Poliker quotation, Neta incredulously says:

Abandoned?! ('*Natush?!*')

¹²⁷ As in all System Ali performances, they wore their non-conformist attire, which reflects the non-conformity of the band itself. Two of the Palestinian members and Enchik who is originally from Uzbekistan, dressed very much like gangsta rappers: baseball caps, sports top and baggy jeans, with necklaces (not stars of David in this instance, but one sporting the colours of the Palestinian flag, another an emblem in the shape of a large golden scorpion, an astrological sign). Amne wore a baggy black t-shirt, jean shorts and running-shoes while Neta and Yonatan wore loose cotton trousers and black t-shirts.

In the Hebrew language, adjectives follow the nouns, so the nostalgic phrase ends on the word ‘natush’, ‘abandoned’. When Neta angrily yells ‘*natush?!*’ the song changes paces, and a group member releases a torrent of provocative rap in Arabic. This response is usually delivered by Amne, Muhammed M., or Neta. Reviewing a 2012 performance of this song, the left-wing Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* describes it as follows:

Then they [System Ali] drop the bomb: "Abandoned??!" screams the revolutionary rapper with the accordion. And the innocuous cover becomes a vitriolic political protest song about discrimination and blindness. Only a really sharp, creative mind could identify the right spot in Poliker's song and transform it into a lethal weapon (Shalev, 2011)

At this point, the group abandon the Poliker song and, in many performances, Amne begins her original rap about life in Jaffa:

Hey someone was shot at Tamar Square for drugs
While girls dishonour their home
Why use this disintegration?
As for every man on this planet, ‘boom boom’ was heard!

I took a walk down the street
I’ve seen a lot of
Girls with no future
Destruction, my house they took away from me
They even took the dirt on the ground
But we don’t forget, to our last breath we’ll fight

(Amir Amer’s translation from Arabic)

Amne’s rap acts as a realization of the introductory interjections. She communicates a state of dispossession that focuses on the experience of women in the Jaffa ghetto. Once her rap is concluded, Neta takes over, singing the end of the first verse of the Poliker song:

I have a folding bed here
If the three of us want to sleep
You and I and the boy,
Against a window looking out
To the Mediterranean Sea

On the words ‘you, the boy, and I’ (*‘at, ani, vehayeled’*) Enchik states, ‘and Amne and Muhammed and Yonatan too,’ and the whole band laughs in response. The comical

interspersed is an act of inclusion, the inclusion of all members of the System Ali 'family' as part of, not one, but several, dispossessed communities. Through their laughter and performance all of them share in the Zionist collective memory of Poliker's original song; at the same time, they evoke a contemporary, shared experience of displacement. The locale, shared by both the song and the performances, Jaffa within South Tel Aviv, is what unites their convergent, collective memories of dispossession. 'Natush' concludes with the whole group singing the chorus of Poliker's song in unison:

And maybe from afar
There is a one in a million chance
And maybe from afar
Some joy is sneaking up to the window

Here, 'sneaking', '*mitganev*', is a verbal form of the word '*ganav*' meaning 'thief'. Thus, 'Natush' both critiques and validates the stance of the Poliker song. In the end, both songs express hope for the future amidst despair, hope that continues to 'sneak' through the window like a thief despite the efforts of outside influences to keep it at bay and despite the historical reality of multiple displacements and ethnic conflicts.

The juxtaposition of Poliker's and System Ali's texts creates a potent political commentary. 'Natush' suggests that the feelings of alienation and displacement experienced by Poliker's refugee protagonist are not restricted to Jewish individuals. The musical performance widened the 'convergent dispossession' collective experience from culturally/ethnically-specific to an urban-specific paradigm. Thus, System Ali's use of the Poliker quotation challenges nostalgic, traditional Zionist narratives that describe the land as being relatively uninhabited before 1948.¹²⁸ The complexity of System Ali's intertextual allusion lies in the fact that their message is not a simple admonishment. Poliker's protagonist is not refusing to acknowledge the dispossession of the Palestinian population following the war of 1948. He is simply unaware of it. At the end of his strength and isolated from his family, he takes refuge wherever he can. System Ali's use of the quotation shifts the blame of dispossession from the individual to complex ideologies and battling infrastructures that led to a situation whereby Jewish ignorance of the historical dispossession of Palestinians was perpetuated. System Ali's use of the Poliker song reformulates the social and historical representations in the Poliker song rather than acting as a challenge to it. According to Rose, this redefinition of an

¹²⁸ This view is discussed in Chapter 2 in reference to *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*. (Songs of the Land of Israel).

original text to reform the ‘constitution of narrative originality, composition and collective memory’ is common practice in contemporary Hip Hop (Rose 1994, 85). Here the resulting reinforcement of the trope of dispossession as a multiple, rather than solely Jewish, phenomenon, enables System Ali to resonate with many residents of South Tel Aviv across different boundaries of identity and belonging.

In several performances, throughout the song, the audience responded by dancing to the beat and reacting with laughter to the inserted comments and the sudden change from ‘Poliker’ to ‘System Ali’. Yet when the slow ending came, a direct quotation of Poliker’s song, audience members look subdued and reflective, as if they too wanted some joy to sneak through the window. Chats with many attendees revealed that most of them self-identified as left-wing Jewish-Israelis. While most were in their twenties, several were significantly older. Iris was present, the woman in her sixties who I had met while observing the Russian break-dancers. There were a couple of Jewish-Ethiopian girls and a Russian girl with whom I did not speak. There was also a young Palestinian boy of about thirteen who was related to one of the band members. All had been present at various other events that I had observed and seemed to form part of the band’s entourage. However, despite the audience’s relative diversity, working-class Jewish-Israelis who were usually present at performances of Zionist rap in the South Tel Aviv area were startlingly absent. An analysis of the demographic groups at the performances I observed reveals that the concert was predominantly attended by Jewish-Israeli Ashkenazim, who identify as left-wing, and who are middle-class or wealthier, and a small group of Palestinian-Israelis and a very small group of Jews and non-Jews who belong to neither category. The kinds of people present reflect people who enjoy System Ali’s eccentric, potent aesthetic, but also those who support their message of inclusivity, of collective dispossessions united, but distinct.

In live performance, this evocation of collective memory acquires an additional potency. I recorded System Ali performing ‘Natush’ on several occasions, both during rehearsal and at formal events in South Tel Aviv, and I also observed video recordings of performances of the song made before my fieldwork period began in 2011.¹²⁹ Observations of each type of performance revealed additional nuances of collective memory and intertextuality created by the juxtaposition of the songs. For instance, I took a video recording of System Ali at their

¹²⁹ For instance, the following clip was taken from a 2008 performance at the Hebrew Arab Theatre, also featuring the percussion artist Frejon (Fred Johnson): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5S7R7-1-0N4>.

studio in Bat Yam performing 'Natush'. Reviewing it, I noticed that while Neta sang the opening Poliker quotation, both Enchik and Muhammed M. interjected spoken supplements. While Enchik spoke primarily in Russian, Muhammed M. spoke primarily in Arabic. I then realized that these interjections were about the band members' everyday experiences in South Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Looking at later performances of the song (recorded between 2012 and 2014), I noticed that the commentaries had changed, suggesting that they were, to some degree, improvised, an assertion that was corroborated by the band members. All of the interjected commentaries reflected the members' perceived experience of exclusion from the dominant Jewish-Israeli culture. However, the group also generated a juxtaposition between the romantic world of the imagined past of the Poliker song and the spoken commentary of actual individuals who 'live' the song in everyday reality. The reality is, of course, that both modalities, sung and spoken, are part of the performance. However, in performance, these layers of intertextuality frame and emphasize the authenticity of the real-life minority and marginalized status of the performers.

The above analysis might make 'Natush' seem like a parody of the Poliker original. However, while audience members could interpret it as comical, this was not System Ali's intention. When I asked the band if their lyrics were parodies of the songs that they referenced, Yonatan K. quickly denied this, stating: 'We do not see our songs as parodies, but more as continuation of the music coming from this part of the world' (Yonatan, personal communication, 2012). In a recent interview, Neta also described their references to Songs of the Land of Israel and by extension popular songs like Poliker's, commenting: 'I don't feel that we are rebuking or parodying these songs with our versions but I definitely feel their cultural weight' (Shafez 2013, 5). Indeed, while the song '*Natush*' is a political commentary, using Poliker's song as a springboard for political critique, this does not imply that Poliker himself was uncritical of Israeli politics. Poliker was the first openly-gay man in the Israeli music industry. Long after the recording of this song under discussion, Poliker released songs problematizing the Israeli government's attitude towards Palestinians, such as 'Radio Ramallah' (2008). Thus, Poliker can be viewed as progressive and left-wing in his own right.¹³⁰ System Ali's use of his work is but a furthering of his left-wing stance.

¹³⁰ A big thanks to Philip Bohlman for making this point at the 'Sixth Annual Workshop in Ethnomusicology', Hildesheim Center for World Music, 25-29 June 2014.

In group discussions, System Ali band members were explicit about the way in which convergent memories inform their raps. Although born in the USA, System Ali band member Yonatan Kunda is a third generation ‘Jaffan’. He often described his grandfather’s experience arriving in Jaffa as a refugee in the 1940s. Kunda perceives this arrival as a paradox: his grandfather is simultaneously coming out of exile and pushing someone else into exile. Thus, for Kunda, his family history in Israel involves an irreconcilable juxtaposition of narratives of identity and collective dispossession:

My grandfather came here after the war [World War II], the hardship of the war from Eastern Europe, from Siberia and Poland to get here, unusually with all his family. And after some time he found himself here (*points to his Jaffa surroundings*) cruising in a military Jeep, some months after the military occupation of Jaffa, and was told to choose a home. The memory of Jaffa as a ghost town has been an image in his head ever since. (Yonatan Kunda in *Jaffawiye* 2008)¹³¹

Kunda describes his grandfather arriving in Jaffa after a long period of ‘exilic’ displacement after narrowly escaping genocide in Eastern Europe as a Jewish refugee. Having arrived in Jaffa, his grandfather was offered his pick of empty houses in the area, which he was later to learn had been evacuated by Palestinian families. Here, Kunda’s testimony is a perfect example of Halbwach’s notion of local, collective memory formed in proximal, lived, social contexts, here, Kunda’s own family. He corroborated this stance in conversations that we had at *Beyt System Ali* and during meetings on the boardwalk (2011-2012), which I noted became more pronounced as the gentrification process in Jaffa continued.¹³² Kunda appropriated his grandfather’s memory and was able to experience it vicariously as his own. In a more recent interview, Kunda elaborates on the problems and inherent contradictions embedded in his identity:

I feel that my family roots are tied to a lack of something, a breakage. My family’s first home in Israel was in Jaffa. They were European refugees living in the home of an Arab family – refugees from Jaffa in 1948. How can we reconcile such deep, painful contradictions in our story and identity? It’s impossible. (Shezaf, 2013: 6)

¹³¹ The director Dan Deutsch in the documentary film *Yaffawie* (2008) has given Kunda’s view about intersecting inherited traumas a special emphasis.

¹³² I have used the citation from the film here rather than my own conversations, because it is the most compact summary of Kunda’s experience.

The abandoned house in which Kunda's refugee grandfather settled shaped his own experiences and 'Jaffan' identity. This local, collective memory, transmitted as oral family history, allows Kunda to reinterpret the intercultural aspects of his own history.

Kunda's experience of collective memory triggered by 'the house' exemplifies Halbwach's notion of how collective memory is constructed within a physical, local frame such as urban space, evoked by proximal, physical objects. To illustrate this concept, Halbwachs uses the analogy of an antique shop wherein a variety of artefacts from different times coexist in the same space:

[T]he furniture...inside the group are objects of appreciation, of comparison, open every moment to new perceptions and new tastes, and also remind us of ancient social customs and distinctions. In an antique shop all eras confront each other thus...and of course we ask – to whom did this couch, these tapestries...belong? (Halbwachs 1997, 194).¹³³

Physical spaces, like the exemplary antique shop are composed of historical layers that coexist in a single, tangible physical space. They prompt individuals to whom collective memories have been transmitted to make sense of their past and, Halbwachs suggests, to construct new interpretations of the present. Porteous and Smith (2001) have suggested that without physical objects and landscape, the perpetuation of collective memory can be disabled: 'memory cannot be totally erased while there are 'rememberers' who can pass on stories to future generations, but it can be mortally wounded when they are not backed up by accessible documents on physical structures on the ground' (paraphrased in Abujidi 2014). Through his interpretation of the 'empty' house, Kunda reconstructs a transmitted collective memory that encompasses his grandfather's post-Holocaust dispossession and that of the former Palestinian inhabitants of the city. He also experiences and reflects upon the difficulty of reconciling the two narratives of displacement. Thus, the house ends up being nobody's permanent home, but merely a temporary abode for the displaced, despite the fact that it has been inhabited for many years by his family. So, although Kunda is a third-generation Jaffa resident, his own identity remains fraught with the experience of multiple displacements.

¹³³ My translation from French.

5.4 Israeli Music and Narratives of Dispossession: The Bigger Picture

A. The Memorial Service

It is important to note that the Hip Hop artists discussed here are not alone in drawing on the notion of collective memory and/or collective dispossession. The unification of different communities through convergent collective memories informed events organized in Tel Aviv. These events often focussed on communal grief and mourning and often utilized manifestations of collective memory. Musical performance often played a pivotal role at the local events. Indeed, musical performances and broadcasts at memorial ceremonies in Israel articulate communal grief. This articulation correlates with a larger, trans-local Jewish-Israeli collective identity. For instance, in an interview with ethnomusicologist Talia Eliram, Amitai Ne'aman (1926-2005) a Jewish-Israeli composer and a talented musician, notes that 'Songs of the Land of Israel' are played for memorial ceremonies or during times of national grief:¹³⁴

The Israeli Folksongs are broadcasted on Memorial Day, Holocaust Memorial day, or if, god forbid, a tragedy occurs. Then quiet songs are played, and they are usually the Israeli Folksongs. These songs help people, give them a feeling of belonging, and a chance to share their grief, even if they hear these songs when they are alone, they feel that they belong to this land (Eliram 2001, 10)

Thus, music becomes a catalyst for both experiencing and mitigating collective grief and trauma, unifying the Jewish-Israeli national collective in mourning.

The use of music to evoke collective memories in commemorative events is scarcely a new invention. Historically speaking, one of the dominant tropes in Jewish cultural and religious narratives is a communal identification, embedded in a shared history of victimhood and collective trauma. This communal identity consists of historical experience of real and imagined persecution, expulsion and exile. Individual Jewish identities within the greater collective have long been formed by past collective traumas transformed into current lived experience. The trauma of persecution, genocide, and displacement continues to be an active force in religious practice and cultural expression, including music.¹³⁵ This identification with

¹³⁴ For instance, such songs were performed following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin in 1995.

¹³⁵ Even the themes of annual religious holidays focus around these themes. For instance: Hannukah (escape from assimilation), Purim (escape from genocide), Passover (escape from slavery).

collective persecution became one of the ways in which Israeli national identity was constructed, since historical persecution and anti-Semitism were both rationales for the beginning of political Zionist movements in the 19th century (Zerubavel 2005).

While collective memory of shared trauma is often confined to discrete, religious or ethnic communities, sometimes collective memory transcends these boundaries. In the context of South Tel Aviv, the convergence of collective traumas of different populations is a historical phenomenon related to Tel Aviv's relationship with Jaffa. Barbara E. Mann describes how important the notion of convergent collective memory helps to understand the formation of Tel Aviv-Yafo as expressed in literature and poetry in the *Yishuv* period: 'European Jewish trauma is intimately related to the psychological and physical traumas of Arabs living in Palestine in the pre-state period, what Yeshurun [a Jewish Israeli poet] calls "the two shoahs: the shoah of the Jewish people and the shoah of the Arab people here"' (Mann 2006, 53). Of course, the traumatic memories of other groups are relevant to contemporary South Tel Aviv: those experienced by Jews originally from Islamic countries, those of Jewish and non-Jewish Russians expelled from Russia, and more recently, those of refugees from African countries, most notably the South Sudan and Eritrea.

In the past decade, convergent collective memory has been used at performances in Tel Aviv-Yafo to promote solidarity between local Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian communities. These musical gatherings correspond to what sociologists Tilly and Tarrow call 'contentious politics', describing counter-hegemonic disruptive actions. They result in social movements that redraw community boundaries, separating different actors from each other, and by creating 'collective stories' about different sides (Tilly and Tarrow 2006). In this case, the 'contentious politics' of musical performance results in the temporary unification of demographic groups that are perceived to be at odds with one another. Their shared experiences of loss are emphasized so that they can potentially empathize with one another. The collective memories evoked by the performances can include state-sanctioned or communal mourning as well as protests against 'domicide', the large-scale demolishing of housing to clear the way for gentrification (Porteous and Smith, 2001), and neoliberal policies. For instance, Belkind's (2013) and Efron's (2012) description of 'The Tent City Movement' in Tel Aviv conforms to this model. Here, the protest against neoliberalism included a variety of musical performances, which united different demographic groups.

Performances incorporating multiple histories have created empathy and mutual understanding through the communality of different collective memories. These intercultural memorial services started as small, ‘underground’ events occurring mainly in Jaffa. One such event, occurring annually, is the joint Palestinian-Israeli intercultural memorial ceremony, uniting Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians.¹³⁶ This event exemplifies how collective experiences of trauma have been used to unite disparate populations. It was started in 2005 by the group ‘Combatants for Peace’ and the ‘Parents Group’ that provides support to all parents who have lost children in the conflict, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious background. When the event started in 2005, a few hundred people attended; the number of attendees has risen over the years and, in 2014, approximately 2500 people attended. The increase in attendance evidences the increase in the popularity of the event. Live music is an important component of this annual event, which both unites the attendees and provides a sense of catharsis for the mourners.

I interviewed ‘Efrat’ who gave a musical performance at the memorial service in 2013. ‘Efrat’ was a music student in her early twenties who studied at the University of Haifa and identifies as a left-wing, secular Jewish-Israeli. She described her experience performing at the memorial ceremony as stimulating much-needed solidarity between Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian communities. She explained that the idea was to provide a venue through which attendees could mourn their losses. The losses she described were not just those occurring in the ‘inherited’ collective past, but often involved recent, personal bereavement, the results of the current, violent conflict:

‘And the ones who started it were people with families that lost their loved ones...from both sides. So it’s a very special happening...it’s a very special event. It became this year very big. There were over two thousand people so it’s pretty big’ (‘Efrat’ interview 14 April 2013, Tel Aviv-Yafo)

While the event originally took place in Jaffa, it gradually moved to South Tel Aviv and has recently been held in a large park in the north of Tel Aviv, ‘Gan Hatarucha’, to accommodate the growing numbers of attendees and performers.¹³⁷ This suggests that initiatives originating in third-space locales such as Jaffa, can potentially emerge outside of such zones, arguably enhancing the potential for social transformation.

¹³⁶ Both Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza have attended this event in the past.

¹³⁷ In 2015, it was held at the Tel Aviv Convention centre to accommodate growing attendance.

‘Efrat’ described the persistence of the underground nature of the event: ‘it’s totally alternative. It is considered underground. It is considered very, very radical. And that’s really weird, you know, because these are just actions for peace. And that’s it’ (‘Efrat’ interview 2013). These kinds of joint events were widely attended by young Tel Avivian ‘*smolanim*’ (‘lefties’), they are generally not acknowledged by the media either inside or outside of Israel.¹³⁸ ‘Efrat’ gave her opinion on her view of the consequences of this invisibility in mainstream media:

‘It is totally political, you know. It is the political interests of the people. It is weird that there are so many people coming to this place and it still doesn’t get any decent media coverage. It is just ignored, it is totally ignored by the media. And a lot of people get their information from the media, you know, like my parents...or people who live [abroad]...yeah, so that’s what they get. It sounds to them like a radical Palestinian thing’ (‘Efrat’, 14 April 2013, Tel Aviv).

Efrat felt that the joint events rarely got any mainstream media coverage, causing them to be perceived as ‘radical’ and undesirable by many Jewish-Israelis. Yet her own musical participation at such an event led her to conclude that the event was a positive way of supporting the local community. Efrat’s contribution was a French song by the artist ‘Barbara’ (1930-1997) who was described by journalists as ‘the voice of France’ and who was of a Jewish background. Efrat sang the song with her own accompaniment on piano. I was quite struck by her choice, which did not seem particularly connected to the event. When asked why she sang this song, she replied that its French lyrics had anti-violence and anti-war themes that would resonate with most audience members. While she did not articulate this, my understanding was that the song was a ‘neutral’ choice that was neither Jewish-Israeli nor Palestinian, yet which appealed to a wide variety of attendees due to its themes.

B. Convergent Dispossessions in the ‘Hood’

In the broader urban context in which I was working, there were many discrete identities that were informed by collective dispossession. For instance, one of my informants, Nizar Radwan, a Palestinian violinist, emphasized elements of both continuity and rupture in his

¹³⁸ When I was studying Hebrew in the summer of 2013, there were several of these joint events that occurred and I was only aware of them through acquaintances or informal media (e.g. posters) in various urban performance spaces in South Tel Aviv (e.g. at The Block Club).

personal narrative. He lived in Haifa but often came to Tel Aviv to perform. Like many of my local informants, unprompted, he told me the history of his family who had lived in Haifa for centuries and had stayed after the war in 1948.¹³⁹ However, even while communicating his narrative of dispossession, he under-emphasized the rupture experienced by his family and explained that he was trying to make the best of things. Considering his success as a musician, family man, and an academic, he clearly had succeeded. Other young Palestinians I interviewed recounted their histories identifying as '48 Palestinians, descendants of Palestinians who, like Radwan's family, stayed in Israel following the war in 1948. They tended not go into detail about it as some older members of the community did.

In the same way, the narration of past, collective experiences was a common feature of the Jewish-Israelis I encountered. Such narratives were often communicated in the daily process of socializing. This process, which constantly regenerates collective memory, reinforced Jewish solidarity through shared experience. I found that many people tended to introduce themselves by relating personal experiences of trauma/dispossession.¹⁴⁰ Examples of this tendency abound in my fieldwork. Staying for the Sabbath in the Tel Aviv suburb of Petach Tikva, for example, I was immediately told the family history of escape from the Nazis, mainly recounted by the Hungarian matriarch, a 103 year-old woman who still remembered 'life in the old country' (fieldnotes January 2012).¹⁴¹ On the way to a DAM concert in South Tel Aviv, my friends and I got into conversation with a group of older men who, by way of introduction, told us that they all came from the same block of houses in Tripoli, Libya and one day were told to leave by the authorities. So, they explained to me, they continued to sit in South Tel Aviv much the same way that they sat in their favourite café in Tripoli all those years ago. In this case, the collective memory re-enacted by social balancing is the Jewish expulsion from Libya recreated in the present. Similarly, in the market place in Jerusalem, I met aging refugee musicians from Iraq who congregated to play music, smoke hookah, socialize and reminisce about their days in Baghdad. Displaced Iraqi Jewish musicians are

¹³⁹ Radwan's experience is summarized in the booklet to one of his CDs: 'I was born in Haifa. I grew up and am still living in my family's house which was built by my Grandfather, Mitry Khoury, who bought the land in the early years of 1930...During the course of the years, flats were built on top of the roof and were purchased by strangers. Now, I am the only family member who is still living in this same building' (Nizar Radwan, CD liner notes 'Haifa', Magda Label, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ I have not undertaken sufficient fieldwork among the Palestinian population inside and outside of Israel, or with African communities in Tel Aviv-Yafo to reflect on how the narration of a personal story of trauma works as a unifying factor in these communities.

¹⁴¹ This was not a singular event: Ashkenazi Jewish-Israelis often related their family histories, particularly those relating to the Holocaust.

discussed at length by Dardashti (2009) and in such films as *Shadow in Baghdad* (2014) and *Forget Baghdad* (2002). Their interactions involving the contemporary, social narration of trauma/displacement are not isolated incidents. Moreover, the way in which the collective memory of the Holocaust is narrated reflects the competition between different prevalent ideologies of Zionism or 'Israeliness' prevalent in the city-scape, 'a battle over memory, reality, and vision, over the past, present and future' (Nimni 2003, 43). The post-Zionist perspective expressed by a variety of Jewish-Israeli individuals used the collective trauma of the Holocaust to project a positive moral message ('never again should this happen to anyone') while critiquing what they perceived to be traditional ethnocentric Zionist notions, which were understood as 'never again should this happen *to us*'. For many Israelis, particularly those who identified with left-wing politics, the perceived 'Zionist' response to the collective trauma of the Holocaust was understood as promoting the self-preservation of the Jewish people at the potential cost of others inhabiting the same space.

It is not possible to draw any broad conclusions from this collected ethnographic evidence from Jewish-Israeli and '48 Palestinian informants. Responses may have been influenced by class or gender differences, or by individuals' lack of comfort expressing their families' past experiences to someone they had just met. However, it is possible to say that, unlike the Jewish-Israelis, the Palestinian community had far fewer public outlets to express collective trauma and feelings of dispossession and discrimination. Moreover, they often downplayed their own family stories and focussed on the general large-scale dispossession of Palestinians, the *Nakba*: I interpreted this as a form of activism, a way of strengthening solidarity within a ghettoized scattered collective. They projected Palestinian dispossession as a unified trauma rather than a mosaic of distinct experiences. Due to the lack of normative, public venues for expression, Palestinian past collective trauma was channelled to performative venues such as musical performance, theatre, and social protest. Karkabi discusses how these performative experiences are crucial to Palestinian youth residing in Israeli urban centres as a means of expressing Palestinian (largely secular) identity and nationalism (Karkabi 2013).

Overall, relating a history of trauma was a way the urban population had of introducing and identifying themselves. In return, they often expected (but did not require) the recounting my personal/ancestral history, which, despite being filled with displacements, I often found difficult to summarize in a meaningful way on a collective level. My maternal grandfather and his family are Holocaust survivors of Jewish extraction. Political refugees from Belarus

my family arrived in Berlin in the 1930s. The only reason that they survived was because, having already been displaced from their home they were quick to recognize ‘danger signs’.¹⁴² This story took a normative, familiar shape familiar to members of Jewish-Israeli society and was, therefore, accepted and understood. However, if I mentioned the collective dispossession experienced by the paternal ‘side’ of my family, namely, the on-going discrimination and collective trauma of my Bedouin family in the Sinai, it was often evaded or suppressed. This fact highlights the ethnocentrism, both within Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian communities: I often experienced a sense that there was a narrative of ethnic-cleansing, separation walls, socio-economic exclusion currently enacted against the Bedouin communities in the Sinai. While the situation of the Bedouin in the Sinai, from my understanding, is a simple, straightforward condition of oppression, this could not be articulated in an acceptable narrative of collective trauma. The response to this narrative in South Tel Aviv, suggested that it was either viewed as overemphasized ‘Arab’ persecution, and thus detracting from dominant narratives of dispossession. It was also even viewed as a ‘Zionist’ ploy to detract attention from Palestinians. Understood in an essentialist fashion as the product of my historical collective traumas, on the one hand, I occupied a ‘privileged’ place on account of practicing Judaism, having a Jewish mother and being a descendant of Holocaust victims; on the other hand, I was perceived by both Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians as a Sinai Bedouin, hence occupying the lowest social category in Israel/Palestine, dispossessed by the dispossessed, if you will. Thus, ironically, my own histories of dispossession were suppressed unless I made them conform to one of several recognizable tropes.

5.5 Conclusion

My analysis of the fieldwork has shown that collective memory and collective narratives of dispossession are ways in which Hip Hop artists negotiate group identity. The urban borderland of South Tel Aviv is used strategically to emphasize positionalities in performance that may not be popularly viewed at the time of their emergence. Subliminal and other TACT artists used the aftermath of the Second Intifada strategically to articulate existential fears of young men caught in violence. However, they also used the space to unite diverse components of the different Jewish communities in the urban area through a

¹⁴² This is a very simplified version of the story, but is probably the version I might have told acquaintances when asked.

performative evocation of collective dispossession, melding it with Zionist nationalist mythologies. In so doing, the distinctive origins and dispossessions of the artists as Middle Eastern Jews were muted and ignored, both by the artists themselves and, arguably, by academic scholarship. The ‘borderland’ of South Tel Aviv was used as a location to articulate views considered ‘deviant’ (e.g. too right-wing) by some elements of the Israeli population; similarly South Tel Aviv locations were more accessible to working-class Mizrahim who rarely ventured to locations in the North parts of Tel Aviv. Thus, Subliminal’s performances united Jewish-Israelis, temporarily at least, through the performance of a shared history of dispossession and discrimination.

A decade after Subliminal’s release of the album ‘The Light and the Shadow’, System Ali used a performative representation of collective dispossession in Hip Hop performance to unify Jewish-Israelis and Palestinian-Israelis and other elements of the population in a similar manner. Their strategy was to present collective memory and dispossession as a local, neighbourhood phenomenon. The song ‘Natush’ transformed the nationalist mythology of the Jewish refugee represented in Poliker’s song into the ‘real’ current dispossessions of the inhabitants of both South Tel Aviv and Jaffa.

My discussion has shown that the Hip Hop artists are currently drawing on a broad discourse of collective dispossession that informs, not only Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian modes of belonging, but also discrete communities within and without these broad categorizations. Moreover, identification with collective dispossession can be at the national or the local level, a positionality that is either emphasized or downplayed by the artist in performance. The positionality of the performers depended on whether they wanted to stimulate intercultural communication (System Ali; Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Service) or encourage religious affiliation (Subliminal). The emphasis on collective experiences of trauma in communal, intercultural Jewish-Israeli-Palestinian events creates community cohesion and strengthens intercultural bonds, a process which is strengthened by musical performance.

Events focusing on collective dispossession can exclude populations who do not identify as part of an Israeli or Palestinian collective and those who do not feel collectively traumatized. In Subliminal’s case, the exclusion is clear: his performance is exclusively to unite a Jewish-Israeli collective. In the case of System Ali the exclusion is not as apparent. System Ali can be viewed as articulating collective memories of members of the local community through musical performance, no matter what their origins. However, one of the challenges in trying

to create an inclusive urban musical community is to try to represent all of the community's constituents. In the case of System Ali's performances, the culturally defining power of the overarching Arab-Israeli conflict reinforced the Israeli-Palestinian binary opposition. Thus, the experiential convergence through shared trauma tended to exclude others in Tel Aviv, Eritrean, Sudanese communities, and others. However, System Ali does encourage the participation of all community members in many of their activities. For instance, recently, their rapper and accordion player Neta Weiner posted a video of an improvisation session with some young men from Eritrea suggesting that System Ali's membership may expand in the near future to include more communities, perhaps incorporating another layer of collective memories of dispossession into the collaborative musical performance.¹⁴³

Overall, it is important to note that Hip Hop artists' evocation of convergent dispossessions was part of broader social movements taking place in the urban space. Currently, this convergence through shared trauma to unite Jews and non-Jews remains restricted to left-wing 'underground' communities in Israel. Thus, it remains an embodiment of a subcultural, rather than mainstream, recognition of different narratives of loss. Optimistically, these intercultural initiatives will become more accepted as numbers of attendees continue to grow, allowing for greater representation of all the diverse communities in the city.

¹⁴³ The video has since been removed from youtube.com, for unspecified reasons.

Chapter 6: Intertextuality and Hip Hop: Minority Representation, Cultural Continuity, and Political Commentary

6.1 Introduction

Composers and performers have often referenced other music to engage with communal, collective memories and to initiate political commentary.¹⁴⁴ One of the principal ways in which Israeli musicians create continuity with other music, as well as socio-political critique, is through intertextuality. Israeli practitioners often use musical/textual quotation, employing intertextuality to link their work with musical ‘masters’ of the past already embedded in Israeli national consciousness. Israeli Hip Hop artists’ use of quotation, referencing ‘venerable’ texts of the past, often links their work with ‘international struggle’ (e.g. the Arab Spring) and past dispossessions both Arab and Jewish. These intertextual musical references function as a technical mode of creating convergent identity, culturally-coded to stimulate meaning for different band and audience members. While ‘intertextuality’ is potentially a ‘loaded’ term with roots in Julia Kristeva’s poststructuralist theory, here, I simply refer to the insertion of other music/genres that invite the listeners to respond to the political dialogue caused by the inclusion.¹⁴⁵

References to other music are often incorporated into music and lyrics accompanying social protest, and particularly so in Israel. For instance, Belkind notes that many of the protest songs accompanying a housing protest that she attended are derived from well-known children’s songs (Belkind 2013: 329, 331). Specifically, she notes the use of the children’s song *HaKovah Sheli* (My Hat) and the alphabet song. The theme of the former was sung to the words ‘HaBibi sheli’, ‘my Bibi’, referring to Benyamin Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister of Israel. The idea was to discourage individuals from voting for him. Whether referencing children’s songs, Egyptian pop songs, or well-known Israeli Eurovision hits,

¹⁴⁴ My MA thesis examined Jewish-British composer Michael Nyman’s explicit incorporation of a Chopin Mazurka into a minimalist, post-tonal setting. While quotation in a ‘classical’ piece is seldom compared to that in popular culture because of ‘low’ and ‘high’ cultural distinctions relating to musical forms, this comparison is relevant when comparing intertextuality in contemporary Israeli Hip Hop. In the above example, Nyman used Chopin in particular to allay his oeuvre with a late Romantic classic, the epitome of musical excellence from a Western classical normative stance. However, aesthetically, the Chopin imbues the texture of Nyman’s minimalist tableaux with an element of nostalgia, linking his work to that of a ‘composer genius’ of the past.

¹⁴⁵ Other scholars have problematized the term ‘intertextuality’. For instance, Ingrid Monson considers that the emphasis on ‘text’ of the term is inadequate when analysing a product characterized by sound. She therefore utilizes her term ‘intermusicality’ in lieu of ‘intertextuality’ (1996).

songs with undisputed familiarity are useful in communal or protest contexts in a variety of different ways. A well-known hit can reinforce group solidarity because most people will recognize the tune or words and be able to sing it together. Also, the manipulation of the music and/or lyrics can formulate a critical commentary with the values communicated in their original or its status in mainstream society. In the context of Hip Hop, Rose has argued that the use of a pre-existing text represents the way in which Hip Hop transforms commodity to ‘challenge institutional apparatuses that define property, technological innovation and authorship’ (Rose 1994, 85).

Given the prevalence of intertextuality in Israeli contemporary music that is explicitly political, it is not surprising that System Ali and other Hip Hop groups operating in South Tel Aviv employ it. Scholars have described Hip Hop as fundamentally anti-nostalgic (Gross *et al.* 1996), unlike genres such as *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* and *Muzika Etnit*, in which nostalgia plays an important part in enhancing popularity through audience identification (Brinner 1999).¹⁴⁶ Thus, when such genres are referenced in Hip Hop, it is arguably a conscious effort to embed nostalgic musical references into quintessentially un-nostalgic music. Dorchin describes this incorporation of ‘nostalgic’ genres into a normatively ‘anti-nostalgic’ product as typical of Israeli Hip Hop artists (2012). Citations often come from the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* genre and in Arab (mostly Egyptian) revolutionary songs and poetry. The former references are distinctively nostalgic, evoking Jewish belonging to the land through romantic depictions of the natural landscape. The result of such incorporations can often be viewed, in McDonald’s words, as a way to ‘challenge Israeliness from within’ projecting a utopian, counter-hegemonic existence (2009a).¹⁴⁷ Practitioners’ incorporation of Egyptian, Hebrew, or Yiddish lyrics and musical influences injects the anti-nostalgic Hip Hop product with an explicitly nostalgic Jewish-Arab musical dialogue, reflecting on and interrogating preconceptions of their collective(s). The following discussion explores a selection of ethnographic and musical examples in which System Ali uses intertextuality. These examples highlight the way in which Alternative Hip Hop groups communicate political messages and negotiate the collective identity of the group. While arguably the group draw on many

¹⁴⁶ For instance, *Muzika Etnit* often references songs from the performers’ homelands from which they have been exiled or are now at war (Horowitz 2010).

¹⁴⁷ McDonald is describing the transformative function of various strategies utilized by the group DAM (2009a).

musical styles and ‘intertexts’, this discussion of musical referencing will focus primarily on their explicit use of quotations from other artists.¹⁴⁸

6.2 Songs of the Land of Israel in ‘Voina’

System Ali’s use of intertextuality works to convey political stances of different band members, but it is also affected by the practical realities that the group must negotiate on a day-to-day basis. I will now discuss an example of explicit intertextuality, which came about due to an unforeseeable absence of a band member.¹⁴⁹ In 2013, System Ali recorded their song ‘Voina’ (‘War’ in Russian) for Balcony TV, which is an independent business founded in 2006 that broadcasts bands performing on balconies all around the world. Its Tel Aviv division is active in showcasing Israeli, mostly secular, Tel Aviv-based, musicians. However, since the recordings are also broadcast on the general website of Balcony TV’s international hub, recording with them gave System Ali both national and international exposure. At the time of the recording, one of the band members who normally contributed an Arabic rap to the song, could not be present. Therefore, Liba, the violin-player, substituted the original Arabic verse with her own Hebrew-language text. Liba’s contribution sounds aesthetically less like rap and has a more ‘spoken word’ dynamic. Unlike the Arabic contribution, which is about the hardships of young Arabs in the Jaffa ghetto, Liba’s contribution to the song ‘Voina’ (‘War’) directly references the opening lines of Gali Altari’s winning song in the Eurovision song contest in 1978 - ‘*Ein li eretz acheret, gam im admati boeret*’ (‘I have no other country, even if my land is in flames’) – by rapping ‘*Ein li eretz acheret al ha- iparon al ha-machberet*’ (I have no other country, on the pencil on the notebook’).¹⁵⁰ In Liba’s text, an equivalency is made between the propensity of politicians to cloud human rights issues and bureaucracy and academic distancing. Thus, ‘the land in flames’ refers to the real political and social situation, obscured by ‘the pencil and the notebook’, which indicates a detachment from the lived reality of situations of hardship. Liba’s reference to the pencil and the notebook can also be interpreted as having a positive meaning: it is through the rewriting

¹⁴⁸ Indeed Hip Hop scholars have differentiated ‘deliberate’ intertextuality, self-conscious citation for the purposes of initiating commentary/dialogue, from other forms (e.g. Peterson 2014).

¹⁴⁹ Band members were often absent for practical reasons like work commitments, etc. However, absences were also due to discrimination, incarceration of family members, financial problems, and mandatory military service. The potentially sensitive nature of some of these absences meant that these were not things that could always be addressed directly with the band in the fieldwork process.

¹⁵⁰ The video of this performance is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N94SThV4E90>.

of songs with such implements that social change can be enacted (e.g. ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’).¹⁵¹ This example also illustrates on one hand, the intertextual meaning generated by the juxtaposition of two different texts and on the other hand, the intertextual moment generated by the different performers. The live juxtaposition of the present Liba and the absent Amne was felt acutely by myself as an ethnographer, making Liba’s critique of the Altari song all the more potent.

6.3 ‘Yalda MiGadot’ (‘Girl from Gadot’)

‘Yalda MiGadot’ (‘Girl from Gadot’) is about family safety during times of war. The song uses both intertextuality in its lyrics and music to represent minorities as well as initiate a critique of Israeli nationalism. The lyrics of the song use a direct quotation of ‘Biti At Bocha O Tsocheket?’ (My daughter are you laughing or crying?). This song is by Yovav Katz (lyrics) and David Kribushe (music) who was known in Israel and the USA for his show-tunes and film music. The original song became well-known in a performance by the Israeli singer Yaffa Yarkoni in the 1960s. It was later adapted by the folk-musician Chava Alberstein. The song is a classic of the Songs of the Land of Israel repertoire. It describes how Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967. The song is centred on the conversation between a mother and daughter whose husband/father has gone to war.

System Ali quote both the words and the music of ‘Biti At Bocha O Tsocheket?’ with only slight alterations. However, System Ali’s version conveys a rather different message than the original. Through the new title, ‘Yalda MiGadot’, System Ali locates the conversation in the town of Gadot, which is a small town in the North of Israel by the Jordan River in territory that is still contested by Israel and Syria. Whereas the original song is about a Jewish family who try to return to a normal life following military violence, System Ali’s song is about many families of different backgrounds surrounded by violence.¹⁵² System Ali uses the music of the original song. However, instead of the show-music style of the concert hall used in

¹⁵¹ System Ali are not the first Israeli hip hop artists to cite this song: it was used by Subliminal in his song ‘I’m Living Day to Day’ (2002) to illustrate the hopelessness of living under the ‘threat of constant violence and terror’ (McDonald 2013b, 74). McDonald suggests that this is used to justify any form of violence against the ‘other’. I also suggest that, from Subliminal’s perspective at least, the use of this quotation may be a response to challenge perceived right-wing Arab nationalist discourses that invalidate the existence of Jewish-Israelis and seek a political ‘solution’ that would advocate removing them from their home.

¹⁵² The song reflects a situation reminiscent of the popular Israeli film *The Syrian Bride* (2004).

Yarkoni's performance or the music of the Yiddish folk tradition employed in Chava Alberstein's version, System Ali transform David Kribushe's music into a slow-moving reggae texture, with the rhythmic pulse on the back of the beat.

In System Ali's version, Arabic and Hebrew rap lyrics are interspersed throughout the song, creating new meanings around the original song lyrics. The song is framed by Amne's rap, which begins 'Yalda MiGadot' with:

A block of text that has been completely redacted with black boxes, obscuring the lyrics.

(Amir Amer's translation from Arabic)

Therefore, unlike 'Natush', which is framed by the intertextual reference to Poliker, 'Yalda MiGadot' is framed by Arabic rap. Amne is then joined by Neta on the microphone joining in with Amne on some words in dramatic percussive moments. It is only after Amne's contribution that the Kribushe song (both music and lyrics) is directly cited in 'Yalda MiGadot' confounding the expectations of the audience. Thus, Amne's original rap is transformed into a direct citation of the chorus of a 'classic' song that, as Belkind comments, is 'well known to most Jewish Israelis' (Belkind 2014, 258):

Two blocks of text that have been completely redacted with black boxes, obscuring the lyrics.

(my translation from Hebrew)

The natural symbols, 'green house' and 'the loquat' (a type of indigenous tree) serve to connect the family with the land and the earth. Thus, the words describe a utopian, bucolic existence now threatened by war.

Yonatan K.'s Hebrew contribution following the chorus is in the style of the fast-moving, bullet-like East coast rap in the US. He communicates a message of anti-violence by reducing violence and death to a human, rather than a nationalist, level:

The last rocket has blown up and turned silent



(my translation from Hebrew)

Yonatan K.'s contribution focuses on large-scale conflict that can potentially affect people of any nationality. His words then bring the focus to the housing demolitions 'at home'. Katz' lyrics are then spoken by Neta extremely quickly in a sort of theatrical display leading in a wild dance that concludes the song.

In 'Yalda MiGadot', System Ali have transformed a nostalgic, traditional Zionist Israeli song into a cutting-edge, heterogeneous piece. The groups achieves this through the contrast between Katz' lyrics and their own contributions. System Ali's use of the song can be understood as 'post-modern parody' according to Linda Hutcheon's definition, 'a double process of installing and ironizing' to show how 'present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference' (Hutcheon 1989, 93). The band avails itself of the song's message of wistful home for the future. Put into System Ali's multi-genre context,¹⁵³ the original song is not only 'modernized', but it is transformed into a pragmatic call-to-arms for equality rather than wishful thinking about peace.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ The different musical genres utilized in this song are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

¹⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that listeners did usually not understand the 'call to arms' for equality in 'Yalda MiGadot'. Audience members with whom I spoke tended to recognize the Kribushe song, but were not able to identify it. However, often the familiarity with the lyrics, and melody in particular, caused people to be more receptive to the song, and to System Ali in general. This audience reaction was a reminder that sometimes the subtleties of political commentaries communicated through intertextuality are not always apparent to everyone.

6.4 Che Guevara and the Arab Spring

System Ali's quotation of Shiekh Imam's song 'Guevara Mat' exemplifies both the group's use of intertextuality to convey political commentaries as well as the growing tendency of left-wing young Jewish-Israelis and '48 Palestinians to identify with the Arab Spring (Levine 2011; Belkind 2014). The appropriation of Arab traditional music and music of the Egyptian revolution by System Ali, whether in improvisation or a specific song, typically has both a reverential and unifying function. 'Guevara Mat' is no exception. The song employs a text by Egyptian revolutionary Ahmed Fouad Negm (1929-2013). Starring Muhammed A. who raps the poem, this piece reveals the symbolic reverence with which many young, left-wing Israelis and Palestinians view the Argentinian, Marxist revolutionary leader Che Guevara.¹⁵⁵

System Ali's referencing of 'Guevara Mat' serves to link their initiative with a greater, Middle Eastern community. Ahmed Fouad Negm is generally hailed as the revolutionary poet of Egypt, the 'poet of the people' (Fahim, 2013). Negm was born in 1929 to an impoverished peasant (*'fellahin'*) family in Egypt in the state of Sharqia. While he became a prolific poet, his provocative critiques of Egyptian leadership caused him to initially be relatively unknown internationally. He was jailed for a total of eighteen years for subordination. Only in the past few years his poetic output has become recognized. Negm died in December 2013. Negm's poem, 'Guevara Mat' (Guevara died') was written in 1967, a pivotal year in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt had just been defeated by Israel. The aftermath of the 1967 war led to the Palestinian/Israeli landownership debates fuelling the current conflict and settlements.

Negm's poem 'Guevara Mat' mourns the loss of a hero and a freedom-fighter (*'mujahideen'* in Arabic). In the poem, Negm predicts that while Guevara's death was broadcast 'on the radio stations/In churches/In mosques' (El-Hewie's translation 2013, 52), it would be quickly forgotten. Negm contrasts Guevara's greatness with his lack of appreciation by the rest of the world ('His squeal ascends to heaven/Cries unheeded'). Negm's text implies that the public's lack of recognition of Guevara reflects a lack of commitment to social justice ('Justice is

¹⁵⁵ Indeed, the emblem of Che Guevara has become a ubiquitous marker of left-wing Israelis and Palestinians living in South Tel Aviv. I was approached several times by young Israelis sporting this emblem who would hand out leaflets about promoting human rights and supporting a particular political candidate.

dumb or coward’).¹⁵⁶ Negm’s admonishment to the poor and working class to engage in activism ‘O workers and deprived/ O the chained/legs and the head/no salvation availed/without guns and bullets’ (El-Hewie, 54) reflects System Ali’s message in terms of their local activism in the ‘Tent City Movement’. Negm admonishes the rich and coddled in the poem (‘O indulged in food and clothing/O kept warm/And fond of heaters’ (El-Hewie 53). This critique is similar to the anti-capitalist stance articulated by Alternative Hip Hop groups in general.¹⁵⁷

In somewhat eccentric English, scholar El-Hewie comments on the ideological significance of Negm’s tribute to Guevara that ‘[he] exemplified greater noble ideas as a physician and guerrilla fighter for freedom that knows no national borders’ (El-Hewie 2013, 52).

System Ali’s version of Negm’s poem encapsulates Negm’s idea of political resistance that transcends international boundaries described by El-Hewie. System Ali’s song is both reverential to Guevara and to Negm himself. My interpretation is that, from a Palestinian perspective, this reference connects the Palestinian community with a greater ‘Arab’ community that sympathizes with their plight and promotes liberation. For instance, System Ali band member Muhammed A.’s attachment to Che Guevara was connected to both Palestine and to the war in Syria.¹⁵⁸ From a Jewish perspective, I understood that the band members affiliated themselves with trans-national resistance that defies boundaries, challenging the world’s perception of them as part of a controlling hegemony. This association with a broad, subcultural struggle is a common political stance on the part of the Israeli left. In the field, young Jewish-Israeli participants who identified as ‘left-wing’ often connected their quest for justice to the Levantine area, the Middle East, or even to the global community. They seldom identified their social justice goals as being focused on ‘Jewish’ emancipation.

There is an intertextual ‘triangulation’ between Negm’s poem, the first musical setting of it by Shiekh Imam, and System Ali’s song. The first song set to the lyrics of ‘Guevara Mat’ was

¹⁵⁶ Such discussions of ignoring violations of human rights are reminiscent of Neta’s lyrics about the public being in circus cages in System Ali’s ‘Building the House Anew’. This suggests that Negm’s ideas may have had a broad influence on the band’s output.

¹⁵⁷ This anti-capitalist stance is discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of alternative Hip Hop groups in Israel.

¹⁵⁸ Muhammed A.’s attachment was sometimes at odds with contemporary transnational reality. For instance, after a poetry reading of his original work, he complained that many South American countries (which he associates directly with Guevara and his revolution) abstained in the vote officially recognizing the Palestinian territories in the U.N. (2013). For him, Che Guevara seemed to symbolize ethical freedom-fighting that he linked directly to current South American politics and with the Palestinian cause for self-determination.

composed by Sheikh Imam (1918-1995). Sheikh Imam, (Imam Muhammed Ahmed Eissa), was an Egyptian composer and performer who often set Ahmed Fouad Negm's poems to music. This 'collaboration' began in the 1960s, with Negm sometimes even reciting his poetry to Shiekh Imam's accompaniments on the oud. Shiekh Imam set Negm's poem 'Guevara Mat' to a blues-like song. Essentially the song is slow, dirge-like and repetitive, composed of the repeated call 'Guevara Mat' ('Guevara Died') with an imitative response in the oud.

System Ali's song is very different from Shiekh Imam's dirge-like rendition. The song opens with a dramatic five-note instrumental introduction, with each chord punctuated loudly with percussion. The progression outlines a G7 fully diminished chord (G-Bb-Db-A) and then leaves a D major chord played by Yonatan on the electric guitar. The D major chord 'hangs' in the air in need of sonic 'completion'. This 'hanging' chord introduces the percussion the next section in a dramatic fashion. This section opens with a sudden, fast-paced solo percussion interlude, employing high-tessitura percussion such as the snare and the high-hat, giving a sense of urgency to the texture. The percussion is embellished with quiet chords in the accordion as well as falling thirds and soft chords in the electric guitar. Muhammed A.'s voice comes in suddenly in a breathless, fast recital of Negm's poem, with a stress on the syllable 'et' rather than Guevara's name. The whole band comes in together for the chorus, which is dirge-like and considerably slower than Muhammed A.'s recital of the verses. Following the chorus, Muhammed A.'s recital of the next verse is given a sense of heightened urgency with the additional of punctuations with the electric guitar, which gradually become a dance-like melody in the style of klezmer music.

Figure 16: Sections of ‘Guevara Mat’

Time:	Section:
0:00-0:06	Dramatic five-note introduction
0:06-0:23	Solo percussion with embellishments
0:23-0:59	Negm’s verse by Muhammed A. (Arabic)
1:01-1:19	Group sing dirge-like chorus
1:19-2:04	Negm’s verse by Muhammed A. (Arabic); repeated words/phrases from verse 1; Dance-like music 1:29-2:04
2:04-3:28	Group sing dirge-like chorus; repeated words; low percussion; ends with G-minor chord in the accordion and electric guitar

The second time the group sing the chorus, rather than sing the whole thing through, they repeat the first phrase several times, getting quieter and slower and more dirge-like. The song concludes with a vibrating G-minor chord played softly by the accordion and electric guitar. Overall, System Ali emulates the dirge-like qualities of the Shiekh Imam version. However, the Shiekh Imam version is solely a mournful musical eulogy for the passing of a ‘freedom fighter’. System Ali brings the eulogy to the present, transforming it into action using Muhammed A.’s fast-paced, urgent vocal delivery. Thus, System Ali’s version proclaims Guevara’s impact on living young men and women, involved in a current revolutionary tradition.

6.5.1 Religious Intertexts: Biblical References

A significant body of scholarship explores references to the Tanach in modern Israeli life and literature, with a small selection focusing specifically on biblical references in popular culture (Lowin 2012). A convergence between elements of religious theology and/or liturgy and contemporary culture is particularly evident in popular music. For instance, the popular song ‘*Ana BeKoach*’ (‘we beseech you’) sung by Gad Elbaz and others is a particular anthem both of religious Jews and of modern, secular Israelis.¹⁵⁹ The mystical text on which the song is based is from the second paragraph of the *Kol Nidre* liturgy for the night of Yom Kippur, one

¹⁵⁹ Even the young Israeli staff at the Florentine Hostel (discussed in Chapter 2) found this selection less objectionable than most ‘religious’ music.

of the holiest days of the year in the Jewish calendar, and implores God to have mercy on the Jewish people and ‘untangle our knotted fate’ (my translation). The song’s rendition into a new-age pop song has made it an emblematic unifier of a variety of Jewish communities.

Hadag Nahash, the alternative Hip Hop group often uses biblical and/or religious references to reinforce the political messages communicated in music. For instance, their fourth studio album is entitled ‘*Be’ezrat Ha’Jam*’ (‘with the help of the jam’) a play on the oft-repeated religious phrase ‘*Be’ezrat HaShem*’ (‘with the help of God’). Their rather controversial song ‘*Ani Ma’amin*’ deals with anti-war, anti-racism topics and promotes social welfare and education. The title ‘*Ani Ma’amin*’ is a direct reference to the twelfth of Moses Maimonides’ (12th century) thirteen principles of faith: ‘*Ani ma’amin be’emuna shlema beviat hamashiach*’ (‘I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the messiah’). Framing their song with this messianic religious doctrine energizes and strengthens their beliefs expressed in their song. The use of this trope was considered contentious and quite irritating to some youtube commentators on their music videos, possibly due to the reverence with which they viewed the religious ideology. However, many people I encountered found the result to be a powerful protest song, while others found the reference amusing.¹⁶⁰

It is important to note that religious idioms are not isolated, literary-based references but are part of contemporary Israeli life. My field-site of South Tel Aviv was no exception despite its unusualness. During my everyday encounters, I noted the multiple biblical references with interest and, often, with amusement. References to the Torah or Jewish religious liturgy are ubiquitous in both secular and religious sources. For instance, on the 25 bus that runs north-south that I often rode to observe the urban landscape, signs above the seats reserved for the elderly reads ‘*mipnei seivah takum*’ a phrase from Leviticus 19:32 meaning literally ‘stand before the elderly’ (according to the King James version it is ‘thou shalt rise up before the hoary head’).¹⁶¹ Near my hostel in the ‘hippy’ Florentine area, a large billboard depicting the Lubavitcher Rebbe next to a tiny synagogue read: ‘the Messiah is coming: let’s be ready’, an incitement to good behaviour. In contemporary Israeli political discourse, ‘the Messiah’ is used to denote correct political reform. The Messiah’s absence is blamed on different demographic and/or political groups. Indeed, System Ali imply in one of their songs that

¹⁶⁰ The music video and comments are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTkmOPkuIpo>.

¹⁶¹ Thanks to Dr. Shari Lowen for bringing this to my attention.

someone will have some explaining to do upon the arrival of the Jewish Messiah due to the immorality of the State. In their song ‘Uprising’, in one of the choruses they chant in English:

Cause on the pay day [coming of the Messiah]
When ideology dies
We are here with our mics to clean up the mess of their lies

The Jewish theology regarding the coming of the Messiah is extensive and varies, usually according to Jewish denomination. Here it is important to note that the Messiah’s absence (for he may tarry!) is used by groups to chide others for their apparently immoral behaviours.¹⁶²

6.5.2 Palestinian Exile and the Jewish Exodus from Egypt

In a culture in which explicit references to the Tanach are standard in everyday life and popular culture, it is scarcely unusual for System Ali to use some of their own to communicate their messages and personal experiences. In ‘Yaffawie’ System Ali advocates rights for Palestinians using a biblical reference of obvious familiarity to Israeli Jews, the iconic exodus from Egypt, an example of collective enslavement and subsequent redemption. Ironically, Yonatan K. equates current Israeli leadership to the biblical Pharaoh with the following English language rap:

Keeping it real with the System Ali crew
You’ve got to keep your heart open, deep and blue
Like the Suez Canal we are coming through
Stirring up a storm mixing up a new form
Of a newborn Mediterranean brew...
So be a pharaoh, if the future is a Nile
We are Mr Bulldozer, Israel in denial¹⁶³

These words suggest that the current policies of the right-wing Israeli government will result in their own destruction (e.g. drowning at the Red Sea like the Pharaoh Ramses II as they try

¹⁶² It was not always individuals from religious backgrounds who blamed others for the messiah’s absence. During fieldwork I encountered secular individuals who blamed it on the narrow-mindedness of religious people.

¹⁶³ Monterescu cites a slightly different version of the song lyrics in his book *Jaffa Shared and Shattered: Contrived Coexistence in Israel/Palestine* (2015, 130).

to capture the fleeing Ancient Hebrew slaves). But those not familiar with the biblical Jewish collective experience of redemption from Egypt might miss the power of the reference. During the Jewish holiday of Passover the Exodus is ritually re-enacted at a service held at home and co-ordinated by the family. Freedom is to be experienced, not purely as a recollection of the past but a ritual re-enactment and current, transcendental experience of redemption from slavery and exile: 'In every generation one must see oneself as having personally come forth from Egypt' (Passover Haggadah, Goldberg Edition). The use of this reference in a Hip Hop song advocating rights for Palestinian citizens constitutes a potent challenge to the Jewish-Israeli administration but on theological/spiritual terms. This is particularly important in encouraging social activism in a Jewish culture that defines itself, in part, through a shared history of expulsion and trauma. Evoking the quintessential expulsion, the biblical Exodus from Egypt, with the Palestinian community as the enslaved community under a politically corrupt Israeli hierarchy is particularly provocative and potent. Yonatan Kunda explicitly evokes what he feels to be similar traumatic experiences to reinforce political points. Rather than provoke the audience, these parallels seem to be drawn to incite empathy, particularly as the phrase 'Let my people go' links the Jewish and Palestinian experience.

The intertextual reference to the Jewish Exodus from Egypt also locates Palestinian identity as a current, valid, communal identity, not a figment of the area's indigenous past, |often presented in contemporary visions of Jaffa. As Muhammed A. raps in Arabic in System Ali's song 'Building the House Anew':

They say my past is empty, no past, no regrets
No, no, no, no! I am an Arab of the Syrians
An Arab from Palestine
An Arab from Jaffa
And if you say I'm in the past, I will tell you that I'm in the present

(Amir Amer's translation from Arabic)

System Ali's affirmation of Palestinian culture as a modern, lived phenomenon challenges recent municipal initiatives to view Jaffa as part of Tel Aviv's past. Restricting a community to the past is a process described by Mann as a sociological pattern of repression. Mann describes this phenomenon in *Anti-Semitism in Medieval Europe* in Christian urban centres in which the ghettoized Jewish populations were viewed as being both part of the Christian

past yet also representing the undesirable ‘other’.¹⁶⁴ The ethnic or religious ‘other’ is thus made irrelevant to the contemporary world and its exigencies. Similarly, Jackie Feldman suggests that this view also has contemporary relevance. As an Israeli Jew working for a Palestinian tour company catering to Christian evangelical tourists from the USA and Europe, he found that, as an Israeli Jew, he was regarded as part of a quaint – but disillusioned - Christian past (Feldman 2013). These encounters, Feldman explains, had the effect of strengthening his Jewish-Israeli identity.

While I do not wish to make a simplistic comparison here, what is similar is the assimilative/suppressive form of discrimination, namely the idea that the Palestinians are part of the ‘authentic’ urban past (‘Old Jaffa’) at the same time that [and] their current existence and socio-cultural difference is suppressed. In both cases, the ‘othering’ of a minority community can be viewed as part of a larger process of political and social disenfranchisement. Mann suggests that this prevalent stereotyping of the obsolete ‘other’ applied to both Jewish and Arab populations, but that the essentialization of the Arabs as ‘old’ and ‘quaint’ is something that characterizes the history of Tel Aviv and Jaffa:

The conflation of “Jewish” with “modern,” and of “Arab” with “traditional,” is typical of early discourse regarding Tel Aviv’s urban distinctiveness. This essentially orientalist paradigm clustered together the terms “Jewish/modern/European” and opposed them to “Arab/primitive/Eastern” without attending to the differences inhering between and among them. For example, as evidenced in the debates surrounding public observance of the Sabbath, many of the older Jewish neighbourhoods were relatively traditional. (2006, 164)

According to Mann, the polarized image of Jewish (modern) and Arab (primitive/old) is part of a particular historical trajectory. This polarization was an intrinsic, ideological component of the development of Tel Aviv-Yafo as an urban space except in this case the ‘Jews’ formed the ‘new’ component while the Arabs were viewed as part of the city’s past. This binary perception informed many artistic representations and perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict and stimulated many local urban clashes. System Ali’s references to the iconic Jewish

¹⁶⁴ The theological view that contemporary Jews are part of a Christian past is not one that is considered relevant from most Jewish perspectives. Yet this characterization is often imposed, hence, such assimilative labels as ‘Judeo-Christian’ that have become the norm in Western academic discourse.

redemption from slavery serve to challenge the dismissal of Palestinian identity as part of Jaffa's quaint past. Instead, they reinforce Palestinian identity as a living, valid identity.

6.5.3 Reggae and the Ancient Israelites

With its close association with Rastafarianism, reggae is replete with themes and iconography taken from Jewish theology and biblical sources and, by extension, Jewish-Israelis. Reggae abounds with references to Israelites and Zion, utilizing tropes from the Tanach such as return to the Holy Land and redemption from slavery and so on. The complex relationship between Israeli Jews and communities of the African diaspora is far too large a topic to tackle here. I am interested in particular in how perceived commonalities are used to both perpetuate and deflect racism and specifically how Israeli artists achieve this through the channelling of reggae and Rastafarian concepts. In her ethnographic account of a visit to Israel in 2007, Emily Raboteau comments on her connection to Judaism as an African-American and in particular:

How pivotal the Old Testament story of Exodus and the Promised Land was for African slaves in America, whose early involvement with the Christian tradition was born out of a feeling of kinship with the Hebrew slaves. (2007, 97)

While Raboteau's point is not the result of a detailed sociological study, it exposes the striking ways in which individuals re-construct their perceived histories to validate current cross-cultural relationships. In Raboteau's case, her assertion validates her relationships with Jewish friends who emigrated from the United States to Israel. Here too, a convergence of collective traumatic history is evoked for the purposes of unifying individuals from disparate groups.

Ubiquitous references to the Bible, Zion and Israel abound in contemporary reggae music from the 1970s to the present day. For instance, 'By the Rivers of Babylon' which was a cover by Boney M. (1978),¹⁶⁵ 'The Israelites' by Desmond Dekker and the Aces (1968) explicitly evoke biblical tropes of slavery, exile and redemption. The Dekker song 'referred obliquely to the Rastafarians as the "true" black Israelites, the lost Twelfth Tribe wandering

¹⁶⁵ The text is from Psalm 137.

in Babylon in search of their Ethiopian heaven, Mount Zion' (King 2002, 54).¹⁶⁶ Given that ideological connections to Israel / The Holy Land characterize Rastafarian reggae music, it is scarcely surprising that in Israel, reggae has become a popular genre. Most popular in Israel perhaps, is the religious reggae artist from White Plains, New York, Matisyahu who often performs in Tel Aviv. Interestingly, the Jewish Matisyahu explains that it was Bob Marley, reggae and Rastafarianism that caused him to reconnect with his Jewish spiritual roots through music: 'A lot of things that I had heard before but hadn't related to strongly were making a lot more sense in that context. Reggae music isn't Jewish but a lot of the ideas are' (quoted in Lynskey 2006). Overall, the use of reggae by contemporary Israeli musicians creates a fascinating, if complex, intercultural dialogue that merits further investigation.

There is currently a small community of Rastafarians and reggae artists from Jamaica residing in Tel Aviv. For instance, Jamaican-British Tony Ray runs the bar 'The Rasta' on Harakevet Street. Even during the late 1990s when I was studying at Bar-Ilan University, I recall befriending several members of the Jamaican community in Tel Aviv who would take my friends and I to hear 'good music' as they said. Clearly they had not warmed to *Muzika Mizrahit*. However, these communities are tiny and often experience difficulties due to racism and social stratification. An album which has recently achieved success in Tel Aviv is Zvuloon Dub System's *Freedom Time* (2012). This is an example of a successful reggae album produced in Tel Aviv. The band is led by Gili Yalo, a Jewish-Ethiopian musician; much of the album describes the struggle between Zion and Babylon (standing for 'good' and 'evil').¹⁶⁷ Despite the group's laid-back style, they have also expressed social critique. For instance, in their song 'Going to Zion' they describe a man's surprise when, having travelled to the 'Promised Land' he finds out that not everyone is righteous. Read simplistically, this can be viewed as a critique of Israeli society. However, it can also be seen as a criticism of the ways in which individuals project utopian mythical constructs onto real-life places, in this case, a juxtaposition between the mythical Land of Israel and its lived reality (discussed in various places in Markowitz 2013).

Alongside the more overt biblical references in System Ali's work are references to religion, which are subtler. The strong reggae element of the group's output, both musical and in the

¹⁶⁶ I am defining Rastafarianism loosely here as an Ethiopian spiritual religious movement that emerged in the 1930s in Jamaica (King 2002).

¹⁶⁷ Ben Shalev, the music reviewer for *Haaretz* newspaper, interprets their outlook as optimistic: 'they...observe reality through rasta lenses that love the good' (Shalev 2012).

text, evokes the Rastafarian ‘Israelites’ referenced in American and Caribbean reggae music. System Ali use reggae both to initiate political commentaries, but also as part of their eclectic aesthetic. In their songs ‘Yalda MiGadot’ and ‘Uprising’¹⁶⁸ the use of reggae is particularly evident; however, reggae echoes can be heard in almost all their songs. ‘Uprising’ is a reggae-centric piece with Hip Hop lyrics and klezmer influences. At times, this mix sounds self-mocking, at times angry, and quite provocative. For the chorus, System Ali members sing all together:

We’re coming to town
Make room for the clowns
So march on the roads with the circus

(my translation from Hebrew)

The use of accordion riffs lends the music a circus-like feel and this correlates with the lyrics. Neta explicitly references the Rastafarian ‘Babylon’ in ‘Uprising’, chanting: ‘Sweat on my head, rain pounding/ Even Babylon cannot deny’. ‘Babylon’ in Rastafarian tradition represents ‘evil’ while ‘Zion’ represents ‘good’. Therefore in their reference to ‘Babylon’, System Ali may be suggesting that even ‘the West’ or Israel, or perhaps simply a corrupt person, cannot deny the hardships that they are singing about.

The general use of reggae dub by Jewish and Israeli artists functions as a way of affirming authenticity. System Ali’s use of reggae and of Rastafarian language, reinforces positive connections between Rastafarianism and Judaism rather than racialized forms of authenticity. ‘Zion’ here is usually associated with the African continent rather than the Middle East. This repatriation or return signifies a spiritual transformation as well, from ‘Babylon’ (western concepts and false teachings) to ‘Zion Land’ or ‘the Promised Land’. As the sixth principle of the Rasta creed suggests: ‘a Rastafarian is a Jew by nature, being a righteous one of principles, dignity and love for God’ (Chevannes 1994). Thus System Ali’s symbolic connection with Rastafarianism proposes a flexible concept of ‘Jew’ and ‘homeland’ (‘Zion’)

¹⁶⁸ The title of this song is a Hebrew transliteration of the English word ‘Uprising’. System Ali actually showcased this song on the Israeli talk-show ‘London and Kirschenbaum’, a current affairs show on public television that plays on Channel 10. The show is hosted by two veteran journalists Yaron London and Moti Kirschenbaum. System Ali were briefly interviewed by the hosts, who used the term ‘polyglot’ to describe the band. The hosts remarked that System Ali was probably doing better ‘peace negotiations’ (*massan ve mattan*) than the current government. The fact that the band were invited to perform on a popular television show despite what some might perceive to be extreme post-Zionist (or anti-Zionist) stances is arguably an example of the unusual relationship between subculture and hegemony in the Israeli music industry.

outside of polarized politics and markers of identity in the reality of the State of Israel/Middle East.

6.6 Conclusion:

System Ali's synthesis of disparate musical and performance elements, along with explicit discursive political and social commentary communicated by the presentation and in the song lyrics, are simultaneously an extension and a critique of extant regional and/or ethnic musical traditions. One of the primary ways they initiate this critique is through intertextuality, specifically, through referencing music from the collective past of group members, be it related to Jewish-Israeli identity (secular and religious) or to the Arab Spring. While some of their songs utilize styles such as reggae that arguably imbue their work with new meanings and associations, many of them build a new song on a pre-existing one, as is the case with 'Yalda MiGadot', 'Natush', and 'Guevara Mat'. While obviously a form of intertextuality, this technique also corresponds to what Lacasse terms 'hypertextuality' (2000), the creation of a new 'text' from a pre-existing one.

It should be noted that not all of the intertextual references are recognized or understood even by members of the group. For instance, during a rehearsal when the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was being negotiated, Neta mentioned to Muhammed A. that they should write a song referencing the event by using Arik Einstein's song 'bring him home'. Muhammed A. responded 'Who is Einstein?' which, is something like asking 'Who is Michael Jackson?' A prolific singer/songwriter/actor in Israel, Einstein (1939-2013) was described as 'the Frank Sinatra of Israel' with 'songs that shaped a nation' in an article marking his recent death in the autumn of 2013. The fact that Muhammed A. did not know who Arik Einstein was reveals the social and musical gulf between band members.

The lack of shared recognition of intertextual elements or musical references was not limited to the Jewish-Israeli/ '48 Palestinian divide. For instance, I asked a young Jewish-Israeli member what the song 'Yalda MiGadot' was about. The member responded 'I think it is about Syria?' In fact, as discussed, the song is a complex reformatting of a popular Israeli song. While this Israeli popular song mentions Damascus, its effect is general. It is about a family wishing a war was over so that they can live their lives in peace. The fact that this

Jewish-Israeli member was unaware of the Jewish-Israeli provenance of this particular reference and/or was not interested in discussing it, reveals differences in the band members' interests. It also stimulates broader questions about how shared knowledge of music comes about and how that relates to listening contexts such as family situations, broadcasting structures and music in educational settings. This member performed with System Ali by night and studied a science-based discipline by day, and seemed less interested in the references or even what the songs were about more than using the group to promote politics and to keep up his/her musical skills. Indeed, while I was not present when the group had composed their songs, the use of musical referencing seemed to have been prompted by three members of the band who in my fieldnotes I called the 'intellectual powerhouses' of the group, well versed in Israeli and Palestinian art and literature.

Whether or not intertextual references are recognized by all the performers in the band, like many other musicians, System Ali use musical and textual quotation to link their work to the past and to reinterpret past work in ways that serve the future and their own political and social agenda. This practice can be understood in the context of the emergence of 'new' genres in Israeli music, as discussed by Regev and Seroussi:

As part of one variant's attempt to gain legitimacy, to claim continuity of heritage, and to demonstrate its commitment to the nationalist idea of integration, its cultural producers sometimes use works that originally "belonged" to another variant in a mode typically of their own (2004, 243)

In other words, the use of quotation is employed in music for the purposes of national and cultural continuity. This is arguably particularly the case in Israel in which music was viewed as a means of uniting disparate Jewish immigrant populations. System Ali can be understood as using the same process with a focus on urban community rather than national identity. The act of recontextualization from the national to urban through intertextual references seen in almost all of System Ali's songs, is not the rupture or de-historicization described by many traditional post-modern theorists. Rather, the transformation constitutes an act of reinterpretation, a reconfiguration of the past even as it is reaffirmed, in other words, 'Building the House Anew'. Indeed, System Ali do not represent a traditional Zionist-Jewish identity in their music, such as the one embedded in 'Songs of the Land of Israel', but a local, more inclusive urban identity. Understood in broader terms, the continuity communicated

through the politics of intertextuality can be understood as promoting bi-nationalism (Israel-Palestine), trans-nationalism or even anti-nationalism. Thus, they use intertextuality for the continuity of their own vision of an Israeli society quite different from that projected by their predecessors and other contemporaries.

Chapter 7: Hip Hop in South Tel Aviv and Intercultural Dynamics: Initiatives and Obstacles

7.1 Introduction

Recent scholarship on intercultural dialogue in Israel/Palestine has tended to focus on encounters between Israelis and Palestinians. Such scholarship often attempts to assess the positive outcomes of such encounters. This tendency (and the literature) is aptly summarized by Saar:

The revisionist approach to critical anthropological research on citizenship and civil society emphasis on cultural and ethnic/racial elements, critical research of civil society tends to focus on domination, collusion and resistance (e.g. Rosaldo 1994; Ong 1996) and to undermine aspects of cooperation across class and ethnic lines. In the Israeli context, critical, political-economic analysis of the Jewish-Arab dialogue tends to highlight its essentializing outcomes (e.g., Helman 2002), or at least its limited potential to overcome the objective inequalities (Halabi 2000) (Saar 2006, 195-106)

My analysis attempts to avoid the focus described by Saar in order to reveal the nuances of the intercultural encounter. Thus, this chapter will therefore explore the negotiation of different variables of identity embedded in alternative Hip Hop groups operating in Tel Aviv-Yafo through the lens of intercultural communication theory. Therefore, while chapters 5 and 6 focus on the incorporation of elements of the past in current Hip Hop practices, this chapter focuses on the ‘present’ highlighting a variety of dynamics in the ‘real-time’ fieldwork experience.

Determining whether or not an interaction is intercultural is in and of itself an interpretative act, and sometimes a politically-motivated one. The analysis will centre on specific examples from the fieldwork to elucidate how the intercultural encounter is negotiated in various performance situations. This chapter will also highlight obstacles, both external and internal, that are experienced by the groups while negotiating these encounters. To effectively analyse the data acquired during fieldwork, I determine whether or not an interaction is intercultural according to the criteria of intercultural communication theory that defines the intercultural encounter loosely, not only as communication across ethno-religious lines, but as part of a

process of the exchange of knowledge, a process that is particularly prevalent in urban settings in which there is a high population density. Thus, intercultural or cross-cultural communication refers not only to encounters between ethnically or religiously distinct groups (e.g. Jewish/Muslim), but communication across a variety of identity variables that are often negotiated in performance. The concept underlying this theory of intercultural communication is the philosophical view that individuals build their world through a process of cumulative interactive readings of 'texts' (written, oral, artistic) to which they have been exposed during their life experiences. These 'texts' direct and filter both communication with individuals and perception of 'the other'. Gadamer describes this interaction as the result of a 'fusion of horizons', a human aspiration for an interpretative understanding of 'the other'. This fusion is not a utopian, transcendent encounter, but part of an ever-changing process of partial understanding.

To refine my analysis of the complex negotiations of different spheres of identity in the intercultural encounter, I utilize Vertovec's notion of 'super-diversity'. According to Vertovec:

[T]he proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of a range of new and changing migration variables shows that it is not enough to see 'diversity' only in terms of ethnicity...[but in terms of other variables that] include: differential legal statuses and their concomitant conditions, divergent labour market experiences, discrete configurations of gender and age, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents (Vertovec 2007, 1025)

In the framework of Hip Hop performance, many forms of intercultural communication, defined in the sense elucidated by Vertovec, take place in the form of social encounters. These encounters can occur during composition, performance and rehearsal, but also take place at events that are not part of 'the music' in a traditional sense (e.g. interactions following rehearsal, or during 'breaks' in recording). Generally speaking, these intercultural encounters can produce a variety of results, which might not all be considered positive:

The social encounter is a particular kind of meeting from which a wide range of responses may emerge (e.g. confusion, misunderstanding, tension, trauma, and even possibly social change). It is not a situation only restricted to confrontations between different individuals and groups, but also between individuals and materialities.' (Fahlander 2007, 15)

This chapter investigates points of intercultural contact in the context of Hip Hop performance and the daily interactions surrounding it. I have focussed on elements of the music-making process in South Tel Aviv Hip Hop practices that have yet to receive scholarly attention: A.) musical flexibility, B.) multi-lingualism, C.) quotidian negotiations in the music-making process. This chapter will discuss how specific elements of Hip Hop practitioners' music relate to the urban reality in which they operate, specifically how their eclectic music product and the social networks transcend binaries prevalent on the national level. The specific fieldwork examples under discussion include close readings of social interactions during performances, ethnographic encounters during rehearsals, as well as an analysis of music and lyrics.

7.2 System Ali and Intercultural Dynamics: Normalization, Anti-Normalization or Anomaly?

I have focussed on the Alternative Hip Hop group System Ali to describe my notion of 'musical flexibility' as part of the intercultural communication process. The reason for choosing this focus is because of the unusual composition of the group as well as their explicit stance, which places them in direct contrast with musical groups in Israel that define themselves as 'coexistence' bands (e.g. *Muzika Etnit* groups). Indeed, System Ali seems to be a unique phenomenon in Israel.¹⁶⁹ System Ali are the first 'formal' Israeli Hip Hop group to date made up of individuals of different ethnicities, genders, and religions (Jews, Arabs, and others, in Israel, male and female, Christian, Jewish and Muslim).¹⁷⁰ While System Ali have been classified here as an Alternative Hip Hop group, they have the characteristics of all three 'sub-groups' of all current Hip Hop in Israel: Palestinian, Alternative, and Zionist. Although, arguably, the sub-group of Zionist Hip Hop has been only marginally present. Alternative Israeli Hip Hop groups such as Hadag Nahash, as well as Palestinian Hip Hop groups such as DAM, provide a precedent for System Ali's uniqueness. In a sense, the group can be viewed

¹⁶⁹ Belkind describes the band as an 'eclectic anomaly on the Israeli scene', clearly differentiated from the initiatives in the 'Israeli ethnic music' genre (*Muzika Etnit Yisraelit*) which proliferated in the 1990s following the Oslo accords (Belkind 2013: 339).

¹⁷⁰ Outside of Israel, in New York City, rap duo Mazzi & Sneakas is comprised of an Iranian Muslim and an Israeli Jew. There is little formal literature on the group, but they appear to have been most active between 2009 and 2011 and it is unclear whether the members are still together. They have produced some interesting results such as 'Most Hated' (2010) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEFXhn8sajg>. Similar to System Ali, the presentation of conflicting views forms part of their political raps.

as the child of prior alternative and Palestinian Hip Hop groups, the logical next step in the development of the left-wing values communicated in their lyrics. For System Ali has gone one step further: the intercultural composition of the group itself is a literal embodiment of the ethnic and cultural diversity merely ‘rapped about’ in other Alternative groups. Thus, System Ali can be viewed in a class of its own.

Despite their uniqueness, System Ali are part of a large network of local Israelis (artists, activists, and others). This network is bound together by the common goal of seeking to challenge the current status quo of Israeli politics and difficult daily realities of life in Jaffa and South Tel Aviv by giving a voice to oppressed minorities. However, in my view, System Ali and their greater network do not initiate a rupture with the local history and culture of the region. I argue that their initiatives are, in defiance of pre-existing rigid structures, a continuation of extant socio-historical cultures, including protest tradition and the promotion of critical thought. These ideological motivations inform both secular and religious Jewish and Arab intellectual traditions prevalent in the area.¹⁷¹

Unlike groups like DAM and Hadag Nahash, which tend to present themselves as ethnically and/or culturally uniform (i.e. being made up of all Jewish-Israeli or all Palestinian performers), System Ali’s musical identities are diverse, multi-lingual, and disparate.¹⁷² Their current place of origin, however, unifies them. With the exception of Enchik, all of its members resided in Jaffa at the time of my fieldwork, a neighbourhood with communities of different religious backgrounds, ethnicities, and political leanings, but with an ‘Arab’ character and a relatively large Palestinian-Israeli population that places the area in direct contrast with Tel Aviv (discussed in my introduction). In my interactions with System Ali,

¹⁷¹ In a 2013 talk, ‘Iran’s New Intellectualism: Trends in Contemporary Conscious Music’ (3 June 2013, London School of Economics), Malihe Maghazei described a similar phenomenon in Iran. She stressed that although an inclusive musical culture was a contemporary phenomenon, it had actually been present in Iranian culture since the turn of the twentieth century. In the context of Israel, Antonia Baum has argued that Israelis and Palestinians who have become disillusioned with dominant politics, form social networks in an attempt to create peace in their everyday lives through ‘performative and affective encounter’ (Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum, City University London, 20 May 2014).

¹⁷² Their political leanings seem to be similar, with notable exceptions. One member seems to more moderate than ‘left-wing’, identifying with a more traditional, Jewish background than the other Jewish group members. Similarly, one of the three Muslim members seems to identify with the religious practice of Islam, while the other two appear to be quite secular.

band members made it clear that their music functioned as a platform from which the spectrum of the opinions of their local urban community could be expressed.¹⁷³

System Ali neither identifies as a ‘coexistence band’ nor as having ‘collaborative positioning’, a term coined by Benjamin Brinner.¹⁷⁴ It is particularly significant that the members of System Ali did not form their group because of the potential of marketing their different backgrounds as a ‘coexistence’ product, attractive to international audiences. In fact, a perusal of my own recorded conversations with the band between 2011 and 2014, as well as journalistic interviews, suggests that being perceived as ‘multicultural’ or as embodying ‘coexistence’ would be particularly repellent to them.

In response to anti-normalization discourse, which actively discourages Israeli-Palestinian interactions since they are viewed as attempting to mask discrimination and other perceived oppression on the part of the Israeli government,¹⁷⁵ one of the Palestinian-Israeli members of System Ali states:

The situation in System Ali is the complete opposite from the misconception that everything is good and normal. The fact that Jews and Arabs sing together does not mean that there is peace. Personally, I don’t believe in the peace process. The people in this band are partners. The band got together, first and foremost due to its members, and it got together to say in all four languages spoken among us that there are problems here, there are things that we must not be silent about, no matter what language (Muhammed A. cited in Shafez 2013, 4)

Here Muhammed clearly differentiates between the unique message of System Ali and the message of ‘collaboration’ bands that sing about ‘peace’. Indeed, System Ali members have articulated on many occasions that they found the idea of representing ‘peace’ and ‘building bridges’ abhorrent:

¹⁷³ This spectrum is embodied visually to audiences by the symbolic jewellery worn by some band members during performance. Amne wears a large necklace in the shape of Israel and the Palestinian territories in the colours of the Palestinian flag, a bold statement of Palestinian identity, while Moti wears a large star of David medallion, a strong statement of ‘Jewish-Israeliness’.

¹⁷⁴ Brinner uses the term to describe collaboration as an emphasis on inter-ethnic partnership rather than a reflection of the actual identities of the musicians performing together (Brinner 2009). This is a useful distinction when examining music and conflict transformation or anti-normalization discourses on Israeli-Palestinian ‘collaborations’. Arguably, any band can be seen as a collaboration made of more and less privileged individuals. For instance, bands made up of male and female performers or bands made up of African American groups with ‘white’ performers could be viewed as being composed of more and less privileged members. Brinner’s classification is based on whether the band chooses to stress the differences between their band members as part of their message/marketing platform.

¹⁷⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, in some respects the anti-normalization discourse has had some adverse effects on local communities or demographic groups with liminal status, in particular, Palestinian citizens of Israel.

‘It’s not about peace, it’s about giving people a platform to speak their minds, no matter who they are, and waking people up to what’s going on around us. We’re not multicultural, so we’re not looking to represent multiculturalism or peace. We got together because some of us met through a youth centre. We became friends, and at first it was tough, but then we got so we had a good vibe together’ (Yonatan, guitarist, informal conversation January 2012, System Ali House)

This notion that the band formed organically in the city through quotidian encounter is an idea that is articulated by many members. In my view, the idea of an organic formation had three purposes: a.) to reinforce authenticity as Hip Hop performers; b.) to deflect potential critiques by the anti-normalization agenda c.) to deflect criticism by the mainstream Jewish-Israeli dominated society.

Yet the group’s desire to appear ‘organic’ is not only motivated by the desire to bridge ethnic and religious divides. Interestingly, their projection as ‘organic’ is used to explain why there are women in their group as well as men. Well-known female performers sometimes feature in songs or on music videos with male Hip Hop artists. For instance, Israeli, Mizrahi pop artist Sarit Haddad has performed with Subliminal and Palestinian female artist Amal Murkus has performed with DAM. However, in these cases women artists are seldom permanent members of the band and are rarely on equal footing with their male counterparts, as is the case with System Ali. When asked about the issue, two women performers, Liba and Luna, looked at each other and shrugged, as if they did not think it was significant.

‘I’m not sure why [there are women in System Ali]. We just liked the group and we got together one day at the youth organization. Some teachers and some students and some who were both or in-between. And Luna’s such a talented performer. So we just got together. We didn’t think about whether we were men or women or whatever’ (Liba, violin and vocals, informal conversation, January 2012, Beyt System Ali)

While Liba had been speaking in Hebrew, Neta quickly interjected in English to make sure that I understood this important point. Therefore, System Ali’s rejection of being a coexistence band, whether implicitly or explicitly, refers to many forms of identity and belonging, including gender.

The notion of not being a coexistence band is not merely an ideological issue for System Ali, but motivates practical performance decisions. For instance, System Ali has actively refused to perform in venues at which they might be perceived as representing diversity and/or enacting ‘coexistence’:

The band has refused to take part in events in which they are presented as lip-service tokenism for diversity, including Tel Aviv municipality sponsored festivals. They have also refused interviews on mainstream government sponsored radio stations, which possess the broadest band waves and mainstream listenership. (Belkind 2014, 272).

As discussed in Chapter 2, transnational ‘anti normalization’ discourse can harm local initiatives for the empowerment of liminal populations due to the inability to differentiate between symbolic ideology and lived reality. However, when enacted locally, anti-normalization initiatives seemed to have the potential to enact positive social change. For instance, System Ali members, who, for the most part abhor ‘normalization’, were able to be selective about participation in musical events. If they felt that the participation of an ‘inter-ethnic’ band would convey a false sense of multiculturalism at a specific event, they would not participate in it (Sheizaf 2012; personal communication with the band, January 2012). System Ali’s ‘anti-normalization’ stance was selective; their participation at events was decided on a case-by-case basis. Because of System Ali’s reticence to be identified as a ‘coexistence’ Hip Hop ensemble, their choice of performance locations in South Tel Aviv took on particular significance. In the third-space of South Tel Aviv they were seldom associated with hegemonic expressions of identity. Thus, the performance venues in the area were more conducive to System Ali’s unique, pluralistic message.

7.3 Intercultural Communication across a Generation

Interesting examples of intercultural communication occurred at System Ali’s CD launch concert that took place on 25 July 2013. The event was well-attended, primarily by local left-wing Jewish-Israelis and young ’48 Palestinians from Jaffa and surrounding areas. More prominent attendees included the Oscar-nominated film director, Scandar Copti, who hails from a Palestinian and Christian background and who directed the pivotal film *Ajami* (2009) about life in contemporary Jaffa. I attended the concert with some friends and colleagues, but unlike my companions, viewed and filmed most of the concert from afar. Even in this one

System Ali performance, negotiations of super-diversity were evident on many levels, exemplifying the negotiations of identity both in the Hip Hop product particular to the group and relating to the performance space in South Tel Aviv.

System Ali's interaction with the lead singer of Hip Hop group Hadag Nahash, Shaanan Streett, is a specific example of intercultural communication embodied in the music itself. It is an example that might easily be missed by the ethnomusicologist looking for the overarching frame of Jewish-Arab dialogue. Many Hip Hop crews performing different sub-genres feature guest artists at South Tel Aviv performance venues. For instance, DAM often feature Palestinian artist Amal Murkus at The Block Club. However, there is something particular about the way in which System Ali incorporate guest artists from different political backgrounds that mirrors their unique aesthetic of inclusion, an aesthetic which represents intercultural 'clashes' in the music rather than diminishing or reconciling them.

While he was not featured in the recorded version of the album *System Ali* (2013), Streett made a guest appearance at System Ali's debut album release concert (25 July 2013). This performative example of intercultural interaction exemplifies how System Ali's 'flexible' music works.¹⁷⁶ Hadag Nahash are highly critical of current politics in the State of Israel, a fact obvious in their song lyrics, music videos, and speeches to their fans. Like System Ali, the group critiques what they consider to be prevalent conservative values of the state in favour of more liberal, inclusive politics. Shaanan Streett himself is a pioneer of alternative Hip Hop, according to my definition, who founded the successful group in 1996 (discussed in Chapter 2). A generation older than System Ali members, he was born in Jerusalem in 1971. Shaanan's rapping style is eclectic and, according to Dorchin strongly influenced by funk in a way that characterized much of Israeli Hip Hop emergent in the 1990s (Dorchin 2013).¹⁷⁷ The film I took of the System Ali concert in which Streett appeared revealed that his participation was not announced beforehand; he made a seemingly impromptu appearance during System Ali's performance of their song 'Uprising'. Thus, even though Mr Streett's

¹⁷⁶ Hadag Nahash can be categorized as an alternative Israeli left-wing Hip Hop group. Their name literally means 'the fish is a snake' and is a play on words of 'nehag chadash' which means 'new driver', the official term appearing on a sticker that all new drivers must place on their vehicles in Israel. Their name has been erroneously translated as 'The Fish-Snake' in several internet sources. However, in the Hebrew language there is no word for 'is' or 'are': when two nouns are placed side by side and only the first noun takes a 'ha' ('the'), grammatically this has to form a sentence hence, 'the fish is a snake'.

¹⁷⁷ Hadag Nahash itself is a group that evidences 'musical flexibility'. While I have dubbed it an Alternative Hip Hop group, it has been described by some as a 'rock band' or even as an 'alternative pop group'.

appearance had been negotiated beforehand and had been explicit in some (but not all) of the publicity for the concert, to many in the audience it appeared as spontaneous, bordering on improvisatory. I interpreted the suddenness of his appearance as part of the band's explicit 'organic' stance, their desire to reflect the spontaneity inherent in the urban landscape in performance. When Shaanan leapt onto the stage from the crowd in front of it, he appeared simply as a member of the local urban community, compelled by the music to join in their eclectic oeuvre.

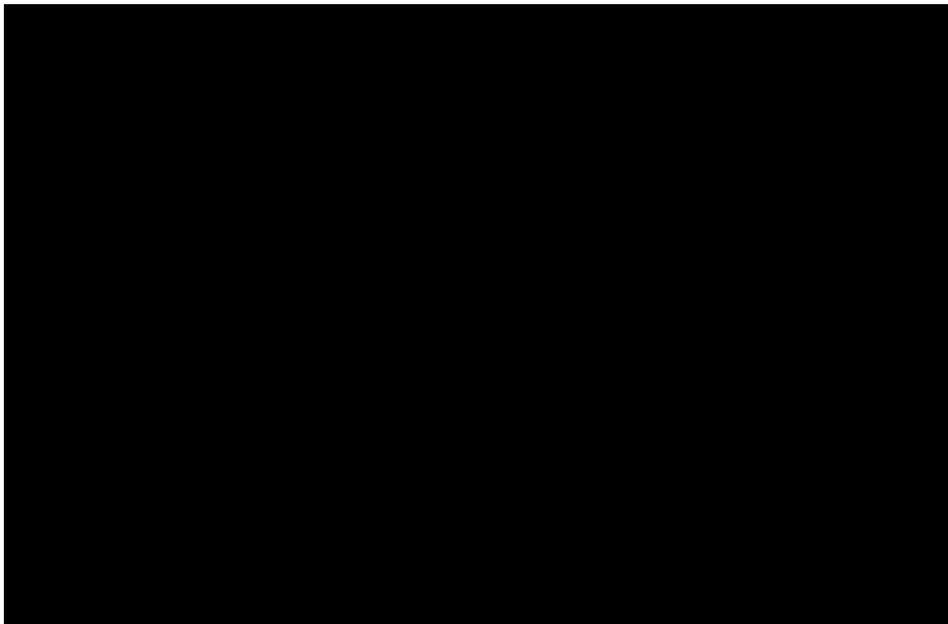


Figure 17: Shaanan Streett Performing with System Ali, 25 July 2013

During his performance, Shaanan wore a signature Hadag Nahash t-shirt emblazoned with the emblem of a fish-skeleton and the large logo 'Fuck Racism'. Like Hadag Nahash, System Ali's messages are explicitly political, expressing both anti-racist stances and empathy and/or solidarity with 'ethnic' minorities. This stance was emphasized by the bold statement written on Shaanan's shirt, which overlapped with the messages of derision at social injustice pervading System Ali's songs. Shaanan dominated the stage from the instant of his appearance. Moti, the drummer, who is also the technician of the band and the go-to person for musical questions, adjusted his speed and slowed down the beat for Shaanan's delivery. The other band members followed Moti and the entire group-sound was subtly transformed into a new product as Shaanan took the stage. Shaanan delivered a verse or two

of his original lyrics, during delivery, System Ali musicians stood in a semi-circle around him, accompanying him on electric guitar, bass and percussion. Neta and Muhammed M. stood quietly on either side of him, moving to his lyrics and nodding appreciatively.

It was only due to Shaanan's thoughtful behaviour, gesturing to the band members when it was their turn to rap, that the other members of the group were given attention. Various negotiations of identity variables imbedded in this song were evident. Shaanan was more than just a self-identifying left-wing Jewish-Israeli like Neta, Yonatan and the others. In performance, he took a leadership role as teacher and professional, removed from the others by gage, experience, and overall, by his comfort on the stage. As Shaanan performed, gradually, Muhammed M. gained confidence. He got closer to Shaanan and on the delivery of a particularly important message about social inclusion and reform, grasped him firmly by the shoulder. At this point it was Neta who was 'dropping his words like bombs' (Neta's description) and giving his lyrical contribution. He then grabbed Shaanan's other shoulder companionably. Shaanan was nodding his head in agreement with some salient points that were not in the version of the song that I had previously recorded and that were unusually drowned out by the reverb of the speakers on my recording. Those familiar with System Ali performances could see that there was some discomfort caused by the presence of the older, more experienced and stylistically different performer bounding onto the stage. However, this discomfort quickly dissipated as the performers reacted flexibly and spontaneously, soon incorporating the new member into their 'community' with ease. Perhaps the group were, in fact, slightly in awe of this pioneer of Israeli Hip Hop performing with them.

Eventually, Shaanan clapped Muhammed M. on the back and then all three, Muhammed M., Neta and Shaanan, performed an impromptu circle-dance that dominated the stage and the song. This outcome represented a totally new and comical aesthetic for both performers and appeared to be completely spontaneous. Similar circle-dances are part of the repertoire of Jewish-Israeli tradition, often performed by religious Jewish men on joyous religious holidays or at life-cycle events. The fact that the Jewish and Palestinian male performers performed a spontaneous circle dance with arms entwined, (evoking the dancing of Jewish-Israeli religious men) exemplifies System Ali's flexible-musical atmosphere. This flexibility characterized many of their collaborations with other artists during which new aesthetic styles emerged.

This improvisatory or ‘flexible’ quality is an important part of their originality, but also an important part of the pragmatic outcomes of their intercultural composition. In the past, the group often operated in a situation in which not all band members could always be present at performances due to, in Vertovec’s classification of identity variables, ‘legal statuses and their concomitant conditions’ (Vertovec 2007, 1025). For instance, during periods of heightened political/social tension, the police in the South Tel Aviv area stopped many individuals of Palestinian origin particularly at night. This sometimes prevented the Palestinian-Israeli members from attending gigs. A former band member who quit the band for work-related reasons, describes the situation:

‘At the beginning, when we started playing here and there, if Muhammed or Ahmed didn’t show up to a gig, we’d know why, but it’s like you don’t even want to ask because it makes you too upset. So we had to be ready to just add some new verses or add some people all of a sudden. And once Neta got these Ethiopian guys to join. At least I think they were Ethiopian and I have no idea what they were rapping about, but damn, it was cool (‘Eran’ former System Ali member present at performance, 25 July 2013)¹⁷⁸

The flexibility described by Eran is vital for performance success when band members cannot always be present for various reasons. Indeed, the police had on a few occasions, detained several members. One band member was required to undertake mandatory military service and therefore could not always be present at rehearsals and/or during performances. Thus, System Ali’s flexibility, practically speaking, has directly to do with the difficulties of being intercultural in contemporary Israel, a pragmatic response to the exclusion of members due to the over-arching conflict situation and its effects. However, since the band’s beginnings, members have acquired a certain positive reputation that would make it unlikely for such instances to occur as long as the group performs in the ‘safety’ of the deviant spaces in South Tel Aviv and Jaffa.

¹⁷⁸ By ‘Muhammed’ and ‘Ahmed’, Eran refers to any Palestinian or Palestinian-Israeli male. It is interesting that he did not include women in his statement considering that the group currently has one Palestinian female member and has had two in the past.



Figure 18: Neta, Muhammed, and Shaanan dancing, 25 July 2013 (Muhammed A. far left; Enchik in the centre)

7.4 Multiple Musical Genres: Intercultural Metaphors?

System Ali's music brings together contrasting musical genres, some of which might normatively be perceived as discordant, including reggae, klezmer, Hip Hop, pop, rock and classical. They perform their music in a tightly-knit blend of eccentric tableaux, in the sense that the music is often a platform, a framework that can be modified or can include embellishments and/or improvisation. Their music is often characterized by raucous, polyphonic textures. The original lyrics are delivered in a variety of languages (Hebrew, Arabic, English and Russian). Their music is often accompanied by beat-boxing, break-dancing, percussive noises and ululation, reminiscent of that of Mizrahi women in local synagogues. In an interview with the Israeli left-wing radio station Café Gibraltar, Neta

Weiner describes the band's music as 'Arabic music along with klezmer and Romani music, all of it wrapped in the vibe of a rock band' (Shezaf 2013, 2).

The 'flexible' framework of System Ali's oeuvre is not only embodied in the opinions of its members but also in the 'music itself'. I argue that System Ali's use of multiple genres is a conscious way of facilitating the intercultural encounter. Amy Horowitz has discussed this process on the part of artists of Israeli Mediterranean music, using the term 'musical hybridity' to describe the process of combining different musical genres, a process that she argues is 'a conscious, strategic act...an aspect of artistic interactions in a multicultural and multivocal social field' (Horowitz 1999, 450). In the context of Hip Hop, this flexibility is enabled to an extent by extant flexibility of the genre. Holt describes certain musical genres as being imbued with 'grooves', which he describes as musical segments of the genre that can be manipulated flexibly to embrace cross-generic elements: 'The groove is a flexible framework for mixing different things because its simple structural and harmonic framework gives individual layers a certain freedom and, allows for various kinds of variation' (Holt 2007, 139). Holt refers to the notion of 'migrating grooves' to describe cross-generic musical influence, giving the example of the impact of 'funk grooves' on early Hip Hop. The musical flexibility afforded through the malleability of 'grooves' is key in 'alternative Hip Hop', which is characterized by generic 'mixing' while identifying itself solidly in the Hip Hop genre.

System Ali utilize multiple genres in their song 'Yalda MiGadot' ('The Girl from Gadot').¹⁷⁹ The piece is primarily in 4/4. It opens with minor chords on solo electric guitar in a style often associated with classic rock. Percussion is added and in the sixth bar, the violin enters in a simple melodic-minor 'classical' melody. This violin segment is comprised of four melodic phrases (a moving bass line is added after phrase 2). The final D turns into a high glissando to introduce Amne's rap in Arabic, whereupon the piece morphs into a standard Hip Hop vibe to accommodate her words (cited on p.177). Neta responds to Amne in Hebrew, with a quotation from Chava Alberstein's song '*Bocha O Tzocheket*' ('crying or laughing'), sung in a reggae style. He is accompanied by percussion and pizzicato on the violin. His verse leads to the chorus which can be described as belonging squarely to a slow-moving reggae genre. Following the chorus, Yonatan K. raps in a style resembling that of

¹⁷⁹ Belkind refers to this song as an 'aesthetic bricolage' (2014, 349).

Israeli Hip Hop. After the short segment, the reggae/folk chorus returns, then Neta repeats the Hebrew words of the Alberstein song that he initially cited in a declamatory, theatrical style, getting faster and faster. His words are accompanied by Liba’s folk-like improvisations on the violin. The conclusion of the song is a chaotic, vibrant klezmer dance-like interlude during which band members do mocking square-dance moves and Yonatan improvises in the upper register of the electric guitar. The following table illustrates the different genres/influences contained in this song:

Figure 19: Genre Progression of System Ali’s ‘Yalda MiGadot’

<u>Time:</u>	<u>Genres:</u>	<u>Performer/Instrument/Language</u>
0:00	Classic Rock	YK – electric guitar
0:15	Classical/Folk	LN – violin
0:41	Palestinian Hip Hop	AJ – Arabic
1:06	Jewish Folk/Reggae	NW – Hebrew
1:09	Klezmer influence on accordion	NW, YK
2:05-2:24	Israeli Hip Hop	YK – Hebrew
2:24	Jewish Folk/Reggae	NW, LN
2:49-3:12	Theatrical – Spoken Word	NW– Hebrew NW – Hebrew
3:05	Klezmer/Folk	LN – Violin
Until the end	Klezmer/Reggae/Square Dance Segment	All members

The above analysis (Table 21) exemplifies the range of genres that are used in System Ali’s work and also illustrates the genre-flexibility of the group. While many bands draw on different styles, System Ali’s employs them in a remarkably audibly heterogeneous and, at times, disjointed way. This is particularly noticeable in the entry of Arabic rap (0:41-1:06) and the ‘spoken word’ (2:49-3:12) sections of the song.

The tableau-like structures created by the heterogeneous, overlapping musical interludes provide a flexible structure for rap-lyrics. As stated above, the ‘flexible’ product is often

pragmatically useful when a performer is absent due to social stigma or other reasons. Amne could not be present for the recording of a music video for ‘personal reasons’. Her rap from the version of ‘Voina’ on the album *System Ali* was replaced by a poetic contribution by Liba performed for System Ali’s music video on Balcony T.V. Ironically perhaps, Amne’s solo contribution (in Hebrew and Arabic) communicates the difficulties she has experienced growing up in the Jaffa ‘ghetto’; however, her message is not completely pessimistic as she explains that young people have helped her during difficult time (it is implied that the people who have helped her are System Ali band-mates). In contrast, Liba’s contribution is in Hebrew and English and communicates her own personal dedication to the cause of social justice, ‘violin in hand’ (Liba’s words in the song). Therefore, even though Amne could not be present at this recording session, the flexibility of the musical structure made it easy for the band to replace her rap with another.

System Ali’s performative flexibility allows it to function as both a musical group and an intercultural social community. The group becomes not only a receptacle in which the rights of marginalized members of the community can be upheld, but is also open to people in the urban space that wish to be heard. While it began primarily as a space in which Palestinian rights and memories can exist without discrimination (albeit in an ephemeral, performative space), its reach grew to encompass members and an entourage from diverse backgrounds. Thus, not only does the musical structure have the capacity to include a variety of genres and narratives, it attracts a spontaneous opening for new collaborations and, by extension, general social inclusion.

7.5 Multi-lingualism as Intercultural Communication: ‘Crunchy Language Salad’

Multi-lingualism is an aesthetic choice fused as an important strategy in many alternative Hip Hop groups operating in South Tel Aviv. Rather than pinpointing a specific fieldwork example to elucidate its importance, the following discussion will summarize some of the causes and effects of the linguistic exchanges, locating them within a broader, global context. McDonald discusses the use of multi-lingualism in Hip Hop groups in Israel as a political tool. Specifically, he describes the use of Hebrew by DAM (Palestinian-Israeli) and the use of Arabic by Subliminal (Jewish-Israeli) to reach a broader target audience that includes both ‘self’ and ‘other’: ‘[t]heir [Subliminal and DAM’s] attempts at crossing linguistic lines are

not to transcend difference, but rather as a means of assault, of forcing their thoughts and idea onto foreign audiences' (McDonald 2013, 77).¹⁸⁰ Multi-lingualism is also used by System Ali to challenge their audiences, but in a different way. System Ali's reluctance to translate their lyrics into anything other than a multi-lingual collage of 'South Tel Aviv' languages reflects their refusal to cater to 'foreign', voyeuristic audiences. Moreover, this refusal reflects the band members' devotion to local issues and to the languages of local residents. System Ali also use foreign language to confront their audience except, in this case, it is because not everyone in the audience understands the languages used that is truly confrontational. Thus, typically, in Zionist Hip Hop and Palestinian Hip Hop, multi-lingualism is used strategically to challenge 'the other'.¹⁸¹ By contrast, in alternative Hip Hop groups such as System Ali, multi-lingualism achieves another function: it is a dominant way in which the complexity of intercultural communication is actively negotiated. For instance, in System Ali's song 'Yaffawie', the accordion player and rapper Neta Weiner introduces his contribution with the following words, spoken with incredulity:

'South Tel Aviv: One language?!'

He then goes on to describe the different identities residing in the South Tel Aviv area, critiquing what he perceives as the hegemony of the Hebrew language in South Tel Aviv, an area characterized by extreme multi-lingualism, well beyond the 'official' languages, Hebrew, Arabic and English.

It is important to note that multi-lingualism is used in Hip Hop globally used to communicate political commentary, drawing particular attention to the local space from which the music emanates. This is of particular importance in the context of South Tel Aviv, but it is also a worldwide issue, reflecting patterns of 'alternative' urban Hip Hop worldwide. Reflecting on an example of Hip Hop in Montreal, Canada, Low and Sarkar claim that although multi-lingualism has been studied extensively in sociolinguistic studies, multi-lingualism in the field of popular culture has been insufficiently examined (Low and Sarkar 2012). They

¹⁸⁰ McDonald's use of the word 'foreign' here is rather enigmatic since he is, in part, describing DAM's use of the Hebrew language to confront Jewish-Israeli audience members. In Chapter 4, I discuss DAM's use of Hebrew as a tool to challenge the Jewish-Israeli members of the audience.

¹⁸¹ Chapter 4 discusses how DAM utilize Hebrew to draw attention to the plight of Palestinians to a Jewish-Israeli audience; similarly in Chapter 5, I have discussed how Subliminal uses Arabic phrases to challenge Palestinian ethno-nationalist claims.

describe how a distinctive urban multi-lingual ‘Montreal’ style has developed in Quebec, in defiance of Quebecois nationalism and imposed language laws:

The article develops a new term ‘Québécoïcité’, part of a theoretical framework that allows us to understand how pluri-lingual usages in Montrealer rap defy linguistic power-structures in Quebec. By creating a distinctive ‘Montrealer’ style rooted in local multi-ethnicity, pluri-lingual rappers effectuate an implicit de-rootedness of some of the basic concepts of the Quebecois nation, as constructed over the centuries (Low and Sarkar 2012, 29; my translation from French)

Quebec is considered a liberal, secular society but its official language laws are stricter than those of Israel.¹⁸² In the example of ‘Montrealer’ Hip Hop above, Hip Hop groups in Quebec utilize multi-lingualism to transcend what are perceived as oppressive nationalist ideologies. This is very similar to the way in which System Ali utilizes multi-lingualism to challenge the Hebrew-centrism of the local community and of right-wing Zionist policies in the State of Israel. The lived performance of the band acts as a corrective to the language policies employed by the municipality, for instance that Hebrew should be the primary spoken language in education and public interaction.

Out of all the alternative Hip Hop groups operating in South Tel Aviv, the multi-lingual aspect of System Ali is of exceptional social and political significance. The few academic studies on System Ali usually consider it to reflect the group’s inclusivity, which, no doubt, it does. However, I would argue that the multi-lingualism has social and political implications that go beyond inclusivity. It cannot be stressed enough how difficult System Ali’s lyrics are to translate, for a non-Jaffan due to several linguistic factors: the extensive use of different forms of slang and the fact that the group members sometimes rap in a mixture of two languages (typically Arabic-Hebrew, Russian-Hebrew, and English-Hebrew). The difficulty of translation is augmented by the band’s reticence to provide texts or translations (discussed below).

The diverse languages utilized by System Ali are particular to the urban space of South Tel Aviv, including Jaffa. Informal chats with ‘tourist’ audience members revealed that this practice was met with both approval and disapproval. For instance, during their performance on 25 July 2013, some young men from the UK complained that they could not absorb

¹⁸² As discussed earlier, signs in languages other than French are banned in all public places. The ‘language police’ enforce this law.

System Ali's political messages since they could not understand the lyrics (notes from 2013 performance). This was a view that was echoed by many young Jewish-Israeli audience members in response to the Russian contributions in particular. For these respondents, the use of different languages in performance, without translations, made them uncomfortable. This category of audience member tended to be less put off by Arabic contributions, although they still complained that these were also pointless because they could not 'understand the message'. However, the majority of audience members at this particular concert enjoyed the multi-lingual aspects of System Ali, stating that it was 'bold' and 'original' and that they 'felt the vibe' even if they did not understand every single word. One young woman in particular appreciated the lack of translations, referring to System Ali's music as 'crunchy language salad that I could eat every day; the vegetables taste awesome even though I don't always know in what garden they grew' (fieldnotes, August 2013). Similarly, System Ali member, Enchik, who raps primarily in Russian, describes the audience responses to multi-lingualism as generally positive whether or not the audience members understand the lyrics: '[O]nce, a Russian came up to me after a show and said "Damn bro, I understood every word you said, and it was crazy," and right after someone else came up to me and said "That was incredible, even though I didn't understand a word"' (Enchik cited in Shezaf 2013).

The linguistic variance is so pronounced that band members often do not understand each other's lyrics. For instance, when Enchik raps in Russian, the others only understand part of what he is saying. Yonatan K. and Neta appeared to be fluent in Arabic, probably as a result of living in Jaffa. Yet, native Arabic speakers commented on their accents (in my fieldwork, some informants remarked that Neta was always very careful to use the correct pronunciation in Arabic). The Palestinian members of the group, Muhammed A., Muhammed M., Amne and Luna, communicated well in Hebrew (though sometimes with accents and with unusual usage of idiomatic expressions). To a native Hebrew-speaker their Hebrew language usage might be viewed as eclectic.¹⁸³ Although not fluent in Russian, both the Palestinian-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli members understood and spoke a few words of it. Indeed, in the song 'Idialam' all the band members sing in Russian. Interestingly, I noticed that the process of rehearsing together had improved band members' knowledge of other languages through quotidian exposure.

¹⁸³ For instance, while praising Luna Abu Nasser's album, in a review in *Haaretz*, Shalev suggests that the Hebrew language portions might have been delivered better (2013).

Even when individual contributions share one language, System Ali's raps are widely divergent stylistically from member to member. For example, Muhammed A.'s Hebrew lyrics (and speech and Facebook comments, for that matter) are full of unusual idioms and syntax, often resembling Syrian Arabic.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Amne's Hebrew contributions are often straightforward and simple, delivered with a strong Arabic accent. For instance in 'Voina' she raps '*Lefamim chaim kashim aval benenu ezrachim*' ('sometimes life is hard, but our fellow citizens [help us through it]'); this straightforward, almost child-like, language is a far cry from Neta's poetic Hebrew lyrics about sleeping giants and pillars of smoke. Moreover, System Ali's raps often employ Hebrew neologisms to reflect on the ostensible stagnation of the Hebrew language used to serve the state, explains System Ali's electric guitarist, Yonatan Kunda (Shafez, 2013).

An important, unpredicted effect of System Ali's multi-lingualism was that it caused two of the group's Palestinian-Israeli members to reconnect with the Arabic language. Language as a major constituent of ethnic and political identity is an important aspect of the politics of multi-lingualism. In some cases, participation in the band caused Palestinian-Israeli members to become more fluent in Arabic. For instance, Amne's participation in the band prompted her to begin writing lyrics in Arabic and to take Arabic lessons with her Mother. Although Amne is Palestinian, she usually utilizes Hebrew as her main-use language. She explained that when writing songs, she often thinks of the lyrics in Hebrew and then translates them. Writing lyrics for the band was the first time that she had engaged with her 'native' language, Arabic, in a creative form. Indeed, before she began to write lyrics, she considered herself illiterate in Arabic:

She [her mother] helps me with the words I am writing, to write them in Arabic. It's hard for me, I don't like Arabic. It's really hard for me. I don't read and I don't write, so my Mum is helping me to read and write. Most of the words we use are in Hebrew [gives examples]. If I want to write something in Arabic, I'll write it in Hebrew first. Here in Yafo, we don't say 'Kif 'alak?', we say 'Ma HaMatzav?' [a Hebrew phrase meaning 'What's up?', slang in Arabic and Hebrew]. We speak more Hebrew than Arabic. (Channel 2, Tel Aviv News, 8 March 2010, my transcription)

¹⁸⁴ My translator-aide was a young man of Druze origin who explained that the accents of the individuals in System Ali when speaking Arabic differed widely and were very different from the way that he pronounced Arabic; my other translator-aide, Anna Lerman, a recent immigrant from Russia, complained that the members sang /rapped in Russian with pronounced Hebrew and Arabic accents, so as to render them almost incomprehensible to her.

Thus, although she strongly identifies as a Palestinian woman, Amne speaks Hebrew well in her own particular ‘Jaffan’ accent. Her creativity in both languages can be heard in many System Ali songs. For instance, in the song ‘Building the House Anew’, Amne describes the housing evictions experienced by lower-class communities in Jaffa in Arabic:

Destruction, my house they took away from me
They even took the dirt on the ground
But we don’t forget, to our last breath we’ll fight

(Amir Amer’s translation from Arabic)

Her rather poetic expression ‘they even took the dirt on the ground’ shows how her command of the Arabic language has improved in the process of writing lyrics. Reconnecting with the Arabic language as a result of membership in System Ali is not unique to Amne. Muhammed M. also reconnected with the Arabic language as a result of his involvement with the band.

During fieldwork, the band’s political stance in regards to multi-lingualism caused some pragmatic research problems. I noted that band members were often reluctant to translate their lyrics despite being asked by several fans to do so, in person and online. When I contacted Neta via email to get the lyrics (not translated but in written form), I received a message several months later from Liba stating that she had the lyrics but only the Hebrew portions. I said if that was all she had, that would be fine, but I never heard back from her and so transcribed and translated most of the lyrics myself.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, their reluctance to provide their lyrics is shown by the fact that their album does not include any lyrics or any description of the songs or the band. I understood this exclusion as deliberate, forcing listeners to confront the multiple languages used on the album without any props to enable understanding all (or any) of them. It seemed to me that translating lyrics for Western consumption might be antithetical to the band’s politics of multi-lingualism. Overall, the band seemed to want to consciously embody both political disparity and co-existence in the music performance: multi-lingualism expressed in raw, un-translated form may well be one of the ways to do so. Indeed, an important assumption underlying the multi-lingual aspect of the band is that human response transcends the coherence of linguistic utterance.¹⁸⁶ This view reinforces

¹⁸⁵ It is possible that she simply does not know all the lyrics. This has to do with the ‘flexibility’ of the band’s music, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁸⁶ This ‘primordial language’ effect resembles *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* artist Shlomo Bar’s employment of *kdam safa* (‘before language’), non-linguistic articulations that sound like his native Moroccan Arabic (Brinner 2009, 68).

System Ali's message of equality based on universalist, human, rather than an ethnic or religious, status. In an interview Enchik states: 'even if he [an audience member] does not understand my language, he will feel me' (Shezaf 2013). He is describing a process through which, on an emotional, meta-communicative level, 'the Other' acknowledges the speaker's/performer's right to expression and his right to exist as a human being. System Ali band member Yonatan Kunda describes the role multi-lingualism has in encouraging acceptance without linguistic understanding as follows: 'Multilingualism is significant when it confronts the basic fear that we have of "not understanding," and to force us to really deal with it' (Kunda cited in Shezaf 2013).

7.6 Intercultural Communication in Quotidian Music-Making Process

A.) 'Russians' at King George Street: Intercultural Encounter through Aesthetic Appreciation

Thus far, the intercultural interactions examined in this chapter have focussed on negotiations between musical performers in formally identified groups (e.g. System Ali, Hadag Nahash). However, cross-cultural negotiations between performers and their audiences are just as revealing in situations where the performance is relatively spontaneous and the musicians are not yet organized in a cohesive group. The following ethnographic example elucidates how musicians and their audiences in South Tel Aviv often transcend social-cultural-linguistic barriers, albeit in a limited way, through an aesthetic enjoyment of the music or the artistic product. The names of the participants have been changed in the following to protect their privacy, due to the informal nature of the musical participation and performance.

It is a sunny day in the summer of 2013 as Russian break-dancers congregate in front of the music shop, 'The Third Ear' (*Ha'ozen Hashlishit*) for an impromptu performance. The right side of the shop opens out on to a small public square, dotted with benches, often frequented by local middle class Jewish-Israeli families and hipsters. 'The Third Ear' is an important locale in the South Tel Aviv music-scape and thus merits further discussion here. In the centre of the shopping district, the building in which the shop is located houses a café on the ground floor, a bar and performance space on the second floor and administrative offices, most notably the office of the Magda Label for *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* on the third floor, as

well as the music shop itself on the ground floor, which sells films, CDs, vinyl records, and cassettes. Right in the centre of Tel Aviv, the building is scarcely a liminal space but a central hub for musical activities of various kinds, a spot where the music cultures of the north and the south of the city converge. It was often hosting various live events when I visited, and is also a meeting point for various musicians and other artists. Indeed, this was the venue at where I conducted fieldwork related to the *Muzika Etnit Yisraelit* genre.¹⁸⁷

The performance venue in ‘The Third Ear’ is a long, rectangular space located on the second floor of the building. The shop itself specializes in all types of media items, including hard-to-get music and films. It caters mainly to Tel Aviv hipsters and tourists. The club itself has an informal feel and is often frequented by individuals belonging to the grunge/hipster scene.



Figure 20: ‘The Third Ear’ Exterior

¹⁸⁷ For instance, I interviewed both the manager for the Magda label, José Karsenti, and the musician Yair Dalal at ‘The Third Ear’.

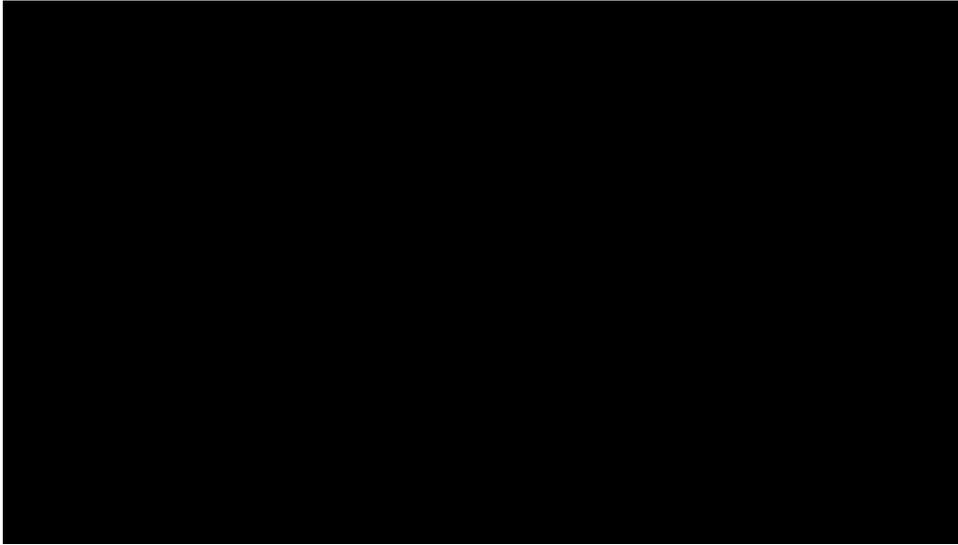


Figure 21: ‘The Third Ear’ Interior. Photo courtesy of PR, *Time Out: Israel*

To the side of the building is a large public square that often hosts both formal and informal musical events. It is in this square, not at the venue itself that less-known groups will try to showcase their talents or where impromptu performances will take place.



Figure 22: Mikhoels Square adjacent to ‘The Third Ear’

‘The Third Ear’ is located on the borders between north and south Tel Aviv. Notably, out of the Russian break-dancers’ typical performance spots (the Old Jaffa plateau; the New Central Bus Station; the boardwalk space between the beach and the Mahmoudiya mosque), this is the furthest north that the group have ventured in the time that I spent observing them. The immediate surroundings of ‘The Third Ear’ signal the difference between it and other performance locations. Indeed, just across the road, is a large, shiny shopping mall filled with designer clothing boutiques and pricey American-style restaurants. This is a far cry from the

shwarma stands and the cramped and rather chaotic corridors of the New Central Bus Station. At first it is unclear why the group have chosen this particular performance venue, until Omar turns to me and says:

‘It’s the noise from the new buildings they’re building for the millionaires. The renovations. Too much noise and there’s this metal and rubbish all around. So we’re going to come here for a bit and see how it goes. You know Luna Abu Nassar? She performed here. I mean, she’s like a real musician, so she actually performed inside. But if she performed here, then they must be cool people around here’ (Omar, informal conversation, ‘The Third Ear’ July 2013)

Omar refers to Luna Abu Nassar, a System Ali band member, as a talented, recognized artist in her own right. I interpreted his statement to imply that if Luna, as a Palestinian and a Christian, is invited to perform at ‘The Third Ear’, then the surrounding area might be tolerant of minority voices, despite its proximity to ‘the north’. Notably, he differentiates between ‘real’ musicians who perform in at formal venues in relatively stable, identified groups, and his own spontaneous crew of interchangeable performers.

The group congregates in the public square, which is surrounded by bushes and benches. It is directly on the side entrance of the shop next to the bar.¹⁸⁸ There are some ‘new’ young men with Omar, who I have not yet met. They set up a ghetto blaster and some portable speakers. One of the group, a young woman, sees me at the bar attached to the shop and shook my hand with complicated ritual manoeuvres, similar to the way in which DAM’s Suheil Nafar at The Block Club had shaken my hand when we had met after the performance. Since the woman’s Hebrew is very basic and we do not share another common language, I cannot converse fluently with her about her participation in the band. However, what I can discern from ‘Svetlana’ is that she is about twenty-two years old and has a small daughter who she looks after while her husband works full-time. She has recently starting attending Ulpan (intensive Hebrew course) in the evenings. This explains why I only see her with the group on weekends.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Although technically, licenses for busking are required by the Tel Aviv municipality, fieldwork data suggests that impromptu sessions are not uncommon. Friday nights, I would attend Sabbath evening services at Beyt Daniel, a Reformed synagogue at 62 Bnei Dan Street, far in the north of Tel Aviv bordering HaYarkon Park. Returning to my residence in South Tel Aviv was a 6 km walk, which required me to traverse a variety of public spaces in the city. These lengthy walks, while not technically fieldwork excursions, allowed me to contextualize my formal fieldwork sessions into a broader practice of informal busking. Nearly all of these spaces were frequented by a variety of musical performances, which I observed as I walked, most of them informal with the musicians practicing without a license like the Russian break-dancers.

¹⁸⁹ In Israel, the weekend spans Friday and Saturday, with Sunday as the first weekday.

In the square where the Russian break-dancers are preparing for performance, a group of young teenagers flirt with each other and play with their mobile phones. A lady with a baby on her knee clutches a bag of shopping. A family rapidly converse in Hebrew while eating falafel and shwarma procured from a small shop across the street. Some young Jewish, American tourists buy drinks made of freshly-squeezed fruit from a stall for an outrageous price. Young men, cigarettes dangling from their mouths, admire some motorbikes, which are parked in a row next to a block of flats in the ubiquitous Bauhaus style, typical to Tel Aviv. This crowd is different from the typical crowds in South Tel Aviv in that the demographic composition here is far less diverse. While spanning different ages, the people in the square all appear to be Jewish or Jewish-Israeli and middle-class.

Omar and his friends spread some gym mats on the ground facing the square. Omar takes a huge ‘retro’ silver ghetto-blaster that looks like it came from the 1990s. He inserts a CD and starts the soundtrack, which is a generic I-II-IV-V-I chord progression on a synthesizer punctuated by a loud bass and some funk rhythms. Omar begins to rap in Russian, words that my translator-aide Anna Lerman translates as:



(Anna Lerman's translation from Russian)

Omar's lyrics are 'simple and cool', just as he describes himself, with a broad message about the problems of young men and social inclusion of Israeli ethnic minorities that will appeal to everyone as long as they understand Russian. However, many people observing the performers in the square probably do not. On some of his words, some of the other men join in. As Omar raps, they wait patiently in a semi-circle and one man at a time performs their break-dancing moves on the mat. While Omar raps, he keeps the volume of the music low

and he delivers the lyrics in an uncertain fashion compared with the confidence with which he delivers them in other venues. I analyse this uncharacteristically cautious behaviour as being due to his discomfort with a place that is not a usual performance spot. Moreover, this is not only a more 'upper-class' environment compared to the Old Jaffa Plateau, but it is far more densely populated than other spots in which the 'group' normally busks. His confidence gradually grows perhaps because, at first, the 'audience' population in the square pay little attention to the group. This attitude changes as the young woman, who appears to be Jewish-Israeli and secular, trendily clad in a Nirvana t-shirt and designer jeans, comes right to the front of the group, and sits on one the cement blocks with a small girl (her daughter?) on her knee. She lights a cigarette and claps in rhythm to the beats, moving her body back and forth. Her reaction functions like a signal to the other Jewish-Israeli residents of the square and many of them come forward and form a more defined audience.

Gradually, a semi-circle and then a large crowd, forms around the break-dancers; many of the locals look on, some bemusedly, some with interest. As one of the lead dancers performs a particularly difficult move, spinning on his head on the portable mat, a sound of awe comes from the onlookers. Now there is a discernible shift. Initially, the audience had been in the square for practical reasons, to rest from shopping or to eat shwarma or falafel. At first, they were mildly attracted to the break-dancers, but largely indifferent to the chance to see a free performance. As they watched, them however, the audience who remained to see them became increasingly engaged as they witnessed their skills and began to respond to the group more as fans than merely as bemused onlookers. Tactfully asking the middle-class Jewish-Israeli audience members questions revealed that they were more concerned about the entertainment value of the performers than the fact that they are 'Russian'.

'Who cares?' says the woman with the toddler, after taking a long drag of her cigarette, 'so they're Russian or whatever. We're multi-cultural here in Tel Aviv.' The Jewish-Israeli teenagers, who are relatively less involved with the performance are not particularly impressed:

'They should rap in Hebrew like Subliminal. Now there's a rapper. But these guys, they're just weird, really weird.'

The American teenagers, Max, Naomi and Ilana, are newcomers to Tel Aviv, having just arrived to complete a Hebrew language course.

‘It’s fun how they just come out and perform,’ says Ilana, ‘it reminds me of back home in San Francisco, only these guys are performing Israeli Hip Hop’

The interesting thing about my conversation with the young Americans is that they do not appear to think that there is anything unusual about the group or even seem to notice that the group are not rapping in Hebrew. I am reminded of some of the responses of the tourists that I interviewed at DAM’s performance at The Block Club. It is unclear whether this has to do with a greater tolerance for difference on the part of the Americans, or their insensitivity to linguistic or ethnic difference.

After the performance, I interviewed the young man who seemed to be a newcomer to the group. I usually converse in limited Hebrew (on both sides) with members of the group; however, ‘Leo’ speaks very good English, although he often uses peculiar expressions. He says he learned English when he visited his brother who is studying in Australia. He seems very pleased to be able to practice his English by conversing with me. He explains that he learned how to rap from Omar, but that he learned ‘dance moves’ from his Dad, who is now deceased. He says he does not know, but he thinks his father learned them ages ago in the Ukraine in the 1970s. That is where he is originally from, Leo adds. He came to Israel at the age of fifteen and has only been living in Tel Aviv for about five years or so. He was allowed to immigrate to Israel, he explains, due to the Israeli government’s immigration policy that victims of Anti-Semitism should be allowed to seek refuge in Israel and gain Israeli citizenship. Leo explains that he is not considered Jewish according to Israeli state law, because only his Ukrainian grandparents were Jewish. Yet, he was allowed to become a permanent resident of Israel. He has been a member of Omar’s group ever since he arrived. He states that he ‘isn’t crazy about Hip Hop’ but likes it as much as any other music. He adds that his mother does not mind him being involved with Omar’s group because it keeps him ‘off the streets’.

‘Why haven’t I seen you with the group before?’ I asked him.

‘Oh, I’ve been doing my military service,’ he explains, adding, ‘oh yeah, the only type of Israeli music I don’t like is this awful hard-core kind of Mizrahi music. I was staying in a tent with these Arab Jews in the desert during my army service and that’s the only shit they would listen to. Seriously Hip Hop, even that alternative crap, is like heaven compared

to that shit. That's why we Russians we've got to stick together. Here, in the streets, as long as you've got a group who looks out for you, you're okay. Anyway,' he says looking at me and at my recording device, as if suddenly aware that this is all very formal. He looks pointedly at his watch, 'I've got to go.'

As Omar packs up the mats and shoulders the ghetto-blaster (still playing music, from the Galgalatz radio station now).¹⁹⁰ I ask him why he seemed more hesitant than usual about speaking Russian and making himself heard:

'Well, not everyone speaks Russian and we don't want to push people away. So we rap a little and then we dance. And who knows? If we can impress people with our moves, then maybe we can bring in the Russian next time. Or go perform down in Bat Yam or something. I don't know, we want people to be saying "we want more" not "oh no, it's those guys again!"' he laughs good-naturedly as he says this (Omar, conversation at The Third Ear, July 2013)

Here, Omar, the leader of the group, expresses his concerns about the limitations of the intercultural encounter and its potential. In this instance, dance, a non-verbal creative, artistic embodied medium is viewed as a necessary segue, or a potential segue, to 'crunchy language salad', which might be too difficult, in Omar's view, for the 'The Third Ear' informal audience to digest at first bite. The encounter also demonstrates a broader, practical cultural dimension to do with housing in contemporary Tel Aviv. Affordable apartments are hard to come by in Tel Aviv, even for the Israeli middle-class. Since apartments are small, public space takes on a central significance in the daily lives of the city's inhabitants in a way that it would not be in urban sites in which living spaces are larger and more plentiful (i.e. in some cities in the United States). Thus, an impromptu performance in a public space is perceived by Omar as having to be carefully negotiated, yet is also welcomed by the Jewish-Israeli and tourist mainstream inhabitants of the public space who, for the most part, welcome the distraction and appreciate the artistry of the performers despite their ethnic, linguistic, and social differences.

¹⁹⁰A popular radio station operated by the Israeli Defense Forces.

B.) Unlikely Intercultural Hubs: Recording Hip Hop Behind a Mattress Shop

An unexpected experience occurred on the last day of one of my fieldwork excursions to Tel Aviv, revealing the intricate negotiations of ‘super-diversity’ in the South Tel Aviv Hip Hop experience.¹⁹¹ I was moving my things from my room in the Florentine Hostel because the ceiling of the room in which I was staying was leaking and great floods of water were pouring down the side of one wall. As I moved my bags into one of the ‘renovated’ rooms downstairs, I got a call on my cheap Israeli Nokia. It is Neta, the ‘leader’ of System Ali:

‘Hey, sister, what’s up? He says’

‘I’m just moving my bags out of this waterlogged room at my hostel. What’s up with you?’

‘Yeah, not much. We’re just recording our album now and it’s right next-door to the hostel where you’re staying in Florentine. I thought you might want to come check it out.’

A question came to mind. Since when had they been planning an album and why did Neta not mention the recording session before? Over the phone, he gave me an address that Google maps specified as being roughly a two-minute walk from my hostel. The heavy rain had subsided, so it was easy enough to get to the location on the map, with my notebook in one pocket, and my video-recorder in the other. But the address Neta had given me required travelling down a gloomy, rain-drenched alley filled with shacks and no streetlights.

¹⁹¹ Please note: in this instance, I have used the actual names of recognized band members, while the names of other informants have been changed to protect their privacy.



Figure 23: Road to the Mattress Shop (taken the following morning: note the puddles)

The address itself was that of a small shop housed in a brick shack. The shop, closed at this hour of the night, seemed to sell uniquely pillows and duvets, which flooded the display window in all shapes and sizes. Apart from the small bar that sold alcoholic drinks and gherkins, there was no sign of life, certainly no sign of music-making or a recording studio in the near vicinity. I called Neta again and the call went straight to voicemail. I stood in the darkened alley for a minute and then decided to explore.

I walked down the driveway next to the pillow shop. Just a few steps away was a small block of flats. There were no streetlights so the area was pitch black. Taking out my key-ring, I shone its small light on the stairs. They were cracked, worn and falling to bits in many places. There was an iron lift next to the stairs, an old-fashioned ‘cage lift’ that looked as though it had not been used in years. As I was wondering what to do next, a young woman with a baby in a pram came to the entrance of the block of flats. Before I could offer to help her, she deftly grabbed the pram and leapt up the stairs to the first flat. I climbed the stairs carefully after her. On the second floor, light shone through the window in the door of a flat, and the door shook slightly, resounding with the sound of a bass coming from the flat behind the door.

I knocked several times before a young woman opened it. She was dark-skinned, most likely of Ethiopian origin, and she was dressed like a hipster in jeans and a T-shirt. She said nothing to me, but looking at me neutrally, shouted:

‘Oh, hey Neta, it’s your friend!’

System Ali has no designated leader, and it is often hard to differentiate ‘performer’ from ‘groupie’ or ‘fan’. But if there were to be a leader, it would be Neta. He is the social one, the group’s business contact, and the scope of the group’s intercultural encounters and their future performance possibilities are largely due to him. In a broader, social context, he functions as a kind of ‘shepherd’ and many different people in the Jaffa and South Tel Aviv area view him as a friend and a helper, and I, as a researcher and a relative stranger, was no exception.

Despite its odd location, the apartment houses a professional recording studio. A room to the right of the entrance functions as a reception area, with magazines and a small bathroom and kitchen. The recording room is on the left and one must go through it to get through to the sound-engineers. Neta was in the recording room beat-boxing; I had to wait until the ‘take’ was finished before I could go into the room, proceed behind the glass isolating the sound engineers, who intermittently recorded and spoke to Neta on their microphones.

A motley crew awaited me in the lounge with the recording equipment: sound-engineers, band-members, fans, and people that belong to none or both of the latter two categories. ‘Liora’ sits on one end of a long couch. She swats for a psychology exam and jots notes down on a pad of paper. Mahdi, a young Druze teenager, is there too, and smiles welcomingly. Yehonatan, the shy and quiet bass-player, smiles a friendly greeting and ‘Dan’ a young Jewish-Israeli hipster, slightly older than the rest of the non-engineer crowd, twirls his drumsticks in rhythm to the beat-boxing coming from the next room. Along a long bench the Ethiopian woman sits on the lap of a young Ashkenazi Jewish-Israeli young man who holds a guitar, clearly his girlfriend. A couple of young Jewish-Israeli ‘hipsters’ hang out in one of the rooms, reading magazines and moving to the beat-boxing. They share jokes with Mahdi, and laugh and dig their elbows into each other’s’ ribs good-naturedly. One young woman helps a younger one with math problems that she is doing for a secondary school homework assignment. The Ethiopian young woman shares some new music videos with her boyfriend. A woman, apparently in her late twenties, then enters the space. She wears a peasant skirt and blouse, and wears a vivid red lipstick and leopard print shades. She tells me that she is an actress and also a dancer and gives me some flyers publicizing her current show. She shows some of the younger women some dance moves. Neta comes in from recording a long beat-

boxing track for the group's album.¹⁹² Mahdi then goes into the recording room with Yoni and they begin working, with Mahdi rapping and Yoni on the electric guitar, which, I note is an interesting recording decision. But since my expertise is not in sound engineering, I make no comment.

I remembered to bring food and take out my supplies. My actions apparently remind a young Yemenite girl who is present that it is time to eat. She brings out a Tupperware with cakes that she says are made according to 'her mother's recipe from Yemen'. She and the Ethiopian girl get into a discussion food traditions in their families. The sound-engineers immediately ignore Mahdi and Yoni and come to see what food we have brought. Gradually, Mahdi and Yoni realize that no one is paying them any attention and they come out of the recording studio for refreshments. Food, whether discussions about how it is made or its actual consumption, is taken very seriously by all participants and often trumps music-making activities. It is also often the stimulus for intercultural discussion during the recording sessions.

Food and musical styles, however, are only a small part of what unites this 'ensemble'. However, the band members and attendees opened up only after I had come to several sessions. One Jewish-Israeli 'groupie' states about their Tel Aviv urban environment and its demographics:

'It's like... where we come from, it's tough and how we feel about where we come from. It's like we have no proper roots, you know, just this corny Zionist myth that's been fed to us from day one. But we know different, because we've all heard the story, but our eyes are open and we see the actual people around us here in Tel Aviv, not just some utopian, exclusionary dream, but the living people who are diverse and creative. It's a special, special thing System Ali have got going on. These people aren't *like* my family. These people *are* my family.' ('Ayelet', Recording Studio, January 2013)

For part of the group's entourage, attendance at group events, even informal ones, constitutes being part of a community, which stands in contrast with 'utopian' nationalist mythologies that are found alienating. If there is one word that stands out in the diverse accounts given by attendees' of their motivations for coming to be with the band and/or participating in the

¹⁹² The group was perpetually recording songs and then running out of money. System Ali released their album a year and a half later in the summer of 2013, which was financed privately through crowd-funding.

music, that word is *'mishpachah'* ('family'). Also attendees explicitly contrast *'parnassah'*, or 'making a living' with their participation at such events as *'chaim'* or 'life'.

Important intercultural communication takes place in these informal situations in these 'underground' locales in locations of South Tel Aviv. Although those situations do not always involve music-making proper, it is because of the music all are assembled and, therefore, the music is the catalyst and the enabler of the intercultural communication. Without the common ground provided by 'Hip Hop' or 'the album', attendees, myself included, would not be prompted to come together and have the discussions that we are having. Moreover, each person in the group can be viewed as an agent for different modes of belonging embodied in distinctive urban communities, which converge and overlap prompted by the extra-musical encounter. Thus, the impact of the intercultural encounter is not limited to the temporal and spatial boundaries of the immediate event, for instance, a conversation between Mahdi and myself, discussing his Druze family who live in the north of Israel. Such encounters have long and short-term impacts that transcend the communication between two individuals, by indirectly involving community experience beyond the present.

During one particularly long recording session, I meet 'Dubi', an older man dressed casually in a polo shirt and jeans. He has a mop of grey hair, a long grey beard and granny glasses. He seems a bit incongruous in the younger crowd; he explains that he is trying to raise funds so that System Ali can complete their new album. After the band records, most of the band members and some of their entourage 'invade' a small space next-door that is an informal sort of restaurant. Dubi happens to be sitting across from me at the table and engages me in conversation, communicating that he is particularly stricken by my wish to write about Hip Hop and 'cross-cultural communication'.

'But, I mean, the band members, they're all Israeli. So how can it be cross-cultural or intercultural or whatever?' he asks.

I explain that technical national identity is one form of belonging and that there are many other forms of identity to which groups members might subscribe. I also state that I might undertake a similar study of intercultural communication amongst musicians who all have British citizenship, for instance. He stares at me incredulously:

‘But...they’re all Israeli!’ he states, ‘you want cross-cultural, then go to the West Bank or something. Or to those “peace bands”’

I interpreted Dubi’s insistence that my classification of the band as ‘intercultural’ was somehow fallacious stemmed from his perception that this classification could potentially undermine the solidarity of the group as ‘family’. While, unlike Dubi, the group members themselves do not deny that they are from different ethnic backgrounds nor that their interactions are cross-cultural, Dubi’s observation is along the same lines. Clearly System Ali desires to represent themselves as an organic group, spontaneously sprouting from the third-spaces of South Tel Aviv and Jaffa. If they are intercultural, then they choose to represent this diversity as a spontaneous by-product of the city, rather attribute intentionality to the ethnic composition of the band and its entourage.

7.7 Conclusion

The above analysis of the fieldwork reveals that intercultural communication extends far beyond the immediate music-making process (rehearsals) and product (album; performance). This type of intercultural communication in Hip Hop groups in South Tel Aviv is complex, requiring theoretical frameworks that refine binary post-colonial approaches. However, the risk in relying too much on intercultural communication theory is that the balances of power prevalent in these urban negotiations are not given adequate attention. For instance, evaluating ‘Arabness’ as one of many factors of identity could be viewed as minimizing the specifically Palestinian experience. Certainly, the different individual members of System Ali can be distinguished in terms of privilege and stigma in relation to the Jewish-Israeli hegemony in Israel. However, a focus using intercultural communication theory, specifically Vertovec’s concept of super-diversity (2007), is useful to highlight inequalities that have yet to receive adequate scholarly attention. For instance, my approach elucidated the gender inequality prevalent in some of my fieldwork interactions. For instance, Svetlana’s difficulty in participating in the Russian break-dancing group due to her family duties, but also due to her relegation by the male members as a ‘mother’. Thus, due to being female, she was unable to undertake a significant role in the group.

This examination of the intercultural encounter also ties in with my discussion of third-space in Chapter 4. The Russians emerged from South Tel Aviv, encroaching beyond the north of the ‘border’ delimiting their normative ‘comfort zone’. While the bus station and the Old Jaffa Plateau and the space in front of the Mahmoudiya Mosque were all used as their usual performance spaces, the venue beside ‘The Third Ear’, while also outdoor and informal, was viewed as a more restrictive space, due to its location and the predominantly Jewish-Israeli population who frequented it. As a result, some of the Russian break-dancers perceived themselves as less free to express ethnic and linguistic difference; whether this was a perception on Omar’s part or actually reflected the objective situation remains to be seen.

Koch discusses the productive effects of intercultural communication in musical performance using the framework of an anthropology of knowledge:

Understanding requires personal contact and does not start at the macro level. It demands personal knowing which is interrelated to collective stocks of knowledge, by referring to them, co-producing them and vice versa’ (Koch 2009)

While Koch is describing the processes within the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (ironically the epitome of a ‘coexistence’ band), his argument is that the transcendent, productive results of intercultural communication occur on the grassroots level. This observation is particularly apt when applied to the participants in my investigation of Hip Hop. Understood as the production of knowledge, intercultural communication is ‘no longer a question of ethnicity, of nation, of membership in an organization or of language ... [but] a question of diverse knowledges of people within a society and between societies and thus more a question of scale, a question of shared and diverse information’ (Koch 2009). Thus, Koch proposes a way to understand the transcendent intercultural communication in venues of musical participation. The active negotiations of power and inequalities inevitably occurring do not obviate the reality and positive potential of the intercultural encounter as much as inform and influence it. Although unlike the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, the groups I examined did not employ a ‘collaborative’ stance, my examples support Koch’s idea that the intercultural encounter is stimulated by the common goal of producing music: without the musical frame, the vast majority of participants I examined would not have interacted and established rapport with one another.

It is important to note that the intercultural encounters prompted by the convergence of Hip Hop performance and public spaces in the South Tel Aviv area were not restricted to the individuals under primary investigation in this research. Indeed, such encounters occurred in various places in the local city-scape as part of normal, day to day life and commerce. For instance, a lively family of Ethiopian Jews owns the restaurant ‘Mimi’ in South Tel Aviv. Run by husband and wife, the small space is located just northwest of the New Central Bus Station. It was a place that I often frequented to compile notes and observe people in the city (and enjoy vegetarian Ethiopian cuisine). Often, migrants, primarily from Eritrea, the Sudan and Ghana would congregate in the large concrete parking lot to the side of front of the restaurant. This crowd was composed of individuals representing all ages and gender, men, women and children. Even late at night, there were usually one or two people in the area. Sometimes it would get so full of people that the intermittent parking attendant would usher the people away, at which point a few individuals would move to another smaller concrete (private) lot directly in front of the restaurant.

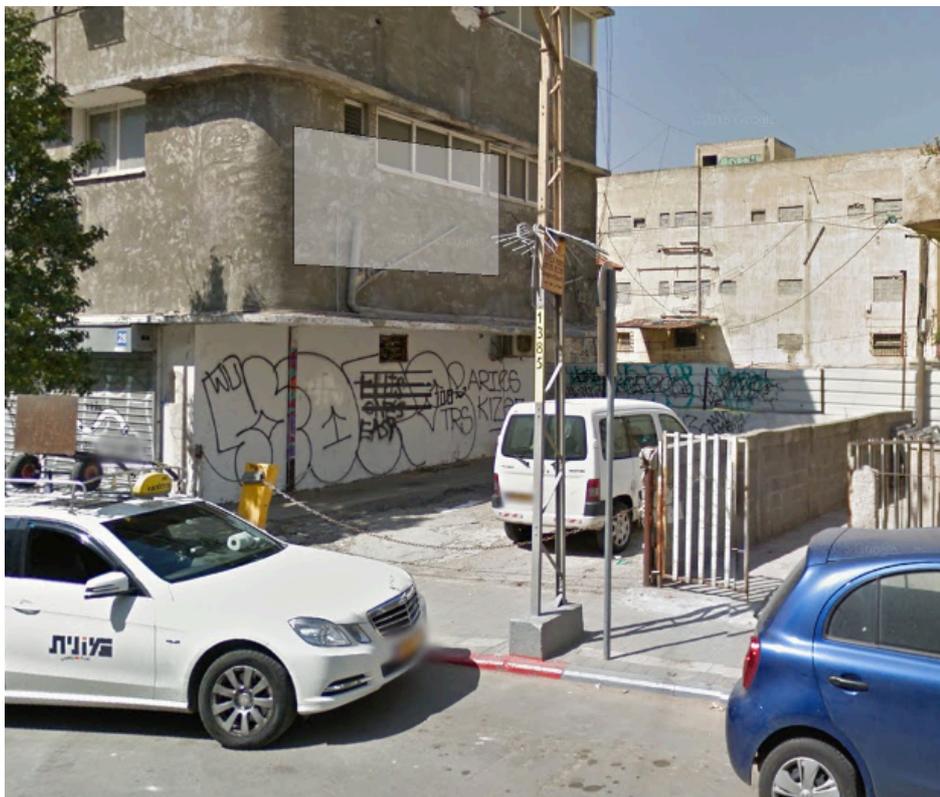


Figure 24: Private Lot facing ‘Mimi’ Restaurant

On weekday afternoons, the Jewish-Ethiopian teenaged children of the family who owned the restaurant would return from school and would sit at the restaurant's outside tables that overlooked the street. Sometimes they did school-work. Often they observed the people in the square. Their large velvet skullcaps in the nationalist colours of blue and white, possibly part of their school uniform, and the large stars of David hung around their necks were confirmation of the cultural-religious ties to a Jewish-Israeli collective. The retaining of such attire post-school time was undoubtedly to clearly distinguish themselves from the non-Jewish migrant communities living in the neighbourhood, who they physically resembled, at least, in comparison with the majority Jewish-Israeli urban population.

One day, a group of young African men hanging around in the square outside the restaurant got into a group. They began listen to African Hip Hop and other popular music on their iPhones. They began to rap and dance spontaneously in a manner similar to the Russian break-dancers. The Ethiopian-Jewish teenagers, who normally ignored the inhabitants of the square, were immediately interested. They came down from their perch on the restaurant terrace to more closely observe the young men and to speak with some of the bystanders. I was not able to determine the subject of their conversation, nor, indeed, whether or not they shared a common language; however, clearly, the spontaneous public performance and their appreciative response to the music prompted the exchange. After returning to his 'perch' one of the Ethiopian young men observed to his companion in Hebrew:

‘That guy is the shit! He could be as good as Tupac even. Just my opinion.’

The parent-owners of the restaurant were not impressed with the teenagers' departure from the norm and advised them to get started on their homework. Whether or not this encounter represents music cosmopolitanism or global musics, it certainly shows how music acts as a catalyst for social unity across ethnic, possibly even linguistic, boundaries.

The owners of 'Mimi' restaurant and their friends and relatives often engaged customers in friendly conversation. Upon hearing that I have parents from different backgrounds, one of the family matriarchs said very bluntly to me: 'behave yourself and everyone will accept you as Jewish, but if you steal, lie, or cheat, they will say you are an Arab and give you a hard time'. Her advice likely illuminated her own strategy for downplaying her liminal identity within the Israeli Jewish collective as an Ethiopian Jew, namely, to not draw any attention to

oneself as an individual and downplay the complexities of identity. This kind of identity negotiation reflects how ethnic or racial minorities situated within demographic majorities find ways to both express their identity and to minimize discrimination through various strategies, including by negotiating between dominant and subordinate identities. Indeed, sociological sources suggest that while Palestinians residing in Israel tend to focus on their individuality as a de-stigmatization strategy to draw attention away from being perceived as the Palestinian ‘enemy’, groups like Ethiopian Jews emphasize their communal identity rather than their peculiarity (emphasizing their ties to the Jewish ‘collective’) (Mizrachi and Zawdu, 2011). This final ethnographic example shows the complexity of the intercultural encounter in the area and Hip Hop’s relationship to it, and also shows the wealth of unexplored intercultural dynamics that could be investigated in future research.

These venues for musical performance, formal and informal, planned and spontaneous, allow for a wide spectrum of different types of intercultural contact. Arguably, the venues for extended contact, such as those frequented by System Ali and their entourage, are crucial given the current socio-economic situation in Israel. Over the last twenty years, Israel has undergone a rapid transformation from a socialist welfare state to a high-tech neoliberal economy, a process that has been occurring globally. The effects of this transformation are particularly observable in Jaffa, which is undergoing a process of gentrification. In Belkind’s words: ‘in 2011 Ajami [the poor district of Jaffa] was undergoing a rapid and cruel process of gentrification—here also meaning affluent ‘Judaization’—that had not yet peaked’ (Belkind 2013, 335). In the context of this accelerated national and local change, the musical frame allows for inter-ethnic solidarity extending beyond performance, establishing mutual advocacy for human rights across the local constituency. The interactions between musicians and attendees alike revolving around musical performance forced us to see each other as individuals all with valid personal narratives and points of view. The fact that the effect of this intercultural communication extends beyond the performers themselves, including audiences and other attendees cannot be stressed enough. While typically dismissed as ‘a left wing thing’ in Israel (discussed by informant ‘Efrat’ in an interview, 14 April 2013) and insufficiently covered by the media, musical collaborations influenced onlookers and audience-members. I could see, for instance, even in cases in which individuals harboured certain prejudices against ‘the Other’ (e.g. staunch believers in a Jew-free or Palestinian-free Levant or the evils of ‘Russians’ or ‘Africans’) trying to fit their new-found acquaintances,

friends, performers, or merely people they had seen in everyday encounters, into their stated political views.

McDonald's notion of 'emergence' can be applied to the way in Hip Hop artists in South Tel Aviv (formal and informal) stimulate the intercultural encounter. McDonald proposes that the concept of 'emergence' the creation of new modes of belonging has replaced 'exile' in new Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop collaborations.¹⁹³ McDonald has identified a new discourse emerging in Hip Hop in Israel that is prompted by the performers' cohesion through shared humanity, evident in the intercultural negotiations of the artists researched here. The musicians he describes are prompted to present themselves outside of the normative binaries of Israel-Palestine:

A recent collaboration by several Israeli artists (both Jewish and Palestinian) attempts to transcend the rigid binaries of the nation-state through hip hop performance and media. In film screenings, panel discussions, and collaborative music performances, these artists articulate what might be termed a post-colonial and post-national discourse of emergence that resists exilic notions of boundaries and explores the shared cultural and historical connections between and within Jewish and Palestinian communities in Israel. The discursive shift from exile to emergence embodied in the work of these artists presents a unique reimagining of the nation-state...interrogating the dynamics of power, hegemony, and popular culture in the Middle East (2013, 70).¹⁹⁴

In my opinion, the transition from memory of displacement from 'exile' (strict territorial boundaries) to 'emergence' (post-nationalist identities) in the individual artists' engagement is prompted by their own trans-ethnic experience of exile. The artists use 'Exilic boundaries' and 'emergence' strategically and often simultaneously. In the case of System Ali, the concepts of both 'exile' and 'emergence' illuminate the social meaning of their music. They cannot solely embrace the values of the Israeli left, which according to McDonald's

¹⁹³ The concept of 'exile' according to McDonald was responsible for the nationalist turn in Israeli Hip Hop following the Second Intifada. The term 'emergence' utilized by McDonald is borrowed from the American Hip Hop artist Invincible (Ilana Weaver) as a discourse that 'involves a conceptual transposition of belonging beyond the territorially defined nation-state, nested within an ethics of shared human vulnerability' (McDonald 2013b, 78). Weaver's music deals with 'social activism on myriad issues' (McDonald 2013b, 79), but actually a large part advocates Palestinian rights in light of growing trauma and displacement. Notwithstanding her potent message, the irony of this activism being performed in one of the most segregated mega-cities in North America (Detroit), as well one of the former residence of a large variety of Algonquin First Nations (now ghettoized or murdered) is clear. This can be seen as an example of how engaging 'in performance' with the Palestinian cause has become a catch-all and iconic form of social activism.

¹⁹⁴ I have previously critiqued McDonald for using primarily American Hip Hop artists to illustrate a point about Jewish-Israelis. However, his point about currently post-nationalist initiatives embedded in popular culture is certainly applicable when discussing System Ali and the intercultural memorial service in Tel Aviv.

definition, can be described as ‘emergent’. By doing so, they would exclude members who do not adopt those values such as members who continue to identify with the ‘exile’ paradigm. Rather, they explicitly address issues of ‘exile’ (or ‘exiles’) with a personal, human approach, which enables their emergence as an inclusive musical-social community. Perhaps the band can be understood as an intermediary, a careful negotiation between exile and emergence to reflect the different situations and self-representation of the band members.

The main difference between System Ali’s music and that of Hip Hop groups such as Subliminal and DAM and the Russian break-dancers, is that the ‘Jewish’ music contributions and references often constitute the musical frame for the dominant minority lyric contribution or ‘influences’.¹⁹⁵ It is no accident that the contributions of three Palestinian members of the band (Muhammed A., Muhammed M. and Amne Jerushe) are often especially highlighted, as are Enchik’s ‘Russian’ contributions. In a way, the other members of the band create a platform for Palestinian, and other minority, musical performance, using their ‘Jewish privilege’ to access elements of Israeli society that would be harder to reach, such as venues and audiences.¹⁹⁶ System Ali exemplifies McDonald’s notion that musical groups in Israel/Palestine must be understood in relational terms (2009, 119). McDonald describes the need to understand the group DAM as the product of a relational tension and negotiation. If DAM, a group formed exclusively of young Palestinian men with Israeli citizenship, is the product of intertwined, relational identities and histories, then a relational approach towards System Ali is even more justified, since unlike DAM it is made up of ethnically diverse members.

It is not possible here to validate the inter-ethnic processes embedded in the operations of Hip Hop groups in South Tel Aviv examined in this thesis on the basis of their large-scale impact. Their failure to effect is often critiqued in the academic community. However, I do not consider that to be their main goal. In any case, in formal contexts, even aside from informal initiatives, which remain relatively undocumented,¹⁹⁷ these collaborations have prompted and

¹⁹⁵ This is partly why System Ali’s identity is ambiguous. I lectured about some of their work in a class on ‘Jewish Music in the Middle East’. During the same week, a colleague requested some of my translations of their lyrics for a class that she was giving on Palestinian popular music.

¹⁹⁶ In a way this can be considered a reversal of Dardashti’s description of Jewish culture-brokers of Arab music in Israel (Dardashti 2009b).

¹⁹⁷ I suspect that the informal group that I have called ‘the Russian break-dancers’ is one of many informal intercultural initiatives in South Tel Aviv that is focussed on Hip Hop. I also suspect that similar groups form in other urban centres in Israel, such as Haifa. This phenomenon may well be investigated in future research.

perpetuated the establishment of local organizations and initiatives that support musicians and artists and their families, without forcing them to compromise their identity, nationalist affiliations and/or politics. These organizations include groups such as Sadaka-Reut, The Arab-Hebrew Theatre, and The Jewish-Arab Community Centre. Optimistically as these youthful Hip Hop artists of Florentine, Jaffa, Bat Yam and other neighbourhoods in South Tel Aviv, become the 'leaders of tomorrow', they will strive to implement more inclusive politics motivated by these events. Indeed, even in the limited time that I have known them, the System Ali group have matured and expanded and the Russian group has started branching out and engaging with a Jewish-Israeli majority directly in a way that they hitherto had not felt comfortable doing. Thus, social change engendered by the intercultural contact of the South Tel Aviv Hip Hop interactions have already happened on a small scale, supporting Belkind's suggestion that carefully constructed collaborative initiatives can 'bring changes in consciousness that can only reveal themselves through long-term processes' (Belkind 2013, 351).

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Research Summary

This research has engaged in a detailed discussion of how Hip Hop performers in Israel negotiate identity, intercultural communication, politics, and urban space. The focus has been on the particular performance space in the environment of South Tel Aviv in the context of multiple migrations, gentrification, and overarching social and political conflict. This research has also contextualized Hip Hop performers and their entourage (fans, etc.) in both a local and transnational framework by tracing their connections and influences. Most scholarship on Israeli popular music tends to divide performers along categories of ethnic, religious, or nationalistic consciousness. However, exposure to the field revealed that such a focus is inadequate to effectively analyse the complexity of Hip Hop performance practice in South Tel Aviv. In practice, Hip Hop performers used neighbourhood venues in South Tel Aviv as transient spaces. In so doing, they were able to articulate the musical expression of various relational subcultural identities. My work brings the importance of these third-space performances to the fore in consideration of the Hip Hop performer's relationship to the space in light of several demographic and experiential categories, including religion and ethnicity, but also in relation to age, gender, country of origin and other local and global forms of identity and belonging.

The opening sections of this thesis situate my fieldwork in the broader context of many categories of academic scholarship. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this research, a discussion of the history of music in Israel and the Palestinian territories highlights the important fact that the groups studied are continuous with extant musical traditions, both global and local. Musical production is then examined in the context of Hip Hop with a focus on both local and transnational factors. The focal points from fieldwork have been highlighted and arranged according to the primary focuses and theoretical frameworks of each chapter.

8.2 Research Results

My ethnographic approach generated research findings that illustrate how, through sharing both concrete territories of urban space and converging histories of dispossession, contemporary Hip Hop performers in South Tel Aviv transcend values and normative ideologies at the macrocosmic level. It was found that the ‘macrocosmic level’ constituted a relationship rather than an absolute. Understanding these cultural products as expressions of ‘subculture’ according to the Birmingham School, each can be seen as expressing a relationship with the ‘mainstream’ culture (the greater culture that surrounds them) (Gelder and Thornton 1997) for the purposes of challenge or de-construction. Thus, performers problematized normative ideologies and discriminatory policies at the macrocosmic level of the nation-state of Israel, as could be convincingly argued in the case of DAM. In the case of Subliminal and Zionist Hip Hop, we can understand ‘mainstream culture’ as ‘the State’ in terms of Subliminal’s minority Mizrahi identity within it. On the other hand, in Subliminal’s representation, the Jewish state itself is the subculture which challenges a.) a Judeophobic Middle East b.) a monolithic global western culture that singles Israel out for not embracing liberal North American values. For System Ali, it becomes more complicated, and perhaps the ‘parent culture’ with which they contend can be understood as not only the Jewish State that they view as discriminating against its minorities, but against rigorous types of nationalism in any form. Certainly System Ali actively critique the Zionist Jewish-Israeli majority at the urban level of Tel Aviv, and the status quo that seeks to silence ‘the ghetto of the left’ (Neta’s words). In the case of other performers and individuals, such as the members of the informal Russian break-dancing group who blur the boundaries of Arab/Jew mainstream/subcultural, the group could be seen to inadvertently defy both state norms and subcultural expressions of identity in their relatively impromptu Hip Hop product in public urban space. Overall, these artists’ relationships to their performances-sites in South Tel Aviv reveal the complex interrelationships between expressions of subculture, positionality, and the urban space in which they are enacted.

My research reveals a complex web of power relations, occurring not just in the context of the State of Israel in relation to its non-Jewish minorities, but in the context of Israel as a tiny nation-state in relation to global Western dominance. Other relational categories of power were also revealed in which the power relations represented paradoxical complexity of privilege and lack thereof. For instance, the ‘Russian’ Hip Hop artists were privileged

through immigration rights, but socially stigmatized along linguistic lines, an unusual social status that was carefully negotiated in performance and choice of venue in relation to Tel Aviv's north-south divide. In the context of South Tel Aviv, the 'resistance' dynamic embedded in Hip Hop, arguably a vestigial trajectory of its roots in African American protest genre, was found to take multiple forms and be active in many levels in performance and rehearsal. Certainly all the Hip Hop performers investigated showed a tension between political commentary, social change, musical aesthetics, and commodification that is characteristic of global Hip Hop (Morrison 1995).

My fieldwork analysis revealed both the tensions embedded in local concerns that united different communities in South Tel Aviv, and the national agendas and concerns that divided them. As far as this local/national tension is concerned, it is clear that the performers are creating alternatives to challenge what they perceive to be the status quo, with the goal of social justice. The socio-political nuances that became evident through fieldwork and its analysis challenge simplistic notions of subcultural resistance and highlight the nuanced differences between demographically diverse identities operating in South Tel Aviv. These nuances are often rendered invisible by predominant ideological transnational binary dichotomies between Arab/Jew and Palestine/Israel that are 'inadequate for describing the multiple axes along which everyday power relations play out' (Wood 2013a, 288).

Some of the Hip Hop artists studied in this research operate in a larger environment of contested, but well-attended, intercultural events, such as the Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Service. These events almost always include musical performance to stimulate group cohesion. They are prompted by more than anxiety, current violence, stigmatization and loss. 'Converging dispossessions' that is, underlying intersecting collective histories of displacement, trauma, and even genocide, are often the driving forces promoting empathy and ephemeral unity in the Tel Aviv-Yafo city-scape. Building on Halbwach's theoretical concept of 'collective memory' (1941), a lived, localized, rather than national, construction of memory, the concept 'convergent dispossessions' is used to describe the traumatic experience of loss of nationhood, ethnic identity and homeland, transcending discrete rational political and social collectives. The presence of convergent dispossessions was not immediately apparent, but became evident after months of fieldwork and consistent exposure to the urban landscape.

While a focus on immediate urban space in Hip Hop studies is not unique, the use of Halbwach's theory of collective memory to highlight cultural production at the local level is my innovation. Halbwach's theoretical frame is also useful to highlight cultural production at the local level and the resulting intercultural encounters that engage unifying collective memories. In this particular urban context, shared memory was dominated by a sense of displacement and shared suffering; these feelings effected the Hip Hop product by not only stimulating intra-religious community cohesion, but also by creating bonds between individuals from different backgrounds. Therefore the different performers, rather than constituting competing candidates for nationalism or land-ownership, represented different potentially equally valid positionalities that were constructed in performance.

While this research has focussed on intercultural contact in actual performance and how it is enacted in the immediate urban space in which it occurs, the global phenomenon Regev calls 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' (2013) may account for Hip Hop's appeal across a variety of demographic categories of identity in South Tel Aviv. My research has focussed more on local, rather than global, 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism,' namely, on intercultural encounters prompted by shared urban space. However, the local encounters investigated here, embodied shared histories of collective trauma, were found to often be accompanied by the desire to participate in a global, contemporary world culture in the manner Regev describes. This research has shown the critical importance of highlighting the local, urban level at which such negotiations occur.

The intercultural exchange in Hip Hop practices was often stressed as appearing 'organic'. This stance is projected by Hip Hop groups as a means of justifying their legitimate connection with the urban milieu in which they operate. It is part of a larger discourse of authenticity that views Hip Hop in particular as valid only if it expresses 'true' adversity (Dorchin 2012). Here, arguably, music's social function is emphasized in which its potential for conflict resolution stems, not from something intrinsic to 'the music itself' or from romantic notions of music as a universal language, but because average, local people organize themselves around the production of music in a spontaneous way. Arguably, this spontaneous organization is not unique to music. It is prevalent in other collaborative art-forms such as theatre, dance, poetry-reading, story-telling, and in the visual arts. Yet, Hip Hop has a particular appeal to individuals who might not be attracted to commune together by the latter art-forms. Moreover, in the 'first world' culture of Tel Aviv as a whole, Hip Hop

performance and rehearsals in its 'deviant' South offers an alternative that transcends esotericism, high art and commercial commodification. For this reason Hip Hop in South Tel Aviv can function as an interactive arena for intercultural communication in ways that other performance arts cannot.

One of my goals throughout this research has been to problematize the equation of Hip Hop with 'resistance' through a discussion of the nuances of performance. My research findings suggest that if, indeed, Hip Hop is to be investigated in terms of 'resistance', a stance articulated by many of its practitioners, it is useful to pay more nuanced attention to the way in which 'subcultural' and 'hegemony' (according to Hebdige's understanding of the terms) (1979) are fluid, relational categories.¹⁹⁸ My research also revealed the importance of identifying the politics and motivations at play in emphasizing some forms of subcultural resistance over others.

Perhaps it would be useful to understand Hip Hop as enacting multiple 'resistances', some explicitly acknowledged by the performers, some implicit in the performance product and everyday act of music-making. Many examples of Hip Hop 'resistances' were evident in performances in South Tel Aviv. For instance, Subliminal resisted Judeophobia, terrorism, and Israel's being singled out for critique by the international media; DAM resisted the oppression of Palestinians while vying for equal rights within the State of Israel; System Ali resisted discrimination, economic inequality and urban gentrification at the local level. Other examples of local 'resistances' abounded in my fieldwork, but were harder to identify without further research. For example, some of the minority performances in public areas can be seen as 'resistances' against the rise of Israel as a neo-liberal state. The Russian break-dancers may well be 'resisting' the suppression of the Russian language in Hebrew-dominated Tel Aviv. Or perhaps they were protesting their exclusion from the Hebrew speaking Jewish or greater Israeli collective. Svetlana's limited participation with the Russian group can be viewed as a personal 'resistance' on the part of a new mother and a housewife searching for a venue to escape temporarily from her domestic duties and her traditional woman's role. The notion of plural 'resistances' in Hip Hop as *differentiated*, rather than 'competing', subcultural expressions, opens up many fruitful questions for future research. In the meantime, this research successfully reinforces the need for continuing critically nuanced,

¹⁹⁸ Hebdige's work was criticized for focusing almost exclusively on white, male working class participants. Yet while his focus in *Subcultures* (1979) may have been fairly limited, his theoretical work can be applied to a wide variety of power-relations and processes of cultural production well beyond his 'case study'.

detailed discussions about Hip Hop, both local and global, and its role in urban cultural production.

8.3 Immediate Contribution:

This research generated new findings on contemporary popular music in Israel through an exploration of Subliminal, DAM, System Ali, other artists and informal groups. Overall, it suggests new ways for analysing music in Israeli urban space that do not focus primarily on the ethnic or religious identity of the participants, and more broadly, brings out the ways in which the music was interpreted, performed and consumed in its local context by individuals residing in the area and individual visitors from transnational locations. This emphasis brought their identities into focus in a new light: a variety of national, bi-national or even anti-nationalist identities were being constructed through a flexible music product, enabled through its performance in liminal third-space. Regev and Seroussi, focussing on the Jewish aspect of Israeli popular music, argue that initiatives are a competition for the dominant expression of national culture (2004). Indeed, placing music in the arena of competing national culture may well be a useful way of grouping musics that are inherently fragmented. However, my research found that such expressions inherently inhabit Yiftachel's notion of grey zones, fluctuating between relatively stable categories of identity (Jewish, Arab, etc.). Thus, they respond to influences, both national and international, as well as pragmatic concerns in the music-making space. This research also contributes to literature on global Hip Hop suggesting the value of a return to a focussed, comparative examination of global forms and their relationship to current African American practice.

Supporting my understanding of South Tel Aviv as third-space, my concrete ethnographic experiences in the area resulted in encounters with a wide variety of demographic groups, including people from a variety of age-groups, religious and social backgrounds. This was as much the case in music-related events as it was in day-to-day interactions: the periodic calls to prayer from the nicely-kept mosque, the young Palestinian, Russian and other school children visiting the beach next to the groups of Chasidic boys praying, secular Jewish-Israelis drinking coffee sitting next to young Arab men listening to Hip Hop, and swimming in the ocean with a group of burka-clad women. These engaged, real-time, sensory,

ethnographic experiences show how this liminal urban space permits the overlapping of different identities. However, these intercultural experiences do not preclude the existence of competing identities, power-structures and/or systems of oppression. Even though South Tel Aviv is an area that appears to be more conducive to intercultural dynamics than other places in Israel, this does not obviate the existence of over-arching power-structures and discrimination. Even as the urban framework of South Tel Aviv, both physical and ideological, allows its inhabitants and those who identify with it to transcend segregation and racism, as in many urban areas, discrimination persists in complex forms that continue to affect the daily lives of its inhabitants. It is a place in which coexistence is perceived as 'working' even while inter-communal tensions continue to manifest themselves (Gross 2002).¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, my research has revealed that, relatively speaking, the peculiarly urban, multi-cultural population of South Tel Aviv can be viewed as a limited hub of limited intercultural social interaction, particularly relating to the arts, and a microcosm of Israeli society in terms of the future potential for interethnic and intercultural dialogue and cultural partnership.

Arguably the most important observation resulting from this research is the necessity for future academic scholarship in this area that will take into account all of the demographics inhabiting this urban space, not just those directly reflecting the conflicting nationalisms characterizing the Arab-Israeli conflict. Jaffa's history as a port city and Tel Aviv's historic relationship with it have shaped its contemporary liminality, allowing the possibilities of utilizing this space as a contemporary hub for inter-ethnic collaboration due to the many migrant communities that inhabit it. Hatuka argues that in urban hubs in contemporary Israel, a distinctive relationship between city and state has developed in which the municipal body can often propose, challenge and even reject national decrees. Hatuka believes the small size of the country is partly responsible for this development: 'As of 2006, the number of citizens living in Tel Aviv was 384,400, with only a little over 7 million making up the population of

¹⁹⁹ However, it is important to note that the discrimination is not simple and binary. Many instances revealing the multi-layered power relationships in the area occurred during fieldwork. For example, a personal friend who is a recent immigrant from Eritrea, complained that when he came to work in Jaffa or Florentine, Palestinian youths would approach him in gangs and steal his bicycle. He explained that because he is Eritrean, it was unlikely that the police would do very much to help him and the youths knew this (fieldnotes from Florentine, May 2013). Moreover, the Israeli 'hipsters' resident in Jaffa and Florentine, who are generally supportive of their Palestinian neighbours, often express unpleasant, sometimes downright racist opinions about their religious Jewish neighbours largely resident in Bat Yam. In a recent work, Gabriella Djerrahian discusses these complex relationships in relation to Palestinian-Israelis and Ethiopian Jews, explaining that individuals in her fieldwork often expressed animosity or racist opinions about each other (2013).

the country (this includes twenty percent who are Arab citizens of Israel – Palestinian, Druze, Bedouin and other). Tel Aviv-Yafo's role as the powerful economic, cosmopolitan centre has 'enabled the city to contribute to the central government's decisions' (Hatuka 2010, 13). The municipality often negotiates decisions of national policy, in some cases challenging and even rejecting policies proposed by the nation-state. Kemp and Rajzman discuss this in the context of non-Jewish, non-Palestinian immigrants/refugees in South Tel Aviv, highlighting public musical performances in key urban spaces as part of the emancipation afforded by municipal, rather than nationalist, considerations (2004). The fact that the municipality provides a public venue for these communities to protest, including permitting public musical performance, may seem but a paltry political gesture. However, considering that a large percentage of this population are technically illegal residents, it constitutes an obvious attempt by the municipality to promote urban stability, potentially violating national immigration policy and decisions. These complexities emerged during my fieldwork with a variety of respondents, showing the necessity of a sustained analysis of these populations in future studies in ethnomusicology.

8.4 Broader Questions:

While musical participation and performance have been the focus of this thesis, my theoretically-informed ethnographic findings addressed broader questions having to do with the gap between local and transnational communities and the ideological and/or practical motivations that inform them. Increasingly, even as modes of international communication such as technological innovation appear to link communities, they can obfuscate communal particularities resulting in alienation and miscomprehension. Broadly speaking, this investigation of Hip Hop in South Tel Aviv and its relationship to international discourse and musical genres addresses a broader problem in our increasingly globalized world, namely, a disjuncture between living, diverse, local communities and the transnational, ideological projections used to define them by outsiders. Local communities in Israel, in particular, are placed under special, intentional scrutiny, understood through transnational frameworks such as 'The Arab-Israeli Conflict' or 'European Colonialism', frameworks that are inadequate for

an erudite scholarly analysis, musical or otherwise.²⁰⁰ Addressing this disjuncture should be a growing concern for ethnomusicologists, particularly those conducting research in urban areas.

Hatuka describes the methodological and moral difficulties in adequately explaining the tension between ideology and lived experience in the context of Israel/Palestine:

How can one explain that, in spite of the ongoing conflict, urban reproduction continues as usual in Israel? How can one explain that many Palestinian workers participated in the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank? This paradox and other such contradictory forces of separation and integration between Israeli and Palestinian territories constantly redefines the 1967 borders, and also redefines the life of people in cities throughout Israel and Palestine...’ (Hatuka 2010, xviii)

In her discussion of violent acts and urban planning in Tel Aviv, Hatuka draws on Juval Portugali’s notion of ‘implicate relationships’ (Portugali 1992), ‘*that which implies that the two nations contain each other, exist inside each other, and cannot evade the reality of coexistence*’ (Hatuka 2010, xiv).²⁰¹ My research has explored this tension between the lived and the ideological in the context of South Tel Aviv with an emphasis on the local and the everyday in the music-making process. The intercultural reality, often in direct contrast with ideologically-driven dominant nationalisms, reveals the inadequacy of hegemonic discourses promoting large-scale ethnic separation as the road to ‘human rights’. While the research has revealed that large-scale power differentials exist in intercultural musical encounters, these are diverse and varied and a top-down ban on intercultural interaction based on ethnicity creates its own problems of discrimination and exclusion.

Emphasis on individuals and the local community can result in a ‘bubble effect’, that is a disassociation with group dynamics from surrounding systems of oppression; conversely, a concentration on ideology often results in the perpetuation of discriminatory transnational stereotypes causing local individuals and communities who are detrimentally effected to be

²⁰⁰ Joyce Dalsheim intends to address this disjuncture in a study of Jewish settlers in the West Bank (forthcoming).

²⁰¹ The moral dilemma in highlighting this complex relationality in academic research is that it might be seen as de-legitimizing nationalist aspirations that are promoted as ‘solutions’ to the overarching conflict situation (e.g. the ‘Two-State Solution’).

overlooked. Indeed, Israel is understood in the light of many divergent, transnational mythical narratives, ideological projections which rarely correlate with the concrete, multitude of lived realities and geographic locales of the many people dwelling there (e.g. Holy Land, ancestral homeland, evil Zionist entity). On a self-reflexive note, perhaps my own desire to highlight the lived reality beyond these myths stems from my identity that, like many people's fits in only partially with these transnational mythologies that often characterize discussions about Israel. Hence, I was motivated to search for theoretical frames, such as 'collective dispossession' that account for the unification of populations even as they acknowledge their differences.

8.5 New Questions:

The theoretical frames of third-space and 'collective memory' have been useful tools with which to analyse specific ethnographic encounters, and have pushed the understanding of cross-cultural dialogue in music-related urban encounters beyond a post-colonial analysis. However, while these frames work well in highlighting the transformative potential of cross-cultural elements in the Hip Hop practices, they can be applied to many situations. The concept of third-space allows the identification of a physical and symbolic space that permits the overlapping of different identities. However, the exchanges I documented using this framework often (but not always) conformed to a reductionist understanding of the subculture-hegemony relationship that I had attempted to ultimately refine.²⁰² In Chapter 5, I put forward my idea of 'convergent dispossessions' as a frame for understanding the unifying factor in intercultural events in South Tel Aviv characterized by musical performance and consumption. However, other possible theoretical frames may be useful to analyse the complex dynamics of intercultural encounters in the context of music in contemporary Israel. To avoid the generality of many post-colonial approaches, moving forward, it might be useful to develop the idea of analysing Hip Hop along the lines of intercultural encounter along multiple categories of identity belonging. As described in Chapter 7, intercultural communication theory considers a theoretical view of culture as shared, diverse knowledge and expertise. Intercultural communication is based on the concept of dialectical hermeneutics (Gadamer 2004, Ricoeur 1996). This theoretical frame highlights the significance of dialogue on both individual and communal levels for engaging the necessary

²⁰² That is not to say that such an approach is not useful, but simply that I am aware of the limitations of the concept.

role of ‘the other’ in both self-identification and inter-community engagement, a process that includes the researcher him/herself, his/her identity as well as his/her dialectical relationship with the participants. Overall, my goal has been to highlight the human dimension of the ever-changing intercultural dynamics of musical encounters and the broader structures that inform them. Moving forward, my approaches might be complemented with a sustained investigation of different forms of de-stigmatization and/or the impact of the capitalist economics of the local and global music industry, thus adding to narratives that continue to shape academic discussions of popular music in Israel.

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Appendix 1: Map of South Tel Aviv and Jaffa



Note: this map serves to highlight the areas in South Tel Aviv investigated in this research. The yellow line represents some streets as well as the intercity highways.