Melodies of Resistance: Palestinian Women's Expression of Resistance through Music

Nour Aboulmagd[1*]

[1]BSc. Politics, Psychology, Law & Economics

[*]Corresponding author. Email: nouraboulmagd13@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis illustrates how Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation. The thesis seeks to contextualise Palestinian resistance in the circumstances imposed by the occupation, which violate international legal frameworks. An interdisciplinary approach is adopted to highlight the legal obligations on Israel as a state as well as an Occupying Power and its inability to abide by these legal standards. The first question posed explores the themes of resistance articulated by Palestinian women in their songs. A thematic analysis was conducted on 11 songs performed by Palestinian women from Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The songs highlighted three predominant themes: strategic displays of resistance, the politicisation of homeland and attachment to Palestine. Afterwards, a doctrinal analysis outlined the main legal frameworks in International Law which should protect Palestinian women. The analysis found that these legal frameworks are not upheld by Israel in the occupied territory, thus prompting Palestinian resistance. This thesis demonstrates the importance of music as an outlet of political expression and resistance to occupation and oppression.

Keywords

resistance, women, music, resilience, occupied Palestinian territory, Israeli occupation

Introduction

"In order for me to write poetry that isn't political, I must listen to the birds, and in order to hear the birds, the warplanes must be silent."

– Marwan Makhoul, Palestinian poet

Palestinian women are key actors of resistance against the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, otherwise referred to as the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Throughout this thesis, I will use the "occupied Palestinian territory", or oPt to refer to Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This terminology is conventionally accepted to describe Palestinian territories under ongoing Israeli military occupation since 1967 (Imseis, 2003). Women take it upon themselves to convey messages of hope, resilience, and dignity to

their fellow Palestinians through the use of music. Palestinian women express the hardships which they face under occupation, whilst focusing on resistance as the necessary response to occupation (Veronese et al., 2021). This thesis demonstrates how music is a rich outlet where women express resistance to the Israeli occupation. My analysis of the songs reveals three themes of resistance: the strategic display of resistance, the politicisation of the homeland, and the singers' attachment to Palestine as an expression of commitment to the Palestinian cause. The thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach, outlining the international legal frameworks which exist to protect Palestinians and their lack of application in the oPt, breeding a movement of Palestinian resistance.

This thesis will ask the following questions: Palestinian women in the oPt use music to express resistance to Israeli occupation? How have Palestinian women disproportionately suffered from Israel's failure to uphold international legal frameworks as an Occupying Power?

To answer the first question, I will conduct a thematic analysis of song lyrics, identifying patterns which convey messages of resistance to the occupation. As for the second question, a doctrinal analysis will outline international legal mechanisms pertaining to Palestinians in the oPt, and then verify whether they can be applied to the case. The legal question clarifies the reasoning behind the resistance movement, simply why Palestinians resist in the first place.

Historical Background

To understand the questions, a contextualisation of the occupation is crucial. Palestinians remain under a brutal occupation in the guise of settler colonialism which has contributed to their ethnic cleansing for 76 years (Pappé, 2006). Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the occupation has been met with diverse forms of resistance by the Palestinians (Pearlman, 2011). Men and women in Palestine have used both violent and nonviolent tactics to resist the occupation of their land (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007).

Zionism is a nationalist movement aiming to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionist movement succeeded at the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, resulting in the destruction of 531 Palestinian villages and the forced displacement of more than 750 000 people (Pappé, 2006). This cataclysmic event, known as the *Nakba* (or catastrophe in Arabic), is largely considered an operation of ethnic cleansing by historians, even from Israel itself (Pappé, 2006; Bashir & Goldberg, 2018).

Palestinians have continued to suffer under Israeli rule, especially since the Six Day War of 1967 when Israel militarily occupied Gaza and the West Bank (Raby, 2023). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 242, which was unanimously adopted in 1967, demanded that Israeli forces evacuate all occupied territory, including Gaza and the West Bank (UNSC, 1967). To this day, the resolution has not been implemented (López, 2023). Nowadays, international organisations, like the United Nations (UN), characterise Gaza and the West Bank as occupied territory. This denomination designates Israel as an Occupying Power, responsible for fulfilling the duties of an Occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (GC IV, 1949, Art. 55, 56 and 59).

Despite the many attempts to reconcile both parties since the 1990s, the oPt have suffered deeply under Israel's military control. Today, Israeli settlements in the West Bank are growing exponentially (UN, 2023). According to the European Union Representative in the Occupied Territories, there has been a 22% increase in settlements in 2022 compared to 2021 (Office of the EU Representative, 2023). These settlements result in the "demolition of

Palestinian structures, daily violence and continued inflammatory rhetoric by their [Israeli] Government representatives" (UN, 2023).

Apartheid is a system of segregation against a minority which does not promote the equality of all citizens regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural identity (Greenstein, 2020). According to Amnesty International, Israel upholds an apartheid system, wherein legal regimes prioritise the freedom, safety and right to self-determination of Israeli Jews, whereas Israeli Arabs, Palestinians in the West Bank, and those in Gaza do not enjoy the same rights (Amnesty International, 2022). These manifest as the denial of self-determination, the restriction of freedom of movement and an unequal distribution of resources.

Palestinians have revolted against the injustice imposed by the occupation on several occasions. In 2000, the Second Intifada resulted in Israel's disengagement from Gaza, which was followed by a complete blockade through air, sea and land. The blockade was perceived by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as a form of collective punishment, as criminalised by Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. UNHRC officials called Gaza "the world's largest open-air prison" (UNHRC, 2023). In 2018, the Great March of Return in Gaza symbolised a peaceful protest against the relocation of the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem which was met with fierce repression by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) (Amnesty International, 2018). In 2021, large-scale demonstrations erupted when Israel announced its intention to demolish the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in the West Bank to build settlements. The protests spread to Gaza and in the span of 11 days, Israeli bombardments killed around 253 Palestinians (OCHA, 2021). Despite resorting to overtly peaceful forms of protest after the Second Intifada, Palestinians have continuously been met with further violence and oppression under Israeli occupation.

Having said that, Palestinians have also practiced more covert forms of resistance which are ingrained in their everyday lifestyles. From cooking generations-old recipes to keeping the keys that once locked their homes before Nakba, the expression of hope and resilience is not uncommon in Palestine, especially amongst its women (Atallah, 2017). This thesis focuses on music as a medium of expression, thus shedding light on unconventional methods of resistance.

Literature Review

Having established the material context in which resistance has emerged, I will now engage with the existing literature on women's activism in Palestine. In "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance" (Khalidi, 2020), a widely cited contemporary history of Palestine, Rashid Khalidi only mentions the words "woman" and "women" 14 times in 325 pages. Additionally, he mainly depicts them as victims of violence committed by the Israeli forces, rather than activists of the Palestinian resistance, often referencing them alongside "children" or "old people" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 93). This example illustrates the widespread inattention given to the role of women in shaping Palestinian history.

Frantz Fanon (1961) famously argues that "decolonisation is a violent phenomenon" (p. 35). Indeed, Palestinians have, on many occasions since the establishment of Israel, taken up arms to fight their colonisers (Pearlman, 2011). Many women have also participated in violent resistance to the occupation (Irving, 2012). Still,

violent resistance groups tend to be highly male-dominated and organised, and they often occupy the most visible political sphere in the oPt (Pearlman, 2011).

Merely studying resistance and occupation without adopting a gendered lens discards the gendered impact of the occupation. Many Israeli policies of apartheid disproportionately impact women (Griffiths & Repo, 2021). Griffiths and Repo (2021) look at the Israeli army's perpetration of sexual harassment of women at checkpoints, which can be daily points of passage for Palestinians. These checkpoints are described as "contact zones and borderlands where cultures meet and contest within the highly uneven power relations that constitute colonial space" (Griffiths & Repo, 2021, p. 251). Additionally, Griffiths and Repo (2021) listen to testimonies of Palestinian women which have been sexually assaulted by the IDF in occupation prisons. Gendered impositions generate the material reality of occupation, which is contested by Palestinians. Rought-Brooks et al. (2010) shed light on Palestinian women's exceptional case, having to withstand both patriarchal and colonial structures to survive.

The gendered aspect of the occupation makes it necessary to study feminine mechanisms of resistance. Several studies have looked at how Palestinian women engage in informal methods of resistance to the occupation. Richter-Devroe (2018) conceptualises Palestinian women's activism as an "informalisation of politics", which creates hidden channels through which Palestinian women can voice their disapproval and demand rights (p. 76). These strategies of resistance are not, by any means, apolitical. Their political nature stems from many women's refusal to normalise the existence of a settler-colonial system striving to control every aspect of their lives (Richter-Devroe, 2011). Arnd-Linder et al. (2018) follow up on the informalisation of politics; with a paper titled "The Political is Personal", they analyse the manifestations of occupation in the everyday lives of Palestinian women. Their aim is to shed light on the *very* real impact of the policies of occupation on the experiences of women. They find that, for women living in the oPt, occupation is ubiquitous: it is felt in Israeli checkpoints but also in the pervasive feeling of insecurity, even at home (Arnd-Linder et al., 2018).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2006) explores the politicisation of the *home*. She argues that, for Palestinians, home demolitions are a constant risk. This is due to Israeli expansionism in the West Bank, or the numerous military operations launched on Gaza with the aim of destroying violent resistance capabilities. The operations in Gaza are called mowing the grass, implying their levelling of entire buildings or neighbourhoods to the ground (Alareer, 2014). By insisting on rebuilding homes, and reinstating security for their families, Palestinian women are engaging in resistance to Israel's policies of destruction (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006). This is another perspective on unconventional methods of resistance which insist on survival despite severe difficulties.

Ryan (2015) studies the concept of *sumud* (steadfastness or resilience in Arabic), a keyword in the vocabulary of Palestinian resistance. She defines it not as "living *with* uncertainty, but, rather, living *despite* uncertainty" (Ryan, 2015, p. 300). S*umud* has embodied the tactical use of resilience as a method of resistance. This concept has also served as a basis for the persistence of intergenerational hope despite the hardships imposed by the occupation.

The expression of *sumud* is typical in Palestinian songs. Palestinian music has been produced and transmitted across generations as a way to resist cultural erasure and provide a positive outlook on the future, essentially for the youth (Kanaaneh et al., 2013). For decades, the Palestinian song has held a significant mobilising role for the anticolonial struggle for national liberation (Massad, 2003). Withers (2023) criticises the focus of agency at the expense of intersectionality when analysing Palestinian women's political expressions through music. She

emphasises the relevance of material reality, in addition to agency, which renders resistance necessary. Therefore, this thesis will explore themes of resistance as a consequence of the structures imposed by occupation and its illegality. The doctrinal analysis serves to ground women's resistance in the reality produced by occupation.

Relevance

The focus of this thesis on gender dynamics under occupation and the variety of resistance movements in the oPt is essentially political. Women's participation in activism is a testament of the politicisation of the *personal* and the *everyday* (Richter-Devroe, 2018). This thesis is written on Palestinian women's resistance efforts in light of current events taking place in Gaza. Since Hamas, an armed resistance group from Gaza, launched a deadly attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023, the Israeli military has declared war and announced a full siege of Gaza (Holmes, 2023). As of June 2024, more than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed (UN, 2024). Israel's blockade of Gaza has restricted the entry of food, water, fuel, medical supplies, and aid to the Strip (HRW, 2024). As a result, the UN Special Rapporteur for food has accused Israel of "mounting a starvation campaign in Gaza" (UN, 2024).

Since December 2023, South Africa has filed a case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of the crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip (ICJ, 2023). The Court has ruled the case "plausible", indicating that Israel's actions in Gaza could be "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (ICJ, 2024). Today, more than ever, it is essential to shed light on the Palestinian cause.

However, the time frame chosen for this analysis is the previous decade, hence from 2013 to 2022, excluding the current war in Gaza due to the fast-paced nature of its events. Nevertheless, this thesis cannot be read without consideration of recent developments. To understand how women use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation, I will conduct a thematic analysis, identifying themes of resistance in songs written by Palestinian women in the oPt. Additionally, to complement the thematic analysis, I will conduct a doctrinal analysis, underlining international legal frameworks and their disregard by Israel in the oPt, justifying the adoption of a gendered lens when studying the Palestinian resistance movement.

Theoretical Framework

In the following section, I will present theories in which both the thematic and doctrinal analyses are grounded. I start with an overview of the depiction of women in International Relations, confining them to the private sphere and primarily viewing them as victims. I attempt to reshape this narrative by portraying the women studied in this thesis as agents of change who participate in anti-colonial resistance movements. However, agency is not absolute: the material context in which social phenomena occur also determines the ways in which they develop. Critical realism thus resolves the dilemma between agency and context. Later, I expand on the disproportionate effects of colonialism on women, which push them to resist, often using informal and unorganised methods, such as music, a key form of creative resistance.

Women in International Relations

To go about analysing the concepts of women, occupation and unconventional methods of resistance in the Palestinian context, it is necessary to adopt a feminist lens through which we will clarify the inherently gendered aspects of occupation and resistance. If we look at the complex history of Palestinian resistance under occupation, we mostly see men and weaponry (Meiering et al., 2020). Feminist International Relations give us the space to ask: "where are the women?" (Zalewski, 2015 p. 9). Are they resisting, and if so, how? By asking these pertinent questions, we produce a different narrative, one that relates the personal, the private, and the invisible to the international (Zalewski, 2015).

In mainstream International Relations, gender remains a determinant of an individual's perceived agency, innocence or ability to take action (Carpenter, 2003). Women are often confined to the private sphere, along with children. The "women and children" framework currently grounding International Law, institutions, and UN resolutions infantilizes women, and portrays them as victims in constant need of protection. It perpetuates the narrative of women's inability to act as agents of change and take on roles outside the private realm or beyond motherhood (Peuchguirbal, 2004). Such depictions serve to uphold the patriarchal status quo wherein men are granted access to public life and political deliberation and women remain restricted to much less visible domains of activity (Krystalli, 2021). They also imply that men will partake in violent and direct acts of resistance whereas women will dedicate themselves to procreation and child rearing (Meiering et al., 2020).

To this day, women, and especially Arab women suffer from "under-representation and continued oppression [...] in academic contexts" (Lin & Kennette, 2022, p. 246). The intersectionality of Arab women's identities both as women and as Arabs allows for the reproduction of patriarchal and orientalist narratives, further exacerbating their depiction in Western academia. The Western dominance of academia reflects an Orientalist perception of the Arab world, which is perceived as the binary opposite of the *superior* West (Said, 1977). Research conducted on Arab populations can start with assumptions that imply the irrationality and inferiority of these people (Lewis, 1982). Indeed, there is a considerable lack of recognition of their agency and a fixation on their helplessness and oppression (Alhayek, 2014). This thesis challenges narratives that centre Arab women primarily as victims by presenting evidence of their contributions to the Palestinian resistance movement.

Women's agency emerges as a response to oppression (Abrams, 1998). Abrams (1998) defines agency as being targeted at cultural, political, and individual ends: "A feminist account of agency supplies the insight that people may be hindered by obstacles that bear on them as members of a disempowered group" (p. 831). However, by acting against oppressive norms and regimes, members of a disempowered group, specifically women, engage in resistance which is inherently a manifestation of agency (Abrams, 1998).

Critical Realism

Considering that this thesis emphasises the importance of resistance, it is crucial to understand the circumstances in which said resistance emerges. Critical realism perceives the *social* as inherently rooted in the *material* (Patomäki & Wight, 2000). Particularly, it underscores the importance of context: it is only through contextualisation that social phenomena can be understood as products of both agency and social structures. Critical realism is interested in "the real, the actual and the empirical" (Parr, 2015, p. 195). By adopting a critical realist lens, this thesis prioritises *the real* which outlines the underlying mechanisms and structures which produce

reality (Clegg, 2006). Critical realism asserts that "context and individual agency is intrinsically involved in causal processes" (Parr, 2015, p. 196). This implies that a focus on agency, in this thesis embodied by women who engage in resistance, is insufficient to explain social activity. Easton (2010) summarises it with the question "in what ways may the external contingency affect the events that have occurred?" (p. 121).

Occupation is especially effective in wholly transforming the material reality experienced by the occupied. Hence, the structures imposed by the Occupying Power deeply impact the social dynamics under occupation, including the manifestations of resistance. The inception and development of resistance movements is therefore a product of the material reality in which these movements emerge. This thesis aims to ground its analysis of resistance in a legal and political contextualisation of the Israeli occupation.

Decolonial Theory

The section below contextualises Palestinian women's resistance movement using decolonial theory to reflect the violent reality of colonisation which prompts resistance. Carolyn Nordstrom (2004) introduced the notion of "the time of not-war-not-peace" to designate occasional military action in a no-active-conflict context (p. 165-167). For Palestinians in the oPt, the Israeli military is a constant presence, regardless of the status of active warfare.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) conceptualises the notion of "the naturalisation of the *non-ethics of war*" under colonialism, which describes the coloniser's dehumanisation and subsequent violation of the native's rights (p. 247). Without active conflict, the coloniser remains entitled to perform cruel acts towards the colonised people. These acts become naturalised: their perpetration seems natural, and even necessary, to maintain the power dynamics relating both groups to one another (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). In other words, war and the grave violations that accompany it become an aspect of the daily lives of the occupied whose entire existence is dictated by the coloniser (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Such acts include the normalisation of the rape of non-white women, murder, the excessive exploitation of a woman's labour, and the objectification of women's bodies for the sake of the coloniser's pleasure (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

The aforementioned examples are manifestations of colonialism's disproportionate impact on women. In the context of colonialism, patriarchal structures intersect with ethnicity, social class, and identity. These structures create a robust system of oppression founded on the colonised woman's *non-whiteness* and *non-masculinity* (Park, 2017). Maldonado-Torres' decolonial theory serves as a basis to understand the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinian people studied in the thesis, but also provides a framework to view the oppression of Palestinian women from an intersectional lens.

Informalisation of Politics

Colonised women defy occupation in various ways. They can resort to non-institutional actions, including armed and unarmed resistance. The latter encompasses all non-institutional acts where the people convey their disapproval of the system (Dudouet, 2014).

Infrapolitics designates the disguised, informal, and unorganised forms of resistance and dissent (Scott, 2017, p. 183). Infrapolitics is often led by subordinate groups who have no other mediums of communication with power due to their political exclusion and limited access to freedom of expression (Scott, 2017). The pressure which they

exert on the domination systems from below is unique by its likelihood to remain present across time. The words and actions of subordinate groups exist as a foundation to other social movements, which they strive to enforce (Scott, 2017). It is by the aggregation of disobedient acts that the powerful state starts to lose its perceived omnipotence over society, laying the ground for larger and more vocal mobilisations (Scott, 2017). Rituals of subordination are broken through the subordinate group's defiance of pervasive rules imposed by the dominant group (Scott, 2017). The existence of minor instances of resistance in street-level politics shapes the relationship between the regime and the people (Bayat, 2012). These acts of subversion symbolise the inception of large-scale resistance movements supported by bottom-up resistance of marginalised groups (Bayat, 2012).

Women are often some of the most present actors in informal politics. Their methods of resistance begin with a disobedient way of life and an attempt to shape discourse and narratives that defy what is prescribed by the dominant power (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Through music, an unconventional outlet of resistance, women express their dissatisfaction and question the status quo (McKinnon, 2010). *Creative resistance* is the use of artistic means as a source of empowerment, manifestation of cultural traditions, and expression of discontent with the status quo and hope for a brighter future (Darts, 2004). This concept, varying from music to art, poetry, and literature, "reveal[s] tears in the social fabric" (Darts, 2004, p. 318). It exposes the divergence between the dominant discourses on equality and liberal values, and the ugly reality of oppression under the status quo (Darts, 2004).

Music has historically been recognised as an expression of resistance (McKinnon, 2010). Musical resistance creates an alternative autonomous space for oppressed people to express their dissent and be heard by those who are subjected to the same oppression (McKinnon, 2010). Bohlman (1993) describes music as "an arresting form of attention, a means of commanding public spaces, and a context for the narration of history" (p. 413). Passed down to generations by virtue of its timelessness and memorability, musical defiance creates a community that relates to the political messages articulated by the songs. Its informality invites deep expressions of both positive and negative emotions. Additionally, the familiar nature of music allows singers to communicate their perceptions of the reality of occupation in tangible terms which resonate with all those who have experienced the same oppressive structures. Hence, music is an effective method of resistance.

The informal nature of music does not overshadow its political significance. It creates an easily accessible and understandable medium of political expression. When the colonised sing in their own language unfamiliar to the coloniser, they establish a reality of which they have full authority. The coloniser cannot intercept this realm of political expression due to its full dependence on vernacular, popular anecdotes and idioms, and collective memory stemming from the shared experience of occupation. In other words, music is the product of a material reality understood only by those who experience it.

Women's performance of music is a testament of their agency as actors in the Palestinian resistance movement. Nevertheless, their resistance can only be understood as a product of the context of occupation in which said resistance materialises. Therefore, this thesis aims to portray the significance of music as means of political expression against occupation. It sheds light on the informal side of politics from which resistance movements emerge.

Methods

Research Design

This thesis seeks to understand how Palestinian women from the oPt use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation. Additionally, it will contextualise the messages of resistance by analysing the illegality of the occupation and its disproportionate effects on women. The thesis' interdisciplinarity is reflected in its qualitative approach, employing both thematic analysis and doctrinal analysis to answer each research question respectively. Using two different methodologies, I will examine two different sources of data: song lyrics and international legal conventions. This variation will help me reach more substantive conclusions about the status quo in the oPt and the resistance it instigates.

First, thematic analysis is a process where qualitative data is coded into separate yet interrelated themes, or ideas, which aim to answer a research question (Terry et al., 2017). In this thesis, the thematic analysis will serve to identify the patterns of resistance throughout song lyrics which have been publicly sung by Palestinian women about their homeland. Starting from a critical realist lens, this analysis emphasises "participants' experiences as lived realities that are produced, and exist, within broader social contexts" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 47). The assumption of the contextual reality of the meanings conveyed in the songs begs the question of: what is the context in which the messages in these songs were produced?

Therefore, a doctrinal analysis will be conducted to examine the legal frameworks in International Law that should protect Palestinians as a national group, and more specifically Palestinian women, and Israel's repeated failure to abide by them. Doctrinal analysis asks the question of: what current legal frameworks exist concerning a specific case? "Doctrinal analysis has been the dominant legal method in the common law world" (Hutchinson, 2015, p. 2). The second analysis will consist of a collection of the legal principles in International Law which aim to protect Palestinians, and especially women, as well as an examination of how these principles materially play out in the oPt.

By using thematic analysis, I will be centring narratives shaped by women, acknowledging the originality of female expressions of resistance under occupation and the value of the messages which they convey. To centre Palestinian voices, I will present the thematic analysis first. The doctrinal analysis will follow due to its reliance on international institutions dominated by Western voices and interests, often disregarding Palestinian ones (Karatas, 2020; Assaiqeli, 2020). In this thesis, it serves a secondary role of contextualisation.

The thematic analysis focuses on the use of certain words, expressions, or metaphors to highlight different aspects of resistance which will be grouped into larger themes. The songs serve as a basis to understand what aspects of the occupation Palestinian women contest in their songs. The doctrinal analysis will provide information on the reality of the situation in the oPt. It will emphasise the lack of application of fundamental principles of human rights by Israel, in violation of the law of occupation in the oPt.

Data Collection

To analyse Palestinian women's use of music to express resistance to the occupation, this thesis employs 11 songs performed by Palestinian women from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem from 2013 to 2022. The last decade was marked by continuous expansion in Israeli settlements and the Sheikh Jarrah protests of 2021 in

the West Bank, as well as numerous wars on Gaza including military operation 'Protective Edge' in 2014 and the 2018 Great March of Return. These events have sparked large-scale movements calling for the liberation of Palestine across the world (Amnesty International, 2022). This decade has witnessed a variety of methods employed by Palestinians to express their resistance to the occupation. Hence, it has led to the production and performance of many songs which articulate the emotions of Palestinians who have been affected by these significant events, either from physical or emotional proximity to their homeland as well as their demands for freedom.

The common criterion guiding the choice of songs is their performance by Palestinian women in recent years. The performer's choice of lyrics to publicly sing, implies her identification with them and desire to repeat their message. All singers featured in this thesis originate from the West Bank, Gaza, or East Jerusalem. This narrows the scope of Palestinian women's resistance by excluding Arab Israelis whose music often gains more popularity among Palestinians all over the world (Kanaaneh et al., 2013).

It is important to note that not all songs analysed in this thesis were written by women. Some of them were originally published as poetry and have since been re-adapted. Others are folkloric melodies which continue to be sung by women. However, a significant limitation to data collection was the lack of songs originating from Gaza. This is due to structural obstacles resulting from the blockade imposed on Gaza by the Israeli forces as well as to the ruling party, Hamas' ideology. As a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas cracks down on Palestinian artists in Gaza, accusing them of engaging in "immoral activity" (Kanaaneh et al., 2013, p. 90). The songs analysed throughout this thesis have all been found online, on global platforms like YouTube, or smaller ones like Anghami, the largest digital music streaming service in the Arab world (Alyakoob, 2022). The decision to include each song depends on its ability to convey a message of resilience and hope to other Palestinian listeners instead of the song's popularity, which varies highly. Many songs were omitted due to their insufficient relation to the Palestinian struggle. Appendix A lists the 11 songs used in the thematic analysis. For each song, it indicates the release date, the name of the artist and her city of origin.

Data Analysis

Before developing the analysis, I independently translated all songs from Arabic to English. Translation can typically distort the meaning of certain words and expressions unique to the language. As the translator, my interpretation of these songs impacts the way I translate them, potentially creating an ethical issue. I have tried avoiding it by consulting several speakers from both languages to verify whether the translation seems logical to them. To conduct a thematic analysis of the patterns of resistance identified in the songs, I used online software ATLAS.ti to code the songs. I conducted the initial coding step: the classification of lyrics under many codes, or ideas which repeatedly arose in the songs. The codes emerged inductively from the song lyrics, no codes or themes were expected to be found beforehand. This approach allowed for the song lyrics to be fully heard with no predetermined ideas as to what they would discuss. The codes were constantly refined and grouped until I ended up with 18 codes which were divided into 3 coherent analytical categories, or themes, that will guide the analysis. The codes were also used to refine the theoretical framework grounding the analysis, relying on an inductive approach that centres song lyrics. This analytical method provides a clear perception of the common ideas held by Palestinians and expressed by different people, as part of the larger resistance movement which has existed since the establishment of Israel.

The doctrinal analysis involves a collection of international conventions concerning human rights, like the UDHR, and international criminal conventions like the fourth Geneva Convention which highlights the responsibilities of an Occupying Power. First, I analyse these legal frameworks and shed light on the principles which they serve to uphold, with a focus on their conceptualisation of women's rights. Second, I apply them to the situation in the oPt from 2013 to 2022 and highlight their insufficient implementation, further criminalising the occupation.

Both analyses complement one another; the thematic analysis is grounded in the cultural expression of resistance to occupation and the doctrinal analysis explores the material reality in the oPt. The Israeli occupation effectively dominates the material reality which Palestinians experience. Their lands and resources are controlled by outsiders whose success lies in the erasure of proof of Palestinian identity and indigeneity (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014). Therefore, as Palestinians continue to be more stripped of their ability to take ownership of their fates due to the occupation, they resort to abstract spaces which they can manipulate by imposing their own narratives. Songs, by virtue of their accessibility and easy memorisation, present a channel of political expression which cannot be fully dominated by the Israelis. Songs allow for politically-dense messages to be heard in a counter-space which is still relatively possessed by Palestinians. The doctrinal analysis is therefore necessary to understand the context behind the messages conveyed in the songs.

Thematic Analysis

This thesis explores the themes of resistance which Palestinian women in the oPt express through music to reflect on the role women undertake as agents of change. Contemporary music conveys values such as resilience and strength to Palestinian people in the oPt, but also across the world. They translate the general Palestinian sentiment towards the occupation, while centring a message of hope. The analysis is structured around the three major themes which were found in the songs and will progress from the most to the least recurring theme.

The first theme identified was 'strategic displays of resistance', alluding to Ryan's (2015) definition of resilience as a "tactic of resistance" (p. 300). The term "tactic" asserts the importance of strategic forms of resistance to exhibit fearlessness and the adaptation to the hardships imposed by the occupation via displays of joy and dignity. The second theme identified; '*Al-Watan*: The Politicisation of Homeland' incorporates questions in relation to human rights, freedom and the right of return. It outlines the political demands of the Palestinians which are inherently revolutionary. Finally, the third theme 'Attachment to Palestine' encompasses the sentimental relationship which connects Palestinians to their land. Elements such as the holiness of Palestine and the centuries-old memories which Palestinians transmit from one generation to the other are sung about to emphasise the Palestinian people's indigeneity.

Strategic Displays of Resistance

The most common theme found in the songs was 'strategic displays of resistance'. This theme encompasses the emotions displayed by the Palestinian people, specifically women, distinguishing them by the way in which they resist. The theme incorporates resilience, hope, joy, unity, strength, and dignity as internalised emotions which

Palestinians showcase in their everyday lives. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of cultural symbols, such as the Dabkeh, the traditional Palestinian (or more broadly Levantine) festive circle and line dance, folklore music, and art as accessible outlets to display sentiments of resistance.

Palestinian women often sing about resilience, or *sumud* in Arabic: "resilient in the face of all adversity" and "[Palestinian] children carrying the resilience of the land" (Salute to Gaza, 2019; Returning, 2021). Their music displays significant resilience in the face of the occupation, dispossession, and dehumanisation by employing phrases such as "determination and pride" and "throwing defeat behind them" to signal their perseverance, despite hardship, to achieve their ultimate dream; liberation from the occupation (Salute to Gaza, 2019; Gaza, 2021). S*umud* is a strategic method of resistance in which Palestinians are socialised and consider one of the most important values to uphold (Ryan, 2015). *Sumud* is seen as a tactical display of resistance in everyday life which encapsulates the intuitive willingness to adapt to difficult life circumstances posed by the occupation. The concepts of strength and dignity emerge as values attached to *sumud*. Palestinian women also mention: "pride", "determination", "dignity" and "honourable" as prerequisites of this resistance (Salute to Gaza, 2019; As Long as I Have, 2021). These values prompt them to maintain their honour while coping with life under occupation (Ryan, 2015).

Sumud is also tied to the physical struggle of resistance. When singing about the war on Gaza in 2018, the Daughters of Jerusalem honour the martyrs; "they bury martyrs everyday", while emphasising the martyr's consistent resilience (Salute to Gaza, 2019). Even after his death, a child "spread a curtain over the rubble" (Salute to Gaza, 2019). This euphemism downplays the harsh reality of the transformation of homes into rubble, allowing the child to simply cover up the destruction and continue fighting. *Sumud* is also manifested by Palestinians' unwillingness to leave their land; "I will not let my land go" (Where Are the Millions, 2022). Songs like Salute to Gaza (2019), written by artists from the West Bank, shed light on the situation in Gaza. This display of unity enforces resistance to the territorial divisions which forbid Palestinians from Gaza from travelling to the West Bank and vice versa.

Expressions of hope are very common among Palestinians: they use music to remind each other that "no darkness ever lasted" and remind Palestine that "your [her] children are returning" (Returning, 2021). Hope is an extension of resilience: it grants the occupied the strength to uphold their demand for freedom by fixating on the bright future ahead, insisting on the transience of the "darkness", or the occupation (Returning, 2021). The Daughters of Jerusalem speak of "a candle to light on the rocks and dry away the tears" (Gaza, 2021). The candle being a symbol for the light in the darkness, sends a message of hope despite the hardships or "tears".

Another emotion prominently instrumentalized by Palestinians to express their steadfastness, and consequently resist to the occupation's pervasiveness, is "joy" (Jaffa — Everything has Changed, 2021). More specifically, weddings as festive occasions have become crucial to understand all facets of resistance: "the wedding is ours and the bride and groom are celebrating", "carrying the forthcoming wedding" (Tell his Mother, n.d.; Returning, 2021). 'Tell his Mother' is a traditional Palestinian song which is performed in both weddings and funerals, invoking Palestinians' ability to celebrate new beginnings as well as tragedies. This song symbolises the Palestinian struggle as a whole: an ability to remain steadfast despite the occupation. Palestinian women particularly express joy as another manifestation of *sumud*, or resistance to the desperation which the occupation tries to inflict: "tell his mother to rejoice and celebrate" (Tell his Mother, n.d.). By planning big weddings for their

children, Palestinian women highlight the possibility for normalcy, and even joy, despite the struggles of living under siege or occupation (Richter-Devroe, 2018). The songs invoke the importance of weddings as occasions to resist and showcase Palestinian cultural heritage through music and dance: "Joy, wedding veils and gowns" (Returning, 2021).

The lyrics analysed in this research have conveyed in many instances the importance Palestinians grant to music, dance, art, and literature as a means to document their existence and struggle but also challenge the erasure of Palestinian heritage by Israel (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014; Kanaaneh et al., 2013). They speak of: "a small library", "students, poets", "Arabic words in my homeland" and "our songs, our dances, our Dabkeh" (As Long as I Have, 2021; Jaffa — Everything has Changed, 2021). Culture thus becomes a metaphorical counter-space used by Palestinians as a set of reactionary practices which become safe zones where they can visibly exercise agency (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006).

This section aims to portray how the overt expression of specific emotions or values allow Palestinians to assert that they are able to adapt to the hardships imposed by the occupation and face them fearlessly. The narratives created by these songs add a different perspective to the occupation; it is not only Israel that possesses strength from its military capabilities, but Palestinians' ability also to face the power of the occupation is an embodiment of strength as "only iron can withstand iron" (Salute to Gaza, 2019).

'*Al-Watan*': The Politicisation of Homeland

Al-Watan, the Arabic word for homeland, holds significant patriotic meaning. It encapsulates the love and devotion one feels for their place of birth (Joffe, 1983). The politicisation of the term *Al-Watan* has colonial origins. It is the primary word used for mobilisation purposes by colonised Arab nations (Joffe, 1983). The theme is titled '*Al-Watan'* because it outlines the demands of freedom, liberation, and self-determination. When Palestinian women sing about decolonisation, they are directly instrumentalizing music for their political movement and therefore engaging in creative resistance (Darts, 2004).

In their music, Palestinian women explicitly denounce the conditions under which they are living. They sing about Israeli guards, checkpoints, gates, and walls: "no need of checkpoints, walls or guards", "erasing the shackles" and "open the gates" (The Holy City, 2018; Salute to Gaza, 2019; Returning, 2021). Expressions which can normally be perceived as metaphors of captivity are employed as literal descriptions of the landscape of the oPt where gates and shackles are omnipresent and largely restrict freedom of movement (Amnesty International, 2022). The critique of prison-like infrastructure and its material consequences on the lives of Palestinians and their ability to move freely is a demand for freedom and peace. The Daughters of Jerusalem dream about "the new Jerusalem, where gates were open wide and people from each faith on Earth in peace lived side by side" (The Holy City, 2018). By emphasising peace and religious tolerance in their vision of Jerusalem, the singers imply that these qualities are currently lacking. The Daughters of Jerusalem thus establish themselves as the champions of peace, which they are actively seeking. This portrayal is not unique to them: by their name, they are insisting on their representation of Jerusalem as a whole, centring peace and freedom at the heart of the Palestinian struggle.

In addition to the demand for freedom, Palestinians also demand their right to ownership in spite of Israel's continuous dispossession and demolition of homes. The idea of a *home* is central to the Palestinian struggle (Richter-Devroe, 2018). The singers insist that: "the house is my house and the homes are my homes" and "the

home that remains, they [Palestine's children] are shielding" (Tell his Mother, n.d.; Returning, 2021). Palestinians insist on property ownership as a symbol of intergenerational inheritance of the land, proving their ancestry and their unwillingness to leave.

Furthermore, the demand for the right of Palestinian refugees to return has been repeatedly mentioned in the songs: "your children are returning", "I cry tears of separation, I am yearning for the day of return" (Returning, 2021; I Love You, Palestine, 2013). Central to Palestinian liberation is the refugees' right to return which has been denied by the State of Israel since the Nakba of 1948 (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014). In the Arabic language, Palestine is referred to as a feminine noun, allowing for the attribution of a feminine role of maternity to Palestine. Nai Barghouti addresses Palestine as a mother who is awaiting the return of her children who will be denied entry to Palestine as long as the land is occupied: "do not worry mother, your children are returning" (Returning, 2021).

Finally, it is important to note the feeling of pride conveyed through the songs of Palestinian freedom fighters who engage in violent operations as part of their struggle for liberation. In fact, throughout their music, Palestinian women mention the "enemies" or "repugnant monsters" when referring to their occupiers (As Long as I Have, 2021; Salute to Gaza, 2019). These negative depictions justify, and even render mandatory, violent forms of resistance to the occupation. Palestinian women refer to "a restless war" and "a weapon in the hands of the revolutionaries" to declare their approval of armed resistance (As Long as I Have, 2021). Palestinians take it upon themselves to express their support of the "revolutionaries" who are perceived as liberators (As Long as I Have, 2021). This makes martyrdom, as "they bury martyrs everyday", an honourable component of the Palestinian struggle (Salute to Gaza, 2019). The pursuit of violent resistance, according to the songs, is fundamentally the price of freedom. They call their homeland "a prize of war", rendering violent resistance necessary to achieve their fundamental rights (To Our Homeland, 2022).

To sum up, the theme *'Al-Watan'* encapsulates the discourse on the political movement for liberation. It explores demands which are central to the Palestinian cause. The prominence of the notion of *the homeland* in the songs politicises music, making it a space to contest disapproval of the current material reality. Nevertheless, at the heart of these politically dense songs lies a humane and sentimental message to Palestine.

Attachment to Palestine

Throughout their music, Palestinians display significant emotional and physical attachment to their land. The third theme demonstrates Palestinians' sense of indigeneity through their connection to the land's natural symbols, but also its religious ones. Thus, it is unsurprising that songs would be used to convey emotions, not just activism and concrete demands. The singers show their feelings of affection and love towards Palestine, which go hand in hand with positive memories of the land and its people.

For centuries, Palestinians have been living on the Holy Land and cultivating its trees, marking that they are profoundly connected to the land and its nature (Abufarha, 2013). Palestinian women highlight this connection to the land through music: they mention "cactus tree", "olive", "lemon", "orange fields" and "basil", flora which is known to grow on their land (As Long as I Have, 2021; Salute to Gaza, 2019; I Love You, Palestine, 2013). Olive trees, which grow in the mountainous regions of the West Bank, symbolise the intergenerational wealth transmitted for centuries in Palestine (Abufarha, 2013). Settlers have historically been guilty of destroying nature, which is

used as a tactic of demoralisation of the native (Braverman, 2009). This takes the form of uprooting of olive trees, symbolising the forced rupture of the connection which Palestinians have maintained with their land for generations (Braverman, 2009). Nonetheless, olive trees, just like lemons and oranges, remain emblems of Palestinian national liberation. Choosing native plants to represent a national group is a declaration of the group's indigeneity to the land in which the crops are cultivated. This sentiment is expressed in Barghouti songs: "returning to open the gates, to cultivate" (Returning, 2021). By connecting the idea of freedom ("open the gates") with land cultivation, she is stating that both concepts are central for freedom.

The concept of indigeneity strongly characterises the Palestinian struggle. By emphasising their connection to the land, "I swear on the life of your basil", Palestinians are combating Zionist narratives (I Love You, Palestine, 2013). Zionist slogans have served to legitimise the establishment of a Jewish state, designating Palestine as "a land without people for a people without land" (Nassar, 1982). This dismissal of the Palestinians' existence and presence on the land justifies their insistence on indigeneity in their fight for liberation. Palestinians express profound love for their homeland: "I carried you between myself and my eyes" is an Arabic expression relaying how attached one feels to something to the point of it feeling closer to her than her eyes (I Love You, Palestine, 2013).

The proclamation of love in the song 'I Love You, Palestine' (2013) goes beyond abstract terms as the singer swears "on my [her] life [...] that I would die for you". The promise of sacrifice is, once again, an illustration of Palestinians' attachment and indigeneity to their land. The consideration that death is the price of freedom, which Lina Sleibi puts as "the freedom to die", shows the extent to which Palestinians are willing to go to achieve liberation. The love for Palestine is also a product of the oral transmission of history across generations. From stories told by the older generations who witnessed Nakba, to poetry and art which narrate the Palestinian experience, a shared memory is created. The Daughters of Jerusalem declare their intention on resisting as long as they have "a small library", "the photograph of a deceased grandfather" and "lessons of history" (As Long as I Have, 2021; Salute to Gaza, 2019). The conservation of memories is essential to teach younger generations about the origins of the Palestinian movement, and once again, to prove Palestinians' existence on the land for centuries (Sa'di, 2002).

Moreover, the holiness of the land of Palestine has, across history, made it one of the most desirable places in the world, from the Crusades in the Middle Ages, to the establishment of the State of Israel on the God-given Promised Land (Armstrong, 1998). It is not surprising when Palestinians are also connected to religious attributes of their land, mainly the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, deemed as the third holiest site of Islam (Armstrong, 1997). The Daughters of Jerusalem sing about "The Holy City" of Jerusalem, calling it "the mother of peace on Earth" (The Holy City, 2018). Abeer Sarsour, another Palestinian singer, calls it the "cradle of prophets" (For you, my Homeland, 2019).

The final theme illustrates the emotional density of the songs analysed in this thesis. It highlights that, at the core of each message, there is an expression of love and affection. These feelings forge a strong bond between Palestinians and their land, as a result of their indigeneity and intergenerationally-transmitted memories. This theme ties together the willingness to remain steadfast demonstrated in the first theme and the liberation movement in the second theme.

In conclusion, the themes of resistance illustrate how music is instrumentalized by Palestinian women to express efforts of resistance and demands of liberation. Through their employment of notions of liberation and their emphasis on the reflection of Palestinian identity in remarkable values, Palestinians insist on the importance of their struggle. They start by sending a strong signal of steadfastness to their oppressor despite the hardships they endure under occupation.

Each theme analysed throughout this thesis is a response to illegal aspects of the occupation, or otherwise difficult circumstances imposed on Palestinians. Although the focus of the songs remains on messages of hope of liberation, strength, and dignity, Palestinians also honour all forms of resistance, from violent to nonviolent and extend their support to all those who engage in such acts. By expressing the general sentiments of the Palestinian people, the singers are inherently engaging in resistance. Part of the Palestinian struggle is to maintain a degree of control on discourse to counter narratives which legitimise their oppression (Sa'di, 2002). The mere act of vocalising these thoughts pushes the boundaries which limit women to the private sphere, and allow them to be visibly active agents of change leading the struggle for liberation.

Doctrinal Analysis

Having completed the thematic analysis of songs written by Palestinian women in the oPt, I will now conduct a doctrinal analysis of legal material prescribed in International Law. This analysis aims to establish the existing legal structures which function as a shield against human rights violations. I will apply the principles mentioned to the case of the Palestinians in the oPt to examine the violations which they are subjected to by Israel. The doctrinal analysis will conclude with an explanation of the illegality of the occupation, amplified by Israel's lack of respect towards International Law in its treatment of the Palestinians. The doctrinal analysis answers the question of: what are Palestinian women resisting? It provides a clear explanation of the mechanisms of occupation denounced by Palestinian women through their songs.

International Legal Frameworks

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) sets the common standards of human rights which shall be upheld by every state (Hannum, 1998). The UDHR starts by stating the primacy of freedom and equality in Article 1, without distinctions based on race, sex, or religion (Art. 2). The right to life is also emphasised by the Declaration, which is defined as both "an extension of the conditions necessary for life to continue [...] and a recognition that all forms of human life will need some basic level of protection" (Wicks, 2012, p. 211). These basic criteria outline the responsibility given to states to ensure that all people under their control have access to basic rights and socio-economic necessities to be able to live beyond survival.

Moreover, many other rights inscribed within the UDHR are significant to the Palestinian case. I will enumerate these rights and show their applicability to Palestinians in this section. Article 13 stipulates the individual's freedom of movement, and the right to leave and return to one's country without restrictions. In addition, Article 17 protects the right to own property and for it not to be arbitrarily taken away. Article 22 emphasises the importance of economic rights. Article 25 designates the right to receive adequate healthcare, with an emphasis on mothers' access to medical attention. Finally, the UDHR underlines the importance of cultural rights and all people's right "freely to participate in the cultural life of the community" (UDHR, 1948, Art. 27).

The UDHR's universality implies its intention to protect all individuals regardless of their legal status (Wicks, 2012). For the Palestinians, this means that citizenship in a state charged with the protection of human rights should not be a prerequisite to their entitlement to these rights. In other words, the UDHR's purpose is to protect all human life, regardless of political denominations.

While the UDHR is not legally binding, other human rights conventions, which were based on the principles of the Declaration, are binding and especially relevant to the Palestinian case (Hannum, 1998). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) starts with the establishment of the right to self-determination for all peoples (ICCPR, 1966, Art. 1). Just as the UDHR, it reiterates the right to life (Art. 6) and the right to freely leave and return to one's country (Art. 12). Finally, the ICCPR can be distinguished by its explicit emphasis on ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities' right to practise their cultural and religious traditions (Art. 27).

While it mentions minority rights, the ICCPR fails to acknowledge that all states are obliged to protect such rights. Article 27 starts with "in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist", implying that some countries do not contain minorities. The phrasing permits some states to deny the existence of minorities on their territory, naturally exempting themselves from the responsibility to protect the rights articulated in Article 27 of the ICCPR (Pejic, 1997). Another key human rights convention which can be applied to the Palestinian case is the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965). The ICERD bans all forms of racial discrimination (Art. 2). Article 3 of the ICERD explicitly criminalises racial segregation and apartheid, both of which the State of Israel has been accused of by Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2022). The aforementioned conventions outline basic and largely indisputable human rights which ground International Law. The following section will focus on other key conventions which outline rights that can be specific to women.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) discusses the importance of access to healthcare services in addition to provisions for maternity protection (CEDAW, 1979, Art. 12). Women, and especially mothers, are disproportionately affected by violations of the right to health and by extension, reproductive rights. The provisions for maternity protection include social benefits such as maternity leave, and other measures which aim to protect women by granting them unimpeded access to reproductive healthcare. CEDAW is often referred to as "the international bill of rights for women" due to its focus on principles of equality and non-discrimination (Saksena, 2007, p. 482). CEDAW was created as an attempt to frame human rights as a feminist issue. By employing CEDAW, this thesis puts women's rights at the forefront of the Palestinian issue.

The right to health is not unique to CEDAW: it was also mentioned in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with an insistence on prenatal and postnatal healthcare for mothers (CRC, 1989, Art. 24). It was again mentioned in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as a "special protection accorded to mothers before and after childbirth" (ICESCR, 1966, Art. 10). Finally, it was ascribed in the ICERD to emphasise the importance of non-discrimination in medical care provisions (ICERD, 1965, Art. 5).

These conventions all ground International Human Rights Law. They, however, do not specifically target occupied people as inherently having a unique relationship with the state occupying them. Therefore, they do not outline the responsibilities which an Occupying Power has towards the occupied people; self-determination being the only principle directly correlated with colonialism (ICCPR, 1966, Art. 1). These responsibilities, nonetheless,

are a key component of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (GC IV, 1949). The Geneva Convention clearly criminalises all forms of collective punishment (Art. 33). According to the Convention, an Occupying Power bears the responsibility of protecting the occupied people and preventing harm to these protected persons (Art. 27).

The Geneva Convention obliges the occupier to provide adequate necessities of life, like food and medical supplies to the population, in addition to ensuring the functioning of proper hospitals and healthcare services to not hinder life (Art. 55-56). It directly instructs colonial powers to create a well-functioning society, with adequate social and economic provisions (Arai, 2009). The law of occupation not only protects the occupied from physical harm and violence, but also guarantees their social and economic stability and even flourishing from the provisions they are entitled to receive from the occupier. In short, "the duties on the occupant are not merely of negative nature, but also of positive nature" (Arai, 2009, p. 116).

Violations of International Law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Having summarised the legal obligations on states with regards to human rights, women's rights, and occupation, I will now apply these legal frameworks to the case of the Palestinian people in the oPt. This section demonstrates Israel's lack of respect towards International Law in its occupation of the Palestinian people, contributing to the structural conditions that make resistance both necessary and meaningful. Gaza and the West Bank have been under military occupation by Israel since 1967. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2019), Israel's actions in the oPt are in violation of the law of occupation and the Occupying Power's core responsibilities (GC IV). Several Israeli policies in the oPt disproportionately affect Palestinian women.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously said: "Israel is not a state for all its citizens… [but rather] a nation-state for Jewish people and only them" (Amnesty International, 2022). In 2018, Israel passed a Basic Law stipulating that Jewish people are the only ones entitled to the right of self-determination in Israel, leaving out Palestinians and other minorities (ICCPR, Art. 1; Brandes, 2020). This Basic Law also encourages the idea of 'Jewish settlements', legalising what is otherwise perceived as an illegal practice by International Law (Imseis, 2003). This move has institutionalised apartheid, the system of oppression which has legitimised depriving Palestinians of citizenship and access to civil and political rights (ICERD, Art. 3; Amnesty International, 2022).

Currently, Palestinians in the oPt are denied freedom of movement (UDHR, Art. 13). The West Bank has become deeply fragmented after the construction of the Separation Wall, inhibiting Palestinians' freedom of movement and access to their own territory, according to UNSC Resolution 242 (UN, 1982). To maintain control, Israel constantly increases watch towers, checkpoints, and 'settler-only' roads (Dana, 2017). Checkpoints are daily points of passage where Palestinians are searched and often detained for hours (Amnesty International, 2022). As an important interface, checkpoints allow Israeli forces to inflict fear, humiliation, and shame onto Palestinians (Cooperman, 2021). Israeli soldiers have been accused, on several occasions, of committing sexual harassment in checkpoints (GC IV, Art. 27; Griffiths & Repo, 2021). Extensive reports have shown that women are strip searched by Israeli soldiers who forced them to take all their clothing off (Cooperman, 2021).

Israeli settlements have drastically increased in the West Bank. They are legalised by the Israeli High Court of Justice (Milner & Kedar, 2023). Settlements rely on the dispossession of Palestinians from their properties in areas which they mainly dominate (Cooperman, 2021). Palestinians in the West Bank are arbitrarily deprived of

their homes and lands (UDHR, Art. 17). The 2021 protests contested Israel's intention to replace the Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood with settlements (OCHA, 2021). Discrimination is also ubiquitous in the West Bank (ICERD, Art. 2). Palestinians endure violent attacks by settlers, with 2022 being "among deadliest years for Palestinians in the West Bank" (UDHR, Art. 3; UN, 2022). In addition, occasionally in Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, Israeli forces storm Al-Aqsa Mosque, beating worshippers who gather to pray (ICCPR, Art. 27; Amnesty International, 2023). Such practices, linked to apartheid, become institutionalised forms of oppression for Palestinians living in the oPt.

Moreover, Gazans' experience with occupation differs from that of Palestinians from the West Bank. Gazans face even stricter restrictions on freedom of movement (UDHR, Art. 13). Since 2007, Israel has built an isolation wall all around Gaza, trapping a population of 2.1 million and restricting the entry of goods as well as the exit of people (OCHA, 2022). An air, land and sea blockade has devastated the lives of Palestinians, perceived as a form of collective punishment by the UNHRC (GC IV, Art. 33; UNHRC, 2023). According to the UN, "unemployment levels in Gaza are amongst the highest in the world" (UDHR, Art. 22). A report by UNICEF (2019) revealed the chronic shortage of medication, medical supplies and facilities in the Gaza Strip due to the blockade.

Palestinian women in the oPt and especially in Gaza, suffer from a lack of provision of healthcare by Israel (GC IV, Art. 55-56; OCHA, 2022). Healthcare inequalities disproportionately affect women in the oPt due to their need for special medical attention during pregnancy, childbirth in addition to other general medical conditions (CEDAW, Art. 12; Bates el al., 2017). In fact, pregnant women in Gaza have reported having to walk for an hour to be able to reach a health facility (UNICEF, 2019).

Finally, since 1953, the Law of Return has obstructed Palestinians from the diaspora from visiting and residing in their homeland (ICCPR, Art. 12). This phenomenon has deeply fragmented the Palestinian population and identity (Jabareen, 2014). It defies the right of return to one's country (UDHR, 1948, Art. 13). By extension, the UN has strongly emphasised Palestinians' right of return under International Law (Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, 1978). This section highlights the human rights violations Palestinians in the oPt are subjected to. Many of these violations are central in the songs, such as the obstruction of return and the denial of self-determination. In any respect, these violations further illegalise the occupation and they push for calls for liberation in the oPt, which are transmitted through songs.

Discussion

By expressing their hope for freedom and liberation through music, Palestinian women are constantly challenging legal obstacles placed by the occupation. Not only are their lyrics directly in defiance of the systems of oppression imposed on them in the oPt, but the mere act of performing a song and spreading a message on a global scale is resistance. Palestinian women are disproportionately impacted by patriarchal structures in society, enforced by the occupation (Rought-Brooks et al., 2010). The conditions of life in which they are forced to survive are rendered difficult, and in times of war, unimaginable. Nevertheless, by practising *sumud*, Palestinians adapt to the hardships they endure, while using the little means at their disposal to delegitimize the occupation (Ryan, 2015).

When Palestinian women sing about their homeland, it is to mirror their entire group's sentiments. They contribute to the consolidation of a Palestinian national identity built on a shared traumatic history and ongoing struggle for liberation. The themes of resistance expressed are inherently intertwined. The songs convey the emotional and physical attachment of Palestinians to their land, justifying their intent to resist its colonisation.

The informalisation of politics has stimulated expression in more subtle and unconventional spheres. Music, being one of them, is a channel of diffusion of the ideas of the movement. Lyrics simplify what are otherwise politically dense messages allowing for their universalisation across space and time. On one hand, folkloric music, like the song 'Tell his Mother' (n.d.) is an example of the intergenerational transmission of political messages. It insists on upholding old Palestinian traditions, like big weddings, to send a message of resilience to the occupier. On the other hand, Nai Barghouti, an artist from the West Bank, currently stages performances from Kuwait to Geneva, according to her Instagram page, globalising the ideas of Palestinian resistance and liberation. The accessibility of the songs reinforces cultural heritage and traditions, also cementing the bond tying Palestinians to their homeland. In the age of digitalisation of art and music, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza can publish their songs online and more easily rise to fame beyond their territory.

Having said that, the singers which have featured in this thesis mostly come from the West Bank. Although women living in the West Bank face many structural obstacles as part of the apartheid system upheld by Israel, they are able to issue more travel permits than Palestinians living in Gaza. West Bank inhabitants face less structural obstacles and looser military control than in Gaza. Due to their ability to perform in big cities in their territory, but also worldwide, singers from the West Bank are able to grow their platforms of listeners faster than those in Gaza.

The main limitation which has complicated my ability to study creative resistance in Gaza and the West Bank was the lack of content issued from Gaza. Singing, and specifically having the means to publish music online and rise to fame, is nearly impossible for a Gazan living under a blockade. In 2013, a Palestinian male singer, Mohammed Assaf managed to convince the Israeli authorities to let him out of Gaza into Egypt to audition for the Arab version of American Idol, Arab Idol. He had to jump off the fence of the building in which the auditions were taking place and was nearly denied entry. He later won the contest, and became one of the only iconic singers to have come from Gaza (Brehony, 2018).

Assaf's story encapsulates the structural hurdles which a Gazan person, let alone a woman, would have to go through to achieve fame. Rahaf Shamaly, who sang 'Where Are the Millions' (2022), was not allowed to perform

on stages in Gaza, "simply because she is a woman" (Khoudary, 2019). As previously explained, the lack of data from the Gaza Strip can also be explained by Hamas' crackdown on musical activity on religious grounds, especially targeting women (Kanaaneh et al., 2013). This thesis' data is therefore unequally distributed between women from Gaza and the West Bank. However, the thesis attempted to address this gap by referring to several songs written by women in the West Bank in solidarity with Gaza, acting as spokespersons for their suffering. These songs strengthen the ideas of solidarity and Palestinian unity honoured in the lyrics.

Furthermore, the thesis remains limited in scope due to the time frame chosen. Although it reflects significant moments of Palestinian history, it does not consider data from one of its most pivotal moments. Since October 7th, Israel's siege and declaration of war on Gaza has resulted in the murder of more than 35,000 Palestinians (UN, 2024). This era has revived calls for liberation, not only on Palestinian soil but worldwide, as solidarity protests, boycotts, and student encampments expand across the globe (Gowayed, 2024).

Future research should focus on more contemporary themes of resistance, and how they evolved to incorporate resistance to the Israeli aggression on Gaza, a case of genocide which the ICJ has deemed "plausible" (OHCHR, 2024). Additionally, it should prioritise personal testimonies, gained through interviews, of women from Gaza and the West Bank as a substitute for the musical expression of resistance. Research must focus on narratives advanced by Palestinian women, as active agents of the resistance, rather than passive followers. By centring the voices of Palestinian women, many other often invisible minorities have not been the subject of this thesis. Research should honour the diverse Palestinian subordinate groups, such as Palestinian Christians or queer people, in order to fully grasp the different messages of resistance and their intersection with identity.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to uncover how Palestinian women use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Subsequently, it aimed to understand why this resistance emerged in the first place. To do so, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach to examine Israel's International Law violations in the oPt and their impacts on Palestinians and specifically women. The thesis concluded that the conditions of life imposed by the Occupying Power, Israel, on Palestinians in the oPt are considerably dire. Palestinians are denied basic human rights, such as freedom of movement, citizenship, and self-determination as well as most political and legal rights (HRW, 2019). Due to the unavailability of formal channels of political dissent, Palestinians resort to music to express resistance to the occupation.

The most common aspect of resistance underscored throughout the songs is strategic displays of resistance. In the Palestinian context, these are understood as the embodiment of resilience and strength despite hardship. These values, which are honoured by the songs, consist of key components of Palestinian identity. Hope was considered a strategic display of resistance, just as joy, strength, and unity.

The second theme which dominated the lyrics was the politicisation of 'Homeland', which provided the underlying demands of Palestinian resistance, ranging from the right of return to freedom and liberation. This theme demonstrated how music is used as an outlet to globalise the political messages behind the resistance movement. The final theme tied the first two together; attachment to Palestine is mobilized throughout the songs to convey emotional connection to, and love for, the land.

This thesis' interdisciplinarity is a significant asset. It portrays the mechanisms which lead to the emergence of a resistance movement. The Palestinian resistance movement did not arise spontaneously; rather, it is the result of a decades-long occupation built on violence, dispossession, and human rights abuses. Additionally, the thesis suggests that resistance is not monolithic. In this particular case, the use of songs is a demonstration of both peaceful as well as active resistance to an oppressive system. Music is more easily digestible as a means of expressing oneself. Unlike aggressive speeches, it can be welcomed by large audiences with open arms, but also memorised readily. Therefore, the importance of music, and more generally art, cannot be undermined as means of political expression.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix A: Song List

Song Title	Release Date	Artist	Artist's City of Origin
For You, my Homeland	2019	Abeer Sansour	Bethlehem, the West Bank
To Our Homeland	2022	Lina Sleibi	Bethlehem, the West Bank
The Holy City	2018	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Salute to Gaza	2019	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
As Long as I Have	2021	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Gaza	2021	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Jaffa — Everything has Changed	2021	Nour Freteikh	Nablus, the West Bank
I Love You, Palestine	2013	Lian Bazlamit	Ramallah, the West Bank
Returning	2021	Nai Barghouti	Ramallah, the West Bank
Tell his Mother	n.d.	This is an older folkloric song still performed by women during both weddings and funerals.	Gaza
Where Are the Millions	2022	Rafah Shamaly	Gaza

Appendix B: Codebook

The 3 Analytical Categories	Sub-themes	Textual Evidence
Strategic Displays of Resistance	Cultural symbols Dignity Hope Joy Resilience Strength Unity	"As long as there are Arabic words in my homeland and popular songs" "They bury martyrs every day, resilient in the face of all adversity with determination and pride" "Salute to the people resisting with dignity, offering us a lesson in the science of resilience" "Salute, salute [...] to the farmer of the land of the dawn with steady steps in spite of the soldiers" "We are the victors, stronger than the mountains, more than grains of sand"

'*Al-Watan*': The Politicisation of Homeland	Feminisation of Palestine Freedom Home Land Return Violent Struggle	"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Lift up your gates, give birth to freedom and justice" "We are returning to build our homeland, returning to open the gates, to cultivate, build and sing in Haifa, Akka and Lydd, in Nablus, Jaffa and Jenin" "The house is my house and the homes are my homes" "Do not worry, mother. Your children are returning" "Oh, home to the generous. A bride in your dress and you are the source of tenderness" "My words will remain: bread and a weapon in the hands of the revolutionaries"

Attachment to Palestine	Holiness Indigeneity Love Memory Natural symbols	"As long as I have the memory of a small library, a photograph of a deceased grandfather" "I would die for you" "I carried you between myself and my eyes" "As long as I have inches from my land, an olive, a lemon, a well and a small cactus tree"

Appendix C: Song Lyrics

1. "Jaffa — Everything has Changed" by Nour Freteikh from Nablus (2021)

A rock sleeping on the city's beach

Waking to the sound of roaming birds

When it saw me with my love it cheered And sent me a quiet breeze from its sea

Even the seagulls in its sky echoed:

Its whispers

Its smiles

Its breeze.

A high lemon blossom

Followed its people barefoot

The wood was running away

Stealing our stories

Our songs, our dances, the Dabkeh and the joy

The Ouja orchard

And our clear sky.

2. "As Long as I Have" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2021)

As long as I have inches from my land

An olive

A lemon

A well

And a small cactus tree

As long as I have the memory

Of a small library

The photograph of a deceased grandfather

And a wall

As long as there are Arabic words in my homeland

And popular songs

As long as I have my eyes

As long as I have my lips

And my hands

As long as I have myself

I declare it in the face of the enemies

I declare it a restless war

In the name of the free and honourable

Workers, students, poets

I declare it

As long as I have myself

And I will have myself

My words will remain

Bread and a weapon

In the hands of the revolutionaries.

3. "Gaza" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2021)

Inside the tin shacks

Near the sand and waves

Over the rocks and thorns

Between the dust and frenzy

The boy appeared, moulded With Henna and waves

Throwing his net into the sea

Bringing in fish and lanterns

Gaza is surrounded

With young men like the light

Throwing defeat behind them

Brother supporting brother

Beckoning your sea in the morning

Evening and night

Throwing over the wound its salt

And a sparrow with its wing

Wipes away its blood

Flutters over its wounds

Flying again

Oh wave within the sea

Bring me a candle

To light on the rocks

And dry away the tears.

4. "Salute to Gaza" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2019)

Salute to Gaza, salute, salute

Salute to all the sad eyes

Her tears overflowing with strength and pride

Salute to the people with wisdom and determination

Harvesting the Khuza'a plain

When repugnant monsters go to war

They bury martyrs everyday

Resilient in the face of all adversity with determination and pride

They learnt the lessons of history, that only iron can withstand iron

Salute to Gaza behind the borders

With patience and determination, erase the shackles

A child died under bombarded buildings

Of a suffering mother and a young man who wades

Fuelling his blood with force

And he presents above the eyes of the sky

And spread a curtain over the rubble

The people of Gaza shall lift the siege.

Salute, salute to the coast of Rafah

To Beit Lahiya and Deir al-Balah

To the orange fields in al-Maghazi

To the farmer of the land of the dawn

With steady steps in spite of the soldiers

To the fisherman who challenged the thunders

Salute to the people resisting with dignity

Offering us a lesson in the science of resilience.

5. "The Holy City" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2018)

Last night I had a vision,

A dream so strange and clear

I stood in old Jerusalem,

And heaven felt so near

I heard the children singing,

A song of peace they sang

A choir from every corner of

the world in answer rang

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

Lift up your gates, give birth

To freedom and justice

You, mother of peace on Earth

But then my dream turned sorrowful,

No distant echo rang

Hushed were the words of justice

The little children sang

The gates were closed, between the humble homes

Grey walls grew high

While shadows cast by weapons fell

Like crosses from the sky,

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

Lift up your gates, give birth

To freedom and justice

You, mother of peace on Earth

And once again the scene was changed

So unexpectedly

I saw the Holy City

Where everyone was free

I saw the rainbow's sign of old,

God's silent, peaceful guide

And all who would might enter,

And no one was denied

No need of checkpoints, walls or guards,

No need to flee or hide

It was the new Jerusalem

Where gates were open wide,

Where people from each faith on Earth

In peace lived side by side

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

Lift up your gates and sing,

To God, Lord of justice!

Receive what peace may bring!

6. "Returning" by Nai Barghouti from Ramallah (2021)

If Jerusalem asks about her children

Tell her they in Sheikh Jarrah

And if Gaza asks about her dawn

Tell her no darkness ever lasted

Do not sleep mother

Your children are wide awake

With open hearts and light in their eyes

Do not worry mother

Your children are returning

Carrying determination and love

Carrying the resilience of the land

A homeland, a girl and a boy

Carrying roses and basil

Gundelia, Jasmine and Gardenia

Joy, wedding veils and gowns

Carrying the forthcoming wedding

And the home that remains

They are shielding, shielding

We are returning to build our homeland

Returning to open the gates

To cultivate, build and sing

In Haifa, Akka and Lydd

In Nablus, Jaffa and Jenin

And to the home that remains

They are returning, returning.

7. "To Our Homeland" by Lina Sleibi from Bethlehem (2022)

For our homeland

And it is the one near the word of God

A ceiling of clouds

And it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns

The map of absence

And it is the one as tiny as a sesame seed

A heavenly horizon

And a hidden identity

And it is the one as poor as a grouse's wings (wild chicken)

Holy books

And an identity wound

And it is the one surrounded with torn hills

The ambush of a new past

And it is a prize of war

The freedom to die

From longing and burning

In its bloodiest night

Is a jewel that glimmers from the far upon the far

Illuminates what's outside of it

As for us

Inside it

We suffocate more

To our homeland.

8. "I Love You, Palestine" by Lian Bazlamit from Ramallah (2013)

I swear on the life of your basil

And your forgotten stones

That I would die for you

And that you live in me

I cry tears of separation

I am yearning for the day of return

I am your longing and I am the one longing

I am the cry of a wounded people

You are a laugh in our stolen time (we live in times where everything is stolen, dark, not ours and you are the light, the laugh in all of this darkness surrounding us)

Smile and say no to tears

Palestine, oh Palestine

You are yesterday and tomorrow

You are the present and the memory

I carried you between myself

And my eyes and that look

I love you, Palestine

I breathe you in with dignity

And lived you with warmth (we live in cold times and Palestine gives us unique warmth)

I wrote you in songs

With letters of loyalty.

9. "For You, my Homeland" by Abeer Sansour from Bethlehem (2019)

For you, my homeland

I sing my song

And my small heart

Flies far away

Asking around, searching for a beautiful homeland

In the Mahdi street [in Bethlehem]

Our small house

Is inhabited by the lilies, the flowers and their fragrance

My childhood dreams are in your arms, dear mother

And my grandmother is telling us the best of stories

Oh Bethlehem, [sending you] my kiss

You are the star of the sky

Peace is born in you

Oh, cradle of prophets

You are the spring of my homeland

Oh, home to the generous

A bride in your dress

And you are the source of tenderness.

10. "Where Are the Millions" by Rahaf Shamaly from Gaza (2022)

Where are the millions?

Where are the Arab people?

Where is the Arab anger?

Where is the Arab blood?

Where is the Arab dignity?

God makes us stronger and greater than the Children of Zion

Who strangle, kill, bury

I will not let my land go

My red blood cultivates the greenery with the flavour of lemons

The fire of revolutions is not priced

We are the victors,

Stronger than the mountains,

More than grains of sand.

11. "Tell his Mother" a folklore song from Gaza (n.d.)

Tell his mother to rejoice and celebrate

To spray the pillows with perfume and Henna

Oh, dear house [*family*] rejoice and built it [*a house, family*]

The wedding is ours and the bride and groom are celebrating.

The house is my house and the homes are my homes

We have been engaged, oh enemy die.

Oh, Mariam's father, do not be grumpy.

Wipe your face and give her the groom

Oh, Mariam's father, do not be greedy.

Money is finite but kin *nasab [marrying into a family*] is fruitful.