

# A Message for Peace or a Tool for Oppression? Israeli Jewish-Arab duo Achinoam Nini and Mira Awad's Representation of Israel at Eurovision 2009

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Israel's contenders for the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest (known as the ESC or, as here, Eurovision) were the Israeli Jewish-Arab duo Achinoam Nini and Mira Awad. The chosen song was "There Must Be Another Way," a tri-lingual appeal for peace and reconciliation sung in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. The decision to nominate Nini and Awad as Israel's representatives to Eurovision was announced in early January, in the midst of a full-scale war Israel launched on Gaza and its inhabitants, which came in response to several years of rockets fired into Israel from the Hamas-led territory. Given the timing and the high profile of the ESC, an annual competition held among active member countries of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the duo's collaboration generated much public debate in Israel and beyond. The debate highlighted the symbolic charge of the song and its performers, and it continued throughout the year, animated by the political situation, the duo's activities, and the media that closely followed the process leading to the May 2009 contest and its aftermath. This article will analyze the meanings given to the artistic collaboration of the two performers that were circulating in the public sphere to show how, in this war-torn region, cultural and political domains are intertwined such that wars are fought not only with guns and rockets but also within cultural spheres, and that both domains are constitutive of highly contested social constructions of ethnic and national affiliations.

Eurovision is a site in which the intersection of popular culture with national and international politics is especially visible, due to its country-centered format, the voting processes, and the extent of mass mediation—over 100 million viewers each year (Haan, Dijkstra, and Dijkstra 2005). The voting process takes place at the national level first when the representative song is chosen, and later during the Eurovision Song Contest, when each country votes for other countries' representative songs. Since the late 1990s, the voting process at both stages typically combines popular votes counted in local telethons with votes cast by a panel of experts commonly associated with each country's broadcasting apparatus (Cleridos and Stengos 2006).<sup>1</sup> Songs must be newly written for the occasion, and the participatory nature

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of the selection process serves to mobilize citizens to share in the creation of what Benedict Anderson calls the “physical realization of the imagined community” (1983:145). According to Anderson, the moments in which songs are publicly shared to signify an event—for example, anthems sung on national holidays—create an experience of simultaneity in which people who are unknown to each other come together in a special kind of imagined community: the nation. What Anderson is pointing to is that music provides one of the ways in which nationhood is culturally constructed. The participatory nature of Eurovision provides for similar moments of simultaneity, both when the public votes for the song and image that would represent the nation, and when it votes for other nation’s songs.

At the same time that Eurovision is a participatory event, the Eurovision voting process also leaves much of the control in the hands of government-affiliated institutions. In other words, what represents “the nation,” and also determines the relative value of cultural production of other nations, combines both popular vote and government control. This process highlights the important role cultural policy has in the creation of the imagined community, and in the delimitation of the cultural boundaries of this community with respect to other communities. Miller and Yúdice (2002) analyze cultural policy as a conflation of two registers: the aesthetic register and the anthropological register, which, when combined, provide for the training of citizens to share common values. The songs represented at Eurovision provide the musical and lyrical content that is interpreted at the aesthetic register, while the context of national representation directed by government institutions inculcates nationalist sentiments among citizens in a manner deemed appropriate by such institutions. According to Jacques Attali (1985), music is both a channel for power and a form of entertainment. Eurovision is a prime example of this: its country-centered format and voting processes have turned it into an international contest in which centralized power structures such as government broadcasting institutions mobilize music as a “tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality” (Attali 1985:6). Music in this context links power centers to subjects on several levels. The highly mediated environment and the commercial nature of the hype preceding the contest render Eurovision a prominent economic institution. But as Philip Bohlman suggests, Eurovision also sparks attachments that extend well beyond its economic function and “the events leading up to the final broadcast make it almost impossible to escape the allure of a nation symbolized through its music” (2004:3). What links power centers to subjects here is a commercial musical event that serves both as a market and as a social institution that reinforces the guided image of “the nation.”

Eurovision also provides an international forum in which nations can define their identity through the expression of local opinion about the cultural production of others, in an environment seemingly free of political or economic sanctioning; however, despite the autonomy given to the participating countries, the voting process tends to be influenced by cultural or historical alliances between nations (Clerides and Stengos 2006), which affects the voting public and jurists' aesthetic preferences. It is not only the country-centered voting process that provides an outlet for (inter)-national alignments. Sometimes the representative songs themselves can highlight a nation's positioning vis-à-vis other nations. Israeli-Yemenite singer Ofra Haza's international career was launched during the 1983 Eurovision when she was placed second with the song "Chai" (Alive), which became an international hit. That year Eurovision was hosted in Munich, Germany, where a decade earlier Israeli athletes were massacred at the Munich Olympiade. The song contains two lines that repeat: "Israel is alive" and "I am still alive." Bearing in mind that the newborn state of Israel became the immediate home of many holocaust survivors following World War II, the location and context in which the song was performed provided for a symbolic affirmation of the nation both in respect to the trajectory of Israel's founding, and to the perceived contemporary threats to its existence.

The importance of Eurovision in the construction of nationhood within the international arena can also be deduced from the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation's (PBC) 2007 application to the EBU for active membership and participation in the 2008 Eurovision, despite the fact that Palestine is not yet recognized as an independent nation-state. Cheun-Fung Wong quotes Fadia Daibes, the spokesperson for this campaign, who stated that PBC's purpose in aspiring to join Eurovision is to "change the perception of Palestinian identity and to present our rich culture . . . to put Palestine back on the map by showing that we have many stories to tell" (2009:280). Beyond the political struggle for Palestinian emancipation, the PBC is looking for international recognition of Palestinian nationhood through its assertion of a Palestinian cultural essence. Both Ofra Haza's song and the PBC's spokesperson's statement show how a national imaginary—the meanings and significations derived from cultural practices and products that enable a community to imagine itself a nation (Marcus and Myers 1995:10)—is forged through and with an eye and ear tuned to other nations. Haza's song establishes the vitality of Israeli citizenship through its affirmative performance on German soil, while the PBC seeks international recognition for the distinct cultural identity of Palestinians as part of the Palestinian nation-building project.

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But while the structure of the Eurovision process provides a means for participating countries to express and advance an imaginary that highlights national unity, Israel's 2009 ESC entry shows that in a fraught and highly charged domestic socio-political situation, it can also provide an opportunity for voices of dissent, and hence, contribute to the fragmentation of the imagined monolithic nation. In its specific historical moment, against the backdrop of the war on Gaza, Israel's entry became a symbolic battleground for contested and conflicted national imaginaries and interests. In their representation of Israel at Eurovision, the artists were advancing the idea of a pluralistic Israel that should and can include its Arabic-speaking minorities as equally represented within the Jewish state. Israeli state authorities were promoting the pluralistic symbolism to counter Israel's negative image in the larger world at a time when Israel faced much international criticism. Supporters of the Palestinian struggle, both in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, interpreted the collaboration as undermining the Palestinian struggle for national emancipation, and used the collaboration to keep the plight of the Gazans and the struggle for Palestinian self-determination alive in the public mind, in Israel and abroad. The diverse positions and discourses surrounding Israel's 2009 Eurovision entry, analyzed below, show how this popular song contest became implicated in the politics of inter-ethnic warfare during an especially charged and violent period as a site of contesting social constructions of ethnic and national affiliations.

### On the Politics of Popular Cultural Production

Steven Feld (1984) argues that the production and reception of music is an intersubjective process of reality construction. Through this process, music comes to generate contradictory meanings for historically situated actors, meanings that are revealed through discourse about music. If music is a site in which relationships between ethnicity and nation can be differentially configured and highlighted by the participating actors, it can also become a locus of struggles for legitimacy or dominance for different groups (Bohlman 2004; Gilroy 1987, 1993; Hall 1991; Lipsitz 1994; Regev and Seroussi 2004; Stokes 1992, 1994). As Martin Stokes suggests, what is constructed through music often involves notions of difference and social boundaries, as well as the organization of hierarchies of moral and political order. It therefore also provides a means for social actors to negotiate and transform the hierarchies of place, ethnicity, or nation inscribed by dominant ideologies.

In the context of Israel and Palestine, notions of "the popular" in music can apply to local versions of pop and rock genres, as well as to music associated with Palestinian resistance movement that circulates through

alternative, non-mediated channels; classic Israeli repertoire that coalesced into a hegemonic genre known as “Songs of the Land of Israel” (*Shirei Erets Israel*) in the first decades following the founding of the state and that musically, often derived its structure and modality from Eastern-European folk music; and the repertoire of famous Egyptian artists such as Umm Kulthum and Muhammad Abdul-Wahab who had become household names all over the Middle East during the golden years of the Egyptian music and film industry, but are today considered “classical” Arab artists. In this article I limit the discussion of popular music to internationally predominant mass-mediated genres of the past several decades such as pop and rock and their local adaptations. The process of adapting mass-mediated global popular music genres to local conceptions and languages tends to combine both local and cosmopolitan idioms, thus expanding the base of cultural materials from which local representations can be constructed (Regev and Seroussi 2004), and hence, also expanding the basis of interpretive reception to such products. Furthermore, their mediated circulation also facilitates the constitution of groups that identify with such representations or oppose them: as Nini and Awad’s collaboration became a site of struggles for legitimacy and contingent ideologies in both Palestinian and Israeli public spheres, the heightened media exposure facilitated the constitution of groups that either identified or disagreed with this representation. The role of this collaboration as constitutive of contradictory sentiments and affiliations was further complicated by the singers’ “belonging” to multiple spheres of interest in a highly fraught situation. While the two singers believed that their collaboration was forwarding coexistence, the public debate that surrounded it highlighted that, for others, this collaboration sanctioned the oppression of Palestinians aspiring to becoming an independent nation.

The lyrics of Israel’s 2009 Eurovision song, “There Must Be Another Way,” evoke hardship and pain, and in that sense, they diverge from the light topical fare often hosted by the ESC. Musically, however, “There Must Be Another Way” is rather typical of the pop balladry found in many Eurovision entries that often adhere to the dominant Anglo-American pop aesthetic and are devoid of the sonic indexing of ethnicity, place, or nation, that consolidate group identities and mobilize hegemonic struggles in many music genres.<sup>2</sup> The song’s arrangement is an up-tempo, danceable mix of drum machine, guitars, an electric keyboard, and miscellaneous “ethnic” percussion instruments such as the Middle Eastern *def* and Yemenite jerry-can drums. This “ethnic” percussion provides for visual touches of exotica in performance and allows a seductive marketing strategy that positions the musical representation as “authentic” (Taylor 1997), even though these percussion instruments are sublimated in the song’s overall texture.

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The political significance of Israel's 2009 entry is by and large located in the combined contexts of the singers' ethnically-mixed national representation during an armed conflict and high political tension in a hyper-mediated inter-national popular music event, rather than in sonic symbolism. And it is this representation, not the sonic imagery, that was the primary site of the discursive conflict during the 2009 Eurovision debates. The duo collaborated prior to this Eurovision song and encountered no criticism. It is the particular contexts of production and reception in which this song came to life in order to represent Israel at a time when it was waging war on Palestinians that greatly amplified interpretive tensions in social constructions of meaning regarding what kind of place and nation the collaboration was about: a democratic, multicultural Israel, or an Israel that provided a token representation to its minority only to leverage the violent oppression of the Palestinian people. These tensions manifested in the highly confrontational nature of the discourse, in which divergent meanings associated with the multi-lingual and bi-ethnic representation of Israel at the ESC were constructed as contested struggles for survival. The volatility of the debate surrounding the song shows how this interplay between popular expressive culture and politics also diffused the boundaries of what is often conceived of as independent to each of these domains (Massad 2005).

### The Song's Producers: A Vision of a Pluralistic, Multicultural Israel

While Israel had been participating at the ESC since 1973, this was the first occasion on which Israel included not only the embodied presence of its non-Jewish minority, but also her language, an Arab citizen singing in Arabic, to represent the nation on the Eurovision stage. This tri-lingual song representing the Jewish state challenges the primary signifier of Hebrew as the national language. It is especially important given that Jews in Palestine revived Hebrew (a language used for primarily for liturgical purposes until the late nineteenth century) as an important aspect of the project of nation-building (Kuzar 2001), a process which had its musical equivalent in rise of "Songs of the Land of Israel."

The inspiration for the duo's collaboration resulted from the shared vision, musical and political, of the two artists. Both are singer-songwriters who possess an international pop aesthetic, have collaborated intermittently in the past, and are deeply invested in the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>3</sup> Nini is a singer-songwriter of Jewish-Yemenite descent whose pop-folk style often includes elements of traditional Yemeni vocal styles and percussion. Nini has sold one million albums (Bronner 2009b), a high number for an artist from a country in which sales of 40,000 units constitute

a platinum album. Nini's sales record is a by-product of her performance career being more focused on international markets, especially Europe, where she is known as Noa, than on local markets (Bronner 2009b). She is also internationally known as a peace activist and a supporter of a two-state solution, and has been advocating the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza strip since the early 1990s. Her activism extends to showcasing multicultural representations as symbolic of the potentials of coexistence, including performances and recordings with many Arab artists such as the Lebanese singer Nabil Salameh and the Franco-Algerian raï artist Khaled. Her activist approach has rendered her a symbol of progressive Israeli culture in international circles, and she has often been invited to perform at events hosted by the United Nations and at other symbolic peace-building occasions in front of world leaders, including former US President Bill Clinton, Israeli President Shimon Peres, Pope John Paul II, and the Italian President Giorgio Napolitano. In addition, she has received numerous honors for her work from the United Nations, the Freemasons, and the president of Italy, among others. Nini is also known as a peace activist within Israel and often performs in events associated with the political left: in 1995, she sang at the peace rally in which Israel's prime-minister Yitschak Rabin was assassinated. Nini's popularity abroad and her association with peace-building initiatives are likely to have served as impetus for the Israeli Broadcasting Authorities' request that she represent Israel at Eurovision. While this choice preceded Israel's attack on Gaza, Nini's insistence on collaborating with Awad at a time when Israel was bound to face much international criticism and needed to project a benign, peace-seeking image provided Israel with a tailor-made opportunity to promote such an image.

In recent years Mira Awad has made a name for herself as an actress in Israeli theater and television. Awad began her musical career at the age of sixteen as a lead singer in an Arabic rock group called *Semana*; and, like Nini, she graduated from the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, Israel's only educational institution teaching modern-day jazz, R&B, rock, and pop. Prior to her collaboration with Nini, she recorded one album (*Bahlawan*, or "Acrobat"), an acoustic singer-songwriter project in Arabic and English. No Israeli record label wanted to take on the risk of promoting this album until Awad received the high levels of media exposure that came with her association with Nini (Kohavi 2009a).

Awad was born to a Christian Arab-Israeli father from the Ramah village in the Galilee and a Bulgarian mother. In interviews, Awad sometimes identifies herself as an "Israeli-Arab" and sometimes as "Palestinian-by-ethnicity and Israeli-by-citizenship" (Bronner 2009b). Awad's complicated set of

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identifications is related to the fact that, in Israel, ethnicity (with “Jewish” signifying ethnicity rather than religion in a Jewish-Arab binary) determines a differential access to full rights and responsibilities of citizenship, with full rights and responsibilities enjoyed exclusively by Jews. While Jewish Israelis are usually referred to as (un-hyphenated) Israelis, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are often referred to as Israeli-Arabs or simply Arabs, highlighting their minoritized status. By calling herself Palestinian, Awad is also identifying with the Palestinians who reside in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank and Gaza), are not Israeli citizens, and aspire for a separate nation-state.<sup>4</sup> This fraught set of identifications is shared by other Israeli-Palestinians who are, to different extents, integrated into the Israeli polity. Their identification with the Palestinian struggle for emancipation is greatly complicated by their own struggle as citizens aspiring to equal rights within the Jewish state (Amara and Schnell 2004; Blithe 2003; Schnell 1994; Smooha 1999).<sup>5</sup>

This is even truer for twice-minoritized Christian Arabs. Christians comprise approximately ten percent of the Arab population in Israel, which in turn comprises twenty percent of the total population. According to Ilan Shdema (2009), the past several decades have been characterized by increasing differentiation in the socio-political identifications of Muslim and Christian Arabs in Israel. Shdema argues that this has resulted from an increased Palestinian identification with Islam as a mobilizing force for national liberation, as evidenced by the Hamas victory in the 2005 elections in Gaza and the emergence of Islamist movements in Israel, and a decreased affiliation with the Communist Party. In Israel’s early years, Christian Arabs filled the gap created by the exodus of the traditionally Muslim Palestinian Arab leadership, and Christians became a salient part of Israel’s Arab political leadership, accounting for about fifty percent of Arab Knesset members that were particularly active in the Communist Party. In the 1990s, Meretz, a left-wing Zionist party included in the Rabin-Peres coalition government, drew many Christian Arabs, resulting in a decline of the Communist Party’s non-religious power-base for the Arab minority in Israel and in an improvement in the position of the Christian urban and middle class in particular (Tsimhoni 2001). Roda Kannaneh (2003) also cites the divisive policies of the Israeli state, which consciously creates differentiation between its Bedouin, Druze, Christian, and Muslim Palestinian minorities so that they don’t coalesce into a unified Arab front, as a prominent factor in the more polarized current identifications of Muslim and Christian Arab citizens of Israel. In addition, the Christian-Arab community in Israel enjoys a higher socio-economic status than do Muslim-Arabs (Sa’ar 2003), and being largely



urbanized, often in mixed Jewish-Arab cities such as Haifa, also enjoy a higher degree of amalgamation into secular Israeli society than do Muslims (Tsimhoni 2001).

This is especially evident in the culture industry. According to Galit Dardashti (2009), the Israeli-Palestinian musicians most prominent on the Israeli music scene are Christians. Dardashti claims that this is due to Islam's ambivalent view of music, in contrast to the encouragement of musical activities in Palestinian churches, and also due to the fact that Christian Arab-Israelis enjoy a higher socio-economic status than Muslims, have fewer children on average, and can expend more resources on music education. In many ways, Awad's integration into the Israeli cultural establishment as both singer and actress is related to the socio-economic standing of her family and her educational trajectory. She spent several years as a child within the Israeli Hebrew-speaking secular education system (her father worked as a physician in Karmiel, a Jewish town), when the majority of Palestinian Israelis attend Arabic speaking schools within their communities; she studied at Rimon, and presently, she lives in Tel-Aviv, the hub of Jewish-Israeli cultural production, where she has participated in numerous theater and television productions. In an interview with a *Ma'ariv* reporter, Awad answered a journalist who asked her about the difference between her generation and previous generations of Israeli Palestinians active in the culture industry with the following words:

We are the generation that can stop apologizing [for being Arabs]. Yes, it's a new generation that is completely from here. I was born in this country. My first language is Bulgarian, the second Hebrew, Arabic came only afterwards. There is no more than this. I am here and the Hebrew language surrounds me. I act in Hebrew theater and on television, and people around me speak Hebrew. So of course most of the time I speak Hebrew. (Nuriel 2007)<sup>6</sup>

And in another Interview with *Ma'ariv*, Awad commented on the fact that during the period she studied at Haifa University, sometimes her Arab friends did not feel comfortable with the fact that she also had Jewish friends:

One can think that if I speak with Jews, I will lose my identity. What does one thing have to do with the other? I will never forget, and it doesn't matter who will be my friends, that I am my father's daughter, whom the Israeli army expelled from his home in 1948. They accused me for trying to please "the enemy." What was I doing? Being sincere and human? You know what? I want to assimilate! (Avtamovitz 2009)

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Awad's statement points to the conflict experienced by Israeli Palestinians, who are members of a disenfranchised minority within Israel while they participate in the economy and cultural life of secular Israel. In Awad's case, her self-labeling and role in representing Israel at Eurovision indicates the primacy of citizenship over ethnicity, despite their inherent conflicts and contradictions.

Given the two singers' singer-songwriter aesthetic, five years of collaborative history, political views, and Nini's activism in Israel and abroad, it is understandable that when Nini was selected as the representative for Eurovision by the Israel Broadcasting Authority, she promptly predicated her consent on her pairing with Awad. Nini claims that she has been asked to represent Israel at Eurovision several times before, but had never agreed because she wanted to be recognized for her artistry as a quality singer-songwriter. But at a time when other media opportunities had shrunk and Eurovision could reach millions, this was an opportune platform to send a message for peace; hence, collaborating with Awad was the natural choice for her (Avramovitz 2009). And as Nini explained during an interview with an *OpEdNews* reporter in May 2009, this representation was a conscious move made by the two singers who intended to promote both a message for peace and a pluralistic, muticulturalist Israel:

Mira and I are very proud to be the first Arab-Jewish Israeli duo to go to Eurovision. We are also proud that upon our demand, the internal laws were changed and Arabic was allowed to be sung as a formal language representing Israel in the ESC. Our duo sheds light on the complexity of our situation here in the Middle East. Israel has a very large minority, almost 20 percent, of Palestinians, Christian (like Mira) and Muslim, who are Israeli citizens. This sector is still fighting for full integration into Israeli society. This is separate from the Palestinians living in the occupied territories, who are fighting for their independence and the establishment of the state of Palestine. (Paz 2009)

In a separate interview with *The Guardian* (McCarthy 2009a), Awad corroborated Nini's sentiments regarding the importance of a national imaginary constructed by pluralistic inclusivity as a means of struggling against the disenfranchisement of Israeli-Arabs within Israeli society. "I am a minority in the Israeli state," she said, "therefore it is my country now and forever. I believe I have to strive for my place in it and fight for an equal place in it . . ." (McCarthy 2009a). The two singers remained firm in their decision to represent Israel at Eurovision, despite intense criticism of their partnership fueled by the war on Gaza. While both singers acknowledged that the public exposure and professional opportunities Eurovision might

provide were important for their individual careers, they insisted that the more important factor in their decision to perform together at the ESC was the opportunity to project the vision of an integrated Israel from an international stage.

### **The Cultural Policy of the Israeli Broadcasting System and the Nini-Awad Collaboration**

The duo's collaboration had the practical effect of changing the exclusionary norms and practices of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which segregates Arabic language programming into separate channels on both television and radio, despite the obvious presence of Arabic music and cultural idioms in mainstream Israeli expressive culture in the past couple of decades. The IBA broadcasts twenty hours per week of Arabic programming on its Arabic language television network, and eighteen hours per day on its Arabic shortwave radio channel "The Voice of Israel in Arabic," which is not music centered, but broadcasts mostly talk shows. On its primary channels, Israeli national television ensures that most of its schedule—seventy percent on average—consists of locally produced Hebrew-language broadcasts. The rest of the programming typically consists of English-speaking imported programming, including soap operas, detective series, and feature films. A similar picture characterizes government-owned radio's music-centered channels. Arabic is rarely heard on national Israeli radio channels outside of the specialized "Voice of Israel in Arabic" (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). While there are currently several pirate Arabic radio stations operating in Israel, the lack of institutionalized support for Arabic music leaves little opportunity for the promotion of local Palestinian-Israeli musical content.

Israeli sociologist and popular music scholar Motti Regev (1995) argues that local Israeli culture is a field of unequal power relations in which the construction and definition of what is recognized as authentic national culture is determined by the dominant agents' invention of this tradition (Bourdieu 1993). In Israel the leading cultural organizations—including the IBA's five publicly-owned radio stations, its "Voice of Israel" television station, as well as numerous privately owned broadcasting channels—assume a predominantly Western-inclined Hebrew speaking audience and broadcast a variety of imported programming from the West, with local television productions in Hebrew, and local musical content comprised primarily of pop-rock in Hebrew. According to Regev, this relegates Arabic music to the status of a "present-absentee,"<sup>27</sup> a process of rendering invisible those who

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do not fit in the dominant power's national narrative. This process occurs despite the presence of a large Arabic speaking minority, the fact that approximately half the Jewish population in Israel originate in Arab countries and share an affinity for Arabic music, and the obvious presence of Arabic musical elements in many Jewish-Israeli music genres from *muzika mizrahit* (oriental pop) to Israeli rock.

The lack of airtime for Arabic music on Israeli broadcasting channels has discouraged the larger local record labels (which also act as Israeli subsidiaries to the global majors, and their products typically receive the most airtime on radio and television) from releasing locally-based Arabic language and music albums into the market. Small independent music labels tend to specialize either in *muzika mizrahit* or in genres with small market shares such as “traditional” ethnic musics or trance, but there are none dedicated to Arabic music. As alternative promotional avenues to the media and music industry are rare in Israel, this has meant that Arabic music has been relegated to a marginal place in the Israeli cultural fabric.<sup>8</sup> This marginalization, along with the fact that, as Israeli citizens, Palestinian-Israeli musicians are often unwelcome in Arabic-speaking countries in the region (Dardashti 2009), denies Israeli-Palestinians the opportunity to commercially produce original music for the local market and to compete with Arabic music imports promoted on the airwaves of neighboring countries (Regev 1995).

In this context, it is easy to understand how, for Nini, the release of the duo's tri-lingual song into local broadcast media, with the support of the IBA, marked an important milestone toward the public acceptance of Arabic cultural products in Israel. Awad stated that she initially self-released her album *Bahlawan* because record labels were not interested in releasing it, claiming that “it was not marketable” (Kohavi 2009a). Following Eurovision, together with the release of the duo's full-length album in June 2009, Awad's album was re-released by one of Israel's larger record labels, Helicon, in June 2009. Awad claimed that she did not expect it to receive much airplay, and that one of the government radio stations (*Reshet Gimme!l*—the IBA's pop station) refused to play the single because of a policy that stipulates fifty percent Hebrew broadcasting. While airplay rates for *Bahlawan* are impossible to obtain, the album sold over 10,000 units by February 2010 (Biluy Plus 2009), a testimony to the public's receptivity to the project. Awad also received the “Singer of the Year” (2009) award from the “Voice of Israel in Arabic” station (Naim 2010). It remains to be seen whether, despite the setbacks, the Nini-Awad collaboration has opened a space for other Palestinian artists within the Israeli culture industry.

While Nini highlighted the fact that the duo's song resulted in the change of cultural policy guidelines of the IBA, the fact that the song was sung in Hebrew, Arabic, and English at the ESC stirred no responses of approval or disapproval in the Israeli media. I attribute this non-chalant acceptance of tri-lingual national representation and the inclusion of Arabic as a national signifier to a combination of factors: the 1990s peace process; the growing power-base of of *Mizrahi*-Jews (Jews that originated in predominantly Islamic countries) in the Knesset since the late 1970s, along with their increased presence in the cultural media landscape after decades of marginalization; and the growing interest in world music over the past couple of decades (Horowitz 1999 and 2005, Perelson 1998). All these factors have contributed to a growing acceptance of Arabic cultural elements in popular culture as well as to the de-centering of Hebrew from its status as the sole icon of appropriate Israeli "authenticity."

According to Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi (2004:19–20) the de-centering of *ivriut*, or Hebrewism (reflected in both use of language and musical genres), as the universe of meanings that separates Israelis from others, which predominated in the first decades following the founding of the State of Israel, was the result of the effects of globalization—the intensified dissemination of products and materials of the international culture industry. The "globalized Israeliness" that has emerged in recent decades was reflected in music first through the emergence of local rock and pop groups who listened to and participated in the Western popular music developments of the 1960s and 1970s, initially viewed as a radical departure from appropriate Israeliness. A further divergence from the Hebrewism constructed by the largely Eastern-European Zionist founders occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, when second and third generation Mizrahi Israelis (most of the Jewish immigration from Islamic countries occurred in the 1950s) rejected the hegemonic paradigm constructed by Eastern-European based Zionism. In music, they highlighted their ethnicity by creating a hybrid popular musical genre called *musika mizrahit*, a fusion of rock and pop with oriental melismatic vocal styles and instruments such as the *darbukka* drum and the *oud*. Through the 1980s *muzika mizrahit* was marginalized from the mainstream culture industry, though it flourished through the circulation of cassettes, mostly in open-air markets and bazaars (Horowitz 1999). In the 1990s there was a growing presence of Mizrahi culture in the Israeli mainstream culture industry, as well as a larger Mizrahi political power base in the Knesset. These developments, along with the peace process that took place in the 1990s, resulted in Arabic culture and language also gaining some acceptance in the mainstream Israeli imagina-

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tion (Horowitz 2005). As Galit Dardashti has noted, “The signing of the Oslo Accords was a watershed event for the receptivity of Israelis to Arab culture” (2009: 64). This acceptance was exemplified by a higher acceptance of *muzika mizrahit*, a growing interest in classical Arabic music and a new audience for numerous collaborative projects of *musika etnit* (ethnic music), that incorporated both Jewish and Palestinian Israelis during the 1990s (Brinner 2009).<sup>9</sup> *Musika etnit* represents a form of Israeli oriental music that is distinguished from *muzika mizrahit* in that it calls upon a variety of classical Eastern traditions often mixed with classical music and/or jazz rather than rock or pop, its practitioners and listeners align themselves with a world music scene (Brinner 2009, Dardashti 2001), and it is marketed as world music abroad.

This growing interest of Israelis in world music and in *muzika etnit* over the past couple of decades, coupled with recent immigration of Jews from the territories of the former Soviet Union, resulted in locally-formed ensembles that play repertoire in the styles and languages of their countries of origin—from Tajikistan to the Caucasus—as part of the Israeli cultural fabric. In other words, elements of popular culture currently being incorporated into the Israeli mainstream come not only from the West, but from all of Israel’s diasporic and local sources.<sup>10</sup> While such representations of Israel’s diverse ethnicities are not new, their direct impact on popular culture had previously been marginal, as in the days of the predominant Hebrewism paradigm they were often showcased as colorful relics of a cultural past that had been cast-off in favor of integration into Israeli society. As Ben Brinner (2009) suggests, in Zionist ideology Diaspora represented the weak, oppressed Jew, and new Israelis were supposed to supplant the culture linked with it as well, in the process of assimilation. The cultural model into which all immigrants were to assimilate into was constructed by the Western-inclined Ashkenazy (Occidental) founding fathers.

In contrast, today a younger generation of Israelis is seeking to incorporate cultural “roots” into contemporary idioms. These trends have resulted in the proliferation of new styles and genres alongside Anglo-American imports and local Hebrew variations of rock and pop. In live performances especially, languages other than Hebrew and English are presently not an anomaly. Today Israeli fans can attend hip-hop shows performed in Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, and English (Ungerleider 2006). The commercially successful Idan Reichel Project (2002) merged Ethiopian music and the Amharic language with Hebrew lyrics and electronica (and was marketed abroad as world music). Dana International, the transgendered dance artist and 1998 winner of Eurovision, sings in Hebrew and Arabic, and Israel’s 2007 ESC entry by the rock band Teapacks (“Push the Button”), featured lyrics in Hebrew,

French, and English. All these global-local permutations of styles, genres and languages are a testament to the continual development of what Regev and Seroussi termed “globalized Israeliness.” Hence, despite the increased polarization between Israelis and Palestinians in the decade following the peace process, the pervasive presence of such elements in popular Israeli culture has probably rendered the IBA’s Hebrew-centered guidelines and cultural policy highly outdated in relationship to what can be accepted as “authentically” Israeli, linguistically and musically, in the contemporary mainstream imagination. This marks a tremendous shift from previous decades; it is hard to imagine such an attitude regarding the appropriate linguistic representation of Israel at the ESC in the 1970s or 1980s.

### The Discourse Surrounding Israel’s 2009 ESC Entry: “Again We Have a Political Eurovision”<sup>11</sup>

Nini and Awad were positioning themselves internationally as pop icons bearing a message of peace and embodying a multicultural representation of the nation. On the other hand, Palestinian artists and intellectuals from both sides of the border as well as left-leaning Jewish-Israeli artists and peace activists viewed the duo’s representation of Israel at the ESC as a sanctioning of the violence Israel has launched on Gaza, and a contribution to Israeli propaganda (Rizzo 2009). These individuals perceived the fact that the duo was officially chosen as Israel’s ESC representatives a day after Israel launched its war on Gaza as a cynical move on behalf of the state, in which the role of the two singers, and especially Awad’s, was that of accomplices to the violence. The day following the nomination, they sent an open letter to Awad:

The Israeli government is sending the two of you to Moscow as part of its propaganda machine that is trying to create the appearance of Jewish-Arab co-existence under which it carries the daily massacre of Palestinian civilians . . . Please, Mira, for the future of Gaza and for the future of every child in this land—Arabs and Jews—don’t collaborate with the killing machine. (Yudilevitch 2009b; Kohavi 2009b)

The highly emotional tone of the letter, which positions a songstress as the Israeli government’s tool of propaganda and one that collaborates with the “killing machine,” demonstrates how the socio-political context in which this specific collaboration came into being invested it with meanings literally construed as matters of life and death. The request from Awad not to collaborate with the Israeli government is especially charged, as “collaborator” is a label often used for Palestinian informants who work in the service of Israeli security agents against their own people. The letter further added

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that every contribution to the false image built by the Israeli state “allows the Israeli army to use another 10 tons of explosives, another phosphorous bomb.”

This plea, directed to Awad, outlines the view that Israeli-Arabs who seek to be absorbed into and prominently represented in the Israeli national mainstream in effect become the instruments of oppression of their own people. This group of individuals was contesting and reconstructing the boundaries of ethnicity, nation, and power hierarchies advanced by the two singers. Their discursive move conflates the real violence of armed conflict with the symbolic violence enacted through musical representation of the dominant power. It shows how in extreme conflict situations, violence can become a trope in the negotiation of identity politics through which all subjective experience is filtered.

The *Ha'aretz* newspaper reported that the Israeli Broadcasting Authorities responded with the statement that Eurovision is a cultural event “aimed at creating musical dialogue between the various countries that take part in it,” and that the selection of Nini and Awad was a decision based on the professionalism of the two artists “that also expresses the aspiration for coexistence, which transcends politics” (Kohavi 2009b). This response dislodges the committee’s decision from the realm of politics, as it positions Eurovision as a cultural, rather than political event, and highlights the two artists’ professionalism—in other words, their artistic capabilities, rather than their message—as the reason for the choices made. At the same time, the response also explicitly highlights the political weight of the message for coexistence embodied by the duo in its decision-making. As Simon Frith (1996) has pointed out, within discourse about music, aesthetics, or what *sounds* good, is often conflated with ethics: the determination of what *is* good about music and why. This conflation of ethics and aesthetics is also evident in Israel’s president Shimon Peres’s statement from March 2009, following the selection of the representative song via a telethon, in which he expressed his admiration of the duo “for what they are doing for their people and the sake of peace” (Reuters News Agency 2009).

The ethical investment in the collaboration was attached not only to the value of coexistence, but also to official public policy that seeks to legitimize Israel as a superior moral entity in the region. This decision is congruent with Israel’s attempts to fashion a democratic self-image, and to position Israel’s democratic heritage as morally superior to neighboring Arab countries in the eyes of the Western world. Israel’s democratic heritage is often used by Israeli officials as evidence of its moral superiority to neighboring Arab countries (see for example, Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu interview with CBC Canada, May 30, 2010).<sup>12</sup> Participation in the ESC has always been



connected with Israel's wish to establish cultural alliances that cultivate its national imaginary in association with the Europeanized West, rather than with the Orient in which it is located. Israel joined the ESC in 1973 in the midst of the Cold War, when Eurovision consisted of Western European entries, with the exception of Yugoslavia (Bohlman 2004).<sup>13</sup> Initially conceived in the 1950s as a means of bringing together war-torn Europe through a light entertainment program, the EBU launched Eurovision in 1956, with seven participating countries, all located in Western Europe. Following the dismantling of the Soviet Union many Central and Eastern European countries joined the ESC, but even today, there are very few participating non-European countries in the ESC. Sending an ethnically-mixed duo of singers to the ESC provided an opportunity for Israel to leverage an image of itself as a tolerant democracy deserving of inclusion first among progressive, Westernized nations and more broadly, with the European Union.<sup>14</sup>

The selection of the duo as Israel's ESC representatives is also congruent with Israel's policy of using cultural exports to mitigate Israel's negative image abroad. In the months that followed the war on Gaza, cultural exports were further mobilized to diffuse the international isolation Israel felt after the war ended. Arye Mekel, Israel's Foreign Ministry's deputy director general for cultural affairs, stated in an interview with the *New York Times* in March 2009 that Israel has allotted an additional two million US dollars for international cultural campaigns in the coming fiscal year, adding: "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibits. This way you show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war" (Bronner 2009a). In December 2009 right-wing Knesset member Alex Miller of the Yisrael Beytenu party suggested that the Knesset should hold a special parliamentary session to discuss how Israel can better prepare for the ESC by choosing the performers and the song as well as by launching a public relations campaign, stating that "a good performance together with good public relations will serve Israel's artists, but could also be a great opportunity to boost the tourist industry" (Lis 2009). As these statements show, the Israeli state invests in cultural exports as a means of improving its damaged international image, as well as gaining political and economic capital, utilizing culture as a diplomatic tool to divert international attention from Israel's aggressions. So while Nini and Awad's collaboration was intended to be a message for peace and coexistence, it was also used as a showcase for a democratic, multicultural façade.

While Awad was the main target of the first round of public criticism of the duo's collaboration, Nini was a primary target for the second. The duo was scheduled to perform at a fundraising concert for Gazans injured in the war, which was held in Tel Aviv on January 23, 2009. Two weeks prior

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to the benefit, during the last week of the war, Nini published an open letter to Palestinians in Gaza,<sup>15</sup> calling on them to “join hands” in eradicating fanaticism. In the letter she showed compassion for their cause and culture, but also stated the following:

But, now, today, I know that deep in your hearts YOU WISH for the demise of this beast called Hamas who has terrorized and murdered you, who has turned Gaza into a trash heap of poverty, disease and misery. Who in the name of “Allah” has sacrificed you on the bloody altar of pride and greed . . .

I can only wish for you that Israel will do the job we all know needs to be done, and finally RID YOU of this cancer, this virus, this monster called fanaticism, today, called Hamas. And that these killers will find what little compassion may still exist in their hearts and STOP using you and your children as human shields for their cowardice and crimes. (Nini 2009b, emphasis in original)<sup>16</sup>

Nini’s letter enraged the same group that objected to the duo’s performance at the ESC, and many Arab and Jewish Israelis in the entertainment world urged her to take her words back in a petition signed by Jewish Israeli film director Udi Aloni along with many other leftist Jewish-Israelis and Palestinian-Israelis active in the Israeli culture industry. The petition stated that without a public retraction of her statement, her participation in the benefit concert for Gazan victims would taint the event. Addressed to the performance’s organizers, the petition stated: “Nini’s performance will strengthen the hypocritical position of Israel’s leaders, that express their regret over children who were killed ‘by accident’ and then offer to help rebuild Gaza” (Yudilevitch 2009b). The event’s organizers told Nini the event was centered on the question of accountability for the State of Israel’s actions in Gaza, and wanted to be sure the singer identified with this cause. Following this denunciation, and the event organizers’ request from Nini to accommodate the petitioners request, Nini and Awad cancelled their participation in the event. In response to the cancellation, Juliano Mer-Khamis, an Arab-Israeli actor and film director<sup>17</sup> and one of the petition’s authors, wrote the following in a letter published in both Palestinian and Israeli newspapers and websites:

There is nothing more patronizing, arrogant or presumptuous than to tell people who have freely elected one political movement or another, that it is a cancer. One can’t help but be disgusted by people who support Operation Cast Lead and then buy blankets for the handicapped children that remain alive. You can’t kill the Gazans and cry over them too. (Yudilevitch 2009b)

As with the letter that asked Awad to withdraw from the ESC, the visceral language of this statement shows that in the context of violent conflict, a musical performance can become a context in which for many, what is being negotiated is absolute questions of life and death. For Mer-Khamis, Nini's stance in her letter and subsequent volunteering to perform at the Gaza benefit was a hypocritical move that amounted to "killing" and then "crying over it." The last line in this statement also confronts the prevalent trope of "shooting and crying" employed in the Israeli media. This trope encapsulates the struggle of the Israeli soldier who is torn between the ethical duty of protecting his country and the unethical practice of harming a civilian population, including women and children, as part of his wartime duties. The trope has roots in Israeli literature harkening back to stories by writers such as S. Izhar that portrayed the moral ambivalence of soldiers regarding the Palestinians' expulsion in 1948. However, this trope has been used most extensively in the Israeli media since the eruption of the 1987 *intifada*, as the obvious imbalance of power between Israeli soldiers carrying machine guns and backed by armored vehicles and Palestinian children throwing rocks became a loaded visual image that characterized the Israeli occupation. "Shooting and crying" emphasizes the ethical humanity of the Israel Defense Forces soldiers as they fight against a civilian population.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Mer-Khamis, in his letter, legitimizes Hamas as a democratically-elected government, thus turning around Israel's claim to being the sole democracy in the region. His discourse posits a national imaginary of Israel as an oppressive tyrant, and of the Gazans' as that of an oppressed democracy.

While the duo cancelled their appearance at the Gaza benefit, they remained committed to the ESC performance. Both singers claimed that they understood the emotions that their collaboration had evoked in the context of the violence, but as Nini said during an interview with a reporter from *The Guardian*, millions would be watching the duo on stage and this was their opportunity to send a message of peace (McCarthy 2009b). No Arab-Israelis publicly supported Awad's decision. The silence was noticed by Jewish-Israeli journalists who supported the duo. When the duo released their joint album in June, David Forman, a *Jerusalem-Post* columnist voiced the following opinion in an article titled "Counterpoint: Every Second Offers Another Chance:"<sup>19</sup>

Is it just possible that joint artistic ventures of Arabs and Jews might positively serve Arab interests? After all, there is an image out there that Arabs, especially Muslims, are all terrorists, strapping suicide belts onto their bodies or killing each other with impunity as is the case in Iraq (and Gaza) or crashing planes into the Twin Towers. Might one consider that Awad is helping to alter the picture of those Islamic fundamentalists who

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decapitated journalist Daniel Pearl? Why must every Arab-Jewish enterprise be portrayed by a significant majority within the Arab community as propaganda? One would think—or at least, hope—that those who try to foster reconciliation would be encouraged. (Forman 2009)

It is obvious from this description that the author feels there are few moderate, or at least non-fundamentalist, Arabs (especially Muslims): the images of Arabs “strapping suicide belts,” “crashing planes,” and decapitating a journalist are not only “out there,” as he points out, but very much alive and resonating in his own writing. In this the author echoes the sentiments of many among the Israeli leadership, who feel that there is no political leadership on the Palestinian side that is moderate enough to constitute a reasonable partnership in a dialogue towards peace. So in setting Awad as an exception to the rule among Palestinians, Forman implicitly advances the view that the majority of (Muslim) Palestinians are fanatics with whom no dialogue can be conducted.

The author also pointed out that while in Israel there are hundreds of NGOs working to promote human rights and civil liberties, there are few such organizations in the Arab world, and that the few Arab NGOs that there are criticize Israel government policies and infringements on human rights, but refrain from self-reflection. Forman further stated that “. . . what is truly tragic is that Arab human rights NGOs are always willing to join with Israeli human rights NGOs to uncover civil liberties abuses that Israelis commit, but are rarely willing to partner with the Mira Awads of the Arab world who try to foster understanding between Arabs and Jews” (Forman 2009). What this commentary establishes is further implicit justification for an entrenched, hard-line position on the Israeli side: if only Israelis are capable of admitting to and addressing wrongs in their society, how could a space be created for dialogue with the other side?

What Forman is not looking at, however, is what he accuses Arab NGOs of doing: reflecting on the side in whose name he speaks. He is glossing over the fact that Israel controls the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and that the NGOs that operate there are operating under severe constraints determined by the conditions of the occupation. While it is true that in most of the neighboring Arab countries, NGOs operate locally under the constraints of non-democratic regimes, Israel’s perceived tolerance does not extend to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where Israel’s heavy handedness in handling dissent amounted to several decades of military rule and violent suppressions of the 1987 and 2000 intifada: it is discriminatory policies within Israel and human rights infringements in the occupied territories that necessitate the work of Israeli human rights NGOs. Additionally, while Israel does practice “open politics” within its borders, Forman does not take

into account that openness can sometimes be the privilege of the powerful. What lies behind the author's applaud for the collaboration and especially for Awad is the same national imaginary cultivated by the state apparatus that positions Israel's moral superiority over its neighbors as a democratic and pluralistic state tolerant of contesting voices from within. The author does not take into account in this imaginary the contradictions inherent in the projection of the moral superiority of those in power, that at the same time also expects the "immoral" subaltern to address the dominant power on grounds that the dominant prescribes.

### International Resonance

The 2009 Eurovision was held between May 12 and May 16 in Moscow with forty-two participating countries. The finals, which were broadcast on May 16, included twenty-five countries: the host country, France, Germany, Spain and the UK (which are considered the "Big Four" in the EBU and are pre-qualified), along with twenty countries selected over two semi-finals. The duo was placed sixteenth in the finals, and shortly after, they released a full-length album titled *There Must Be Another Way*. But, more importantly, international profiling of the debates within Israel, the music, and performances of the two artists abroad all provided reason and opportunity for international actors to join the symbolic battleground. The international circulation of Nini's letter to the Gazans in January, and the reactions to it within Israel, led the blog Irish-for-Palestine to call on "all Europeans who support Palestine" to give Israel no points at the ESC for its "disgusting propaganda" prior to the contest.<sup>20</sup> Following Eurovision, at a joint performance of Nini and Awad at the *Notte de Taranta* festival in Melpignano, Italy (where Nini is an honorary citizen) in August 2009, protestors in the audience held up a sign that read "Noa and Mira, accomplices in the killing machine. Israel=Nazis" (Nini 2009a). The Palestinian Solidarity Movement in Spain also held a boycott campaign against Nini. During her September 2009 performance at the Diada, a city park in Barcelona, at a festival celebrating Catalonia's national culture day, protestors whistled and booed, waved Palestinian flags and scarves, and held up signs reading "Boycott Israel," while her local fans applauded her (Expatica 2009).<sup>21</sup> Such reactions demonstrate the ways in which the local debate in Israel/Palestine regarding the duo's collaboration became a globalized issue animated by pro-Palestine movements.

There was also support for the duo in the international arena. Nini claims that the duo has received enthusiastic e-mails from fans in Lebanon, Syria, and Qatar, among other places (Paz 2009). Support also came from journalists, bloggers, and notably, from Sergio Blasi, the mayor of Melpignano

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(where the *Notte de Tarranta* festival is held), and from former Beatle Paul McCartney. While on tour in Israel the previous year, McCartney joined OneVoice, a grassroots NGO of Palestinians and Israelis from both sides of the border that “aims to amplify the voice of Israeli and Palestinian moderates” (OneVoice 2009). Both Nini and Awad joined the organization as board members prior to McCartney becoming a member. McCartney wrote a letter to President Obama to make him aware of the organization, which was published on the organization’s website and quoted in various press articles. The letter included a line stating that “. . . the symbolism of two people from both sides coming together to spread their message of peace via music is exciting and inspiring for me. I hope President Obama looks into this organisation and feels that OneVoice could be part of a peaceful solution” (Pineda 2009).<sup>22</sup> The letter was mentioned on CNN on the day of the contest, providing the duo much comfort in the midst of the controversy surrounding their collaboration. When the duo released their joint album in June 2009, they included a cover of the Beatles song “We Can Work It Out” on the album.

As internationally-based liberation movements, music celebrities, foreign journalists, and perhaps even presidents join the debate, the deployment of music to construct national imaginaries is no longer limited to the groups that live within the boundaries of such imaginaries. Being interpreted through the conceptual prism of actors distant from the scene, the international discourse regarding the meanings of Nini and Awad’s collaboration adds further layers to the hierarchies of moral and political order (Stokes 1994) shaped by local actors. The circulation of such imaginaries in the media shapes contemporary imaginaries of Israel, Palestine, and the contesting ethnic and national affiliations constituted by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both in Israel and abroad. In this way, the struggles of the local come to be negotiated by the global.

## Conclusion

The ESC provided an arena surrounding which symbolic warfare, using the seemingly benign exchange of glitz and pop tunes, paralleled the actual war, in which competing national imaginaries were fought for with flesh and blood. The reported number of casualties during the war on Gaza was over 1,300 on the Palestinian side and thirteen on the Israeli side (BBC News 2009), numbers that highlight the tremendous power discrepancies between the State and the stateless in the region. But the mediated, discursive struggle surrounding the collaboration of a Jewish-Arab duo in their representation

of Israel at the 2009 Eurovision suggests that the role of expressive culture in conflict situations is both reflective and constitutive of national imaginaries constructed through and by such conflicts. It is in both political and cultural arenas that meanings given to place, ethnicity, and nation are socially and experientially constructed.

*Notes*

1. Some countries that do not have the technical capacity to hold telethons still rely on a panel of jurists to determine the voting; other countries rely solely on the telethon with a panel of jurists used only as backup in case of technical difficulties (Haan, Dijkstra and Dijkstra 2005). In Israel, experts from the Israeli Broadcasting Authorities select the artist. Both the representative song and the votes for other countries' songs are selected through a combination of the public and the jurists' votes.

2. Co-authored by Nini, Awad, and Gil Dor—who has been Nini's musical collaborator in the past fifteen years—the song's verses alternate between Hebrew and Arabic. Each singer addresses the other as family, as sisters who are walking a long, difficult road, a journey accompanied by pain and tears, but doing so hand in hand. The refrain is in English: "And when I cry, I cry for both of us / My pain has no name / And when I cry, I cry / To the merciless sky and say / There must be another way." The last line of the refrain repeats in unison, four times each time the refrain is sung, its message taking on an anthemic quality.

3. In addition to singing in peace rallies, Nini maintains a blog in which she frequently includes political commentary. Awad has in the past supported Hadash, Israel's Communist Party, which also supports Israel's withdrawal from all the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the recognition of Palestinian Israelis as a national minority within Israel's borders.

4. Beyond the issues of citizenship, labels commonly used in every-day discourse that distinguish ethnicity, nationality and religion in Israel, such as Palestinian, Israeli-Palestinian, Arab, Israeli-Arab, Israeli (usually connoting Israeli-Jew) or Yemenite, are highly complicated in their conflation of ethnic, national, regional, and religious significations (Brinner 2004). For example, while Palestinian-Israeli may be self-negating in the context of the conflict, Iraqi (-Jew) indicates place of origin and associated ethnicity and may be indicative of cultural heritage, but not present citizenship nor religious practice. As there is no current consensus on appropriate terminology, in this paper I use the labels preferred by the subjects or, in the absence of such information, the descriptive labeling by which they are characterized in media discourse, as well as the terminology (often inconsistent) relating to the subject matter in relevant academic publications.

5. According to Sami Smootha (1999), Arab citizens in Israel who have retained citizenship since 1948 have been undergoing a dual process of Israelization and Palestinianization. Smootha maintains that the majority of this group does not wish to assimilate into the Jewish majority, and this majority does not want to assimilate them. Hence, many institutions such as the school systems are separate, and Israeli-Arab children attend Arabic speaking schools. Separated from the Palestinian community since 1948, the West Bank and the Gaza strip were annexed by Israel in 1967, marking the resumption of intensive contact between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians living in the occupied territories. The exclusion of Israeli Arabs from the mainstream and the renewal of contact between the Palestinian communities resulted in an increased identification of this community with the Palestinians in the territories and

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their aspirations for national independence. In parallel, Smooha also observes a process of Israelization through which Israeli Arabs have been increasingly integrated into the Israeli mainstream—absorbing Israeli ways of life and the Hebrew language, consuming Hebrew media, working within the Israeli economy, accepting the right of Israel to exist as a state, participating in Israel’s parliamentary politics, and over time, increasingly viewing Israel as their country. Smooha wrote his assessment of the dual process of Palestinianization and Israelization in 1999, prior to the disintegration of the Oslo peace process in October 2000. According to Alexander Bligh (2003), the human suffering and economic deprivation experienced by the Palestinians of the occupied territories following the 2000 *intifada* resulted in a growing number of Israeli-Arabs who see themselves as an inseparable part of the Palestinian people. Muhammad Amara and Itzhak Schnell (2003) also credit the 2000 killing of thirteen Israeli-Arabs during a pro-Palestinian demonstration as a watershed event in which Israeli-Arabs started to question their identification with their civil identity as Israelis and have begun to aspire either to transform Israel into a non-Zionist state or to be recognized as a national minority.

6. All translations from Hebrew were made by the author.

7. Regev is using a play of words to highlight his point. Present-absentee status in Israel refers to Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 war (the war of independence for Israelis, the “*Naqba*,” or catastrophe, for Palestinians) but who remained within the borders of Israel as internally displaced people, as well as to their descendents. Most present absentees were denied the right to return to their homes and properties, which were expropriated by the government for other uses, following the war.

8. According to Ben Brinner (2009), employment opportunities for Palestinian Israelis consist mainly of performances at weddings and other festivities where they are most often asked to play popular Egyptian classics and current Arabic pop from neighboring countries, so they have little opportunity to introduce original content to the Palestinian community in Israel. The lack of support for Arabic music in the Jewish-dominated Israeli music and media industry, and the lack of such industry within the Arab sector of the population, further compounds the predicament of Palestinian Israeli musicians.

9. The annual Culture of Peace festival and the International Oud festival showcase classical Arabic music in theaters attended by a mixed audience that includes *Mizrahi* and *Ashkenazi* Jews as well as Palestinian-Israelis.

10. One such example is the Alaev family—a dynasty of musicians from Tajikistan—who have recently collaborated with members of Balkan Beat Box—a group that claims leadership in the new Gypsy-rock movement and that combines “roots firmly planted all around the Mediterranean rim” with “solid and rock and reggae foundations” (Balkan Beat Box 2010).

11. Title of an article in *Ma’ariv* (Suissa 2009).

12. For example, in an interview about the UN non-proliferation treaty (of nuclear weapons), Prime Minister Netanyahu stated: “I thought that was a particularly distorted and flawed resolution because it singled out Israel, the only true democracy in the Middle East and the only country anywhere on Earth threatened with annihilation” (Canadian Broadcasting Company Website 2010).

13. It must be noted here that in 1973, the year of the Yom Kippur war, Israel also had no options for cultivating regional alliances. Relationships with neighboring countries could be only be imagined following the 1979 signing of the peace treatise with Egypt and later with Jordan. But notions of the self are always created through the construction of difference (Yuval-Davis 2003). The historical bias of the Israeli leadership towards Western alliances,



especially the United States and Western Europe, and the marginalization of *Mizrahi* culture, highlight the fact that in many ways, Israeli popular imagination was also self-constructed as a foreign implant in a hostile region.

14. While Israel joined Eurovision to further cultural alliances with the West, to-date, all its entries that have won first place at the ESC were *Mizrahi* singers of Yemenite descent: Izhar Cohen won in 1978 (with the entry “A-Ba-Ni-Bi”); Gali Atari won the following year (with the entry “Halleluyah”) and Dana International won in 1998 (with the song “Diva”). Historically, Israeli-Yemenite singers have been most successful in “crossover” productions, through idiomatically mastering both *muzika mizrahit* or traditional Yemenite music and mainstream popular genres. The aforementioned Ofra Haza’s success at the 1983 Eurovision bolsters this list. It is possible that this noted ability also enhanced their capacity to compete successfully at the ESC.

15. The original letter was published on iPeace, an “international social network which has more than 14,000 members from 180 countries” (iPeace 2009) and later quoted partially or in full on other news websites.

16. In a later interview given to *Ma’ariv* (Avramovitz 2009) Nini said she was compelled to write this letter following the news she received of Hamas members throwing Fatah supporters off rooftops and shooting their legs. In addition, a peace activist friend from Gaza (a Fatah supporter as well) encouraged her in a phone call to write the letter.

17. It is unclear whether Mer-Khamis refers to himself as an Israeli-Arab, but the articles published on the Nini-Awad topic refer to him as such. Mer-Khamis is the son of an Arab-Israeli father and a Jewish-Israeli mother. His mother was an activist who established a youth theater in the refugee camp of Jenin (in the Occupied Palestinian Territories) with the purpose of providing an outlet for Palestinian youth to channel their anger and pain to creative works. Both mother and son were active in this project for many years.

18. For examples and analysis of the “shooting and crying” trope in contemporary media, see Benvenisti 2004, Harel 2009, and Klein 2008.

19. Virtually all the songs on the album follow the theme of hope and reconciliation. The title of Forman’s article is a play of words on one of the album’s offerings, titled “Second Chance” in English and “Every Second” in Hebrew.

20. Irish 4 Palestine Blog (2009).

21. See also the Palestinian Solidarity Movement in Spain, available online at <http://atutemlaguerra.org> (accessed October 2, 2009).

22. See [http://blog.onevoicemovement.org/one\\_voice/2009/05/press-release-paul-mccartney-calls-on-president-obama-to-support-the-onevoice-movement-.html](http://blog.onevoicemovement.org/one_voice/2009/05/press-release-paul-mccartney-calls-on-president-obama-to-support-the-onevoice-movement-.html) (accessed November 24, 2009).

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