

ARTICLE

Harmonizing Narratives: Teaching Palestine/Israel through Music in the Post-October 7 Classroom

Oren Kroll-Zeldin

Abstract

This article argues that using Palestinian and Israeli music in the classroom fosters deeper, more personal engagement with Israeli and Palestinian societies. By listening to and analyzing music, students explore cultural and political complexities embedded in popular music while encountering Palestinian and Israeli societies as robust groups existing far beyond the boundaries of conflict, each with their own unique and flourishing modes of cultural production. This pedagogical approach uses music to examine how music reflects and challenges political identities, including the students' own ways of being in the world. It humanizes the conflict, connecting students to course material in relatable ways and highlighting emotional and cultural dimensions often overlooked in traditional texts. Ultimately, this pedagogy provides educators with tools to facilitate multi-narrative learning and critical thinking in an engaging, fun, and accessible way.

Keywords

music education; Palestine; Israel; popular culture and conflict

Introduction

I often imagine what it is like to be a university student today, walking down the corridor on the first day of the semester heading to the classroom. My sense from conversations with my students is that they generally have mixed feelings of anticipation and uncertainty. But I also wonder how might that feeling be different if the course they were headed to was focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a topic so rife with a polarizing campus discourse that the mixed feelings might be significantly enhanced?¹ I imagine that many students might be filled with apprehension in stepping into class where the weight of such a complex and deeply contested topic could be potentially overwhelming. Would their opinions be welcomed or challenged by their classmates or professor? Will they feel confident speaking in class, particularly in a moment of heightened scrutiny and uncertainty over what is acceptable speech in a classroom or a university campus?² University students today are surrounded by friends, family, and classmates talking about Palestine/Israel, with most conversations focused on Gaza. When students open TikTok or Instagram they are often overwhelmed by new posts about Palestine/Israel that they are trying to make sense of but often don't have enough background knowledge to really understand everything that they are hearing and seeing.³

Imagining myself as that student and thinking about what would excite me, I utilize a pedagogical tool to teaching Palestine/Israel that begins before the student even enters the classroom, using music as an inviting and educational medium to approach a challenging course topic.⁴ As my students approach the classroom, they encounter the sound of music floating into the hallways. The music is unfamiliar to most students, layered with rhythms and melodies that hopefully feel simultaneously distant and inviting. I hope that the sounds beckon them closer, stirring a curiosity that might overpower their apprehension. By the time students reach the doorway and enter the

- 1 Kenneth S. Stern, *The Conflict Over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate* (University of Toronto Press, 2020).
- 2 Joel Swanson, "The White House is Declaring War on Campus DEI—Except for Jews," *Forward*, last modified September 3, 2025, <https://forward.com/opinion/766378/donald-trump-antisemitism-campus/>.
- 3 Tamara Abu Laban, "The Role of TikTok in Disseminating the Palestinian Narrative During the War on Gaza from the Perspective of Palestinian University Students," *Advances in Journalism and Communication* 12, no. 3 (2024): 394–408.
- 4 Anthony M. Pellegrino and Christopher Dean Lee, *Let the Music Play!: Harnessing the Power of Music for the History and Social Studies Classrooms* (Information Age Publishing, 2012).

classroom I hope that their trepidation transforms into the spark of possibility, the hope of encountering not just facts and history, but the human stories behind them.

Now inside the classroom with the music fully audible, the sounds fill the usually awkward silence of the first day of class. Students are listening to music that carries stories of joy, loss, resilience, and connection. I welcome students and begin the session by asking the class to share their initial impressions of what they heard: What emotions did the music evoke? What might it reveal about the people and cultures from which it emerged? This moment is not just a first day icebreaker but is an entry point into my pedagogical approach that is repeated every single day of the semester when my class meets.⁵

In my teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I draw on music as a tool to humanize and contextualize the complexities of the region.⁶ I begin every single class session with either Palestinian or Israeli music playing on the classroom speakers as students enter the room. When class begins, I introduce the artists, discuss song lyrics, and explore their cultural significance, prompting students to consider questions about identity, narrative, power, and the everyday lived realities in Palestine/Israel. On some days we watch music videos, which adds a visual element to the exercise. These videos, which usually include English language subtitles, enable students to see the geographic and cultural landscape of the region and to help them recognize that behind the difficult subjects we address in class are ordinary human beings who have similar aspirations as we do.

This activity has numerous pedagogical goals. First, it sets a fun mood for our learning and encourages students to pay attention from the outset of class (and even before class starts!). Second, it encourages students to come to class on time because they do not want to miss the music or the discussion at the beginning of each class about the musicians and the musical genre, which students often reflect is one of their favorite parts of the class. Third, it gets students excited and interested in the course material by exposing them to elements of everyday life and popular culture specifically in regards to the

5 Jeffrey A. Mangram and Rachel L. Weber, "Incorporating Music into the Social Studies Classroom: A Qualitative Study of Secondary Social Studies Teachers," *The Journal of Social Studies Research* 36, no. 1 (2012): 3–21.

6 Kathleen M. Higgins, "Connecting Music to Ethics," in *Music, Business, and Peacebuilding*, ed. Constance Cook Glenn and Timothy L. Fort (Routledge, 2021), 44–64.

topic of the course, which inevitably helps students relate more personally to the course material.

By starting class with music, the students learn more than what is on the syllabus and are excited and motivated for the day's learning, thereby fulfilling some of my primary goals for my classes. Using music in the classroom increases both student motivation and achievement, thereby making it a valuable educational tool.⁷ As I incorporate music into the classroom, students are invited to engage with the popular culture and lived experiences of Palestinian and Jewish Israeli communities, fostering an ethnographic understanding that transcends political rhetoric and leaves students more open to understanding the complexities inherent in human conflicts.⁸ By engaging with both Palestinian and Israeli music, students begin to connect with the narratives of those living amid the conflict, not as abstract political figures but as individuals with rich cultural identities.⁹ Music therefore serves as a bridge, helping students navigate difficult conversations while fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the multi-narrative realities of the region, all while engaging students and building a more inclusive classroom community.

Teaching with Music

Teaching with music can be a powerful pedagogical tool, offering unique cognitive, emotional, and cultural benefits that engage students in deep and transformative learning experiences. Scholars across various disciplines have explored why music is an effective learning tool, providing educators with numerous reasons as to why teaching with music can enhance learning, increase retention, and make the classroom a more fun and engaging space for students. First, using music in the classroom engages multiple learning modalities, which is essential to increase the success of students with diverse learning needs.¹⁰ By engaging auditory and emotional learning music can be a way of making learning accessible to students who might not be as successful in retaining or learning information presented by more traditional

7 Susannah Cane, "Collaboration with Music: A Noteworthy Endeavor," *Music Educators Journal* 96, no. 1 (2009): 33–39.

8 Olivier Urbain, ed., *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonance in Geopolitics* (I.B. Tauris, 2008).

9 Benjamin Brinner, *Playing Across a Divide: Israeli-Palestinian Musical Encounters* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

10 Neil D. Fleming and Colleen Mills, "Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection," *To Improve the Academy* 11, no. 1 (1992): 137–155.

classroom means. Teaching with music caters to students who learn best from different types of modalities but also enhances overall classroom inclusivity among those who are both visual and auditory learners.¹¹

Second, music builds emotional and empathetic connections while facilitating cultural understanding.¹² The emotional resonance that music so often provides fosters empathy and helps students relate to the lived experiences of others in powerful ways.¹³ This is particularly central in the context of learning about groups in conflict because music humanizes the subject matter by linking abstract issues to personal stories and emotions in ways not always addressed by more normative academic literature or historical sources. Music can thus become a “dialogic space” that enables multiple viewpoints to emerge in inclusive yet complex ways.¹⁴ One of the central benefits of teaching with music therefore lies in its ability to humanize abstract and contentious issues such as seemingly intractable geopolitical conflicts. Philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum notes that the arts, including music, cultivate emotional intelligence and empathy, which are essential qualities that can help us grapple with conflict and other emotionally charged topics.¹⁵ But music also opens windows into multicultural spaces for students. This is valuable because according to Patricia Sheehan Campbell, teaching music from diverse cultures exposes students to global perspectives, which promotes empathy and a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity.¹⁶

Moreover, music’s ability to provoke emotional engagement makes it an effective tool for transformative learning. Noted sociologist Jack Mezirow argues that transformative learning occurs when students are prompted to question their assumptions and engage with new perspectives.¹⁷ Music, with

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- 11 Catharina Gous-Kemp, “The Creative Use of Music in Inclusive Education: Bringing Harmony to the Classroom,” *Education as Change* 18, no. 1 (2014): 191–206.
- 12 Eric Clarke, Tia DeNora, and Jonna Vuoskoski, “Music, Empathy, and Cultural Understanding,” *Physics of Life Reviews* 15 (2015): 61–88.
- 13 Michael Lovorn, “Folk in the History Classroom: Using the Music of the People to Teach Eras and Events,” *Social Education* 73, no. 4 (2009): 173–178.
- 14 Kathryn Marsh, “Music as Dialogic Space in the Promotion of Peace, Empathy, and Social Inclusion,” *International Journal of Community Music* 12, no. 3 (2019): 301–316.
- 15 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 16 Patricia Sheehan Campbell, *Teaching Music Globally: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 17 Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 1991).

its capacity to evoke deep emotional responses, can serve as a catalyst for this process, particularly in teaching about conflict. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, music provides students with a window into the lived experiences of individuals on many sides of the political and cultural divides, presenting these societies as rich and multifaceted rather than reducible to the political rhetoric of conflict. Music therefore serves as a cultural artifact, reflecting the values, struggles, and identities of its creators, those whose lives are intimately connected to everyday life in Israeli and Palestinian societies.¹⁸

Finally, music serves as a medium for promoting critical analysis, encouraging students to explore how cultural production reflects and shapes social realities. Analyzing song lyrics, musical styles, artist identities, and the socio-political context of the music challenges students to critically evaluate power, identity, politics, and resistance in alignment with multi-narrative learning, which seeks to present diverse perspectives on contentious issues.¹⁹ As Christopher Small emphasizes in his concept of “musicking,” engaging with music is an inherently relational act that situates learners within broader social, cultural, and political networks.²⁰ In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this relational approach is particularly salient. By analyzing the socio-political contexts of songs, students can critically examine how music functions as both a tool of resistance and a form of identity expression, ideally making it easier to understand the complexities of the material they are studying in the classroom. As Benjamin Brinner highlights in his seminal text on Palestinian and Israeli musicians, collaborative musical projects between these two groups not only bridge divides but also reveal the tensions, complexities, and potential failures inherent in such efforts, offering rich material for classroom discussion.²¹

Ultimately, incorporating music into the study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict aligns with multi-narrative pedagogy, which seeks to present diverse and often competing perspectives to foster critical thinking and empathy.²² James A. Banks advocates for an approach that situates students within the pluralistic realities of historical and contemporary issues, enabling them to

18 Brinner, *Playing Across a Divide*.

19 Zvi Bekerman and Michalinos Zembylas, *Teaching Contested Narratives: Identity, Memory and Reconciliation in Peace Education and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

20 Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

21 Brinner, *Playing Across a Divide*.

22 Robert I. Rothberg, ed., *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix* (Indiana University Press, 2006).

see beyond singular narratives.²³ Music, as a dynamic form of cultural expression, embodies these pluralities, allowing students to engage with the complexities of identity, power, and resistance. By combining music with reflective discussion and critical analysis, educators can create a classroom environment that not only humanizes the conflict but also equips students with the tools to navigate its complexities with sensitivity and intellectual rigor.

Case Studies: Musical Artists and Their Cultural Significance

As I provide musical examples that I use in the classroom it is important to note that my decision to alternate between Israeli and Palestinian musicians each class session in my pedagogical practice is not an attempt to suggest equality or parity, nor to imply that the power dynamics between the two communities are balanced in any way.²⁴ Instead, this approach is designed to expose students to a broad range of diverse perspectives and musical expressions from the region. By doing so, I aim to highlight the rich cultural landscapes and lived experiences of the people affected by the conflict, fostering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of its complexities using the musical artists themselves as a platform to discuss and elucidate larger issues of identity, power, narrative, politics, and culture.

While at times the music I play is random and has no real connection to the lesson of the day, other times, and more often than not, the musical selection is thematically connected to the topic of a particular class session. As such, I will give a number of examples, connecting the musical artist or song to the theme or issue that the song or artist illustrates. I will give a few examples in greater detail of how I use the music to connect to the topic of the day. And then in broader strokes I will give examples of what music I play to discuss various other topics. This is just a small sampling and is not an exhaustive list of the music I use during a semester.

Resistance

When the class focuses on various elements of Palestinian resistance movements we listen to DAM, the pioneering Palestinian hip hop group.²⁵

23 James A. Banks, *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*, 6th ed. (Routledge, 2016).

24 Nadim N. Rouhana, "Group Identity and Power Asymmetry in Reconciliation Processes: The Israeli-Palestinian Case," *Peace and Conflict* 10, no. 1 (2004): 33–52.

25 Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, "Hip Hop from '48 Palestine: Youth, Music,

DAM's cultural and political significance to Palestinian music and society cannot be understated. In addition to being the founders of the genre of Arabic rap more broadly, the intensely and overtly political nature of their music influenced subsequent Palestinian artists to articulate the political condition of their lives through the crafting of musical lyrics. The three original members of DAM were born in Lyd, a "mixed city" in Israel comprised of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. The fact that DAM are Palestinian citizens of Israel is deeply important to their music, as is discussed at great length in the documentary film they are featured in titled "Slingshot Hip Hop," which we watch in class. In particular we listen to their song "Min Erhabi" and dissect the lyrics, which say: "Who's the terrorist? I'm the terrorist? How am I the terrorist when I'm living in my homeland? Who's the terrorist? You're the terrorist. You've taken everything I own while I'm living in my homeland." Analyzing these lyrics brings us into a conversation about how we understand terrorism, violence, and various strategies of resistance. It also sparks conversations about how the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, thereby complexifying dominant understandings of terrorism and state violence. In order to emphasize the cultural significance of this song and to connect it to something students are most likely familiar with, I note that this song can be considered a Palestinian version of N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police." DAM's body of work is extremely rich for class discussions so I often play more of their songs. Sometimes I show the music video to the song "Born Here," which has lyrics in Hebrew and Arabic and I contextualize the song within the broader context of Palestinian hip hop.²⁶ I tell students that the members of DAM are all Palestinian citizens of Israel, which opens a conversation about the complexity of identity.

Since resistance in Palestinian communities is such a rich and significant topic, there is no shortage of music to bring into the classroom that relates to the issue.²⁷ For example, we listen to Rim Banna, a Palestinian singer who is known as "the voice of resistance," who released an album with that as the title. We also listen to two contemporary Palestinian artists with vastly different stories but who both reflect on resistance and Palestinian nationalism in powerful ways through music focused on the keffiyeh. First, we listen to Mohammad Assaf, the singer from Gaza who won the Arab Idol

and the Present/Absent," *Social Text* 30, no. 3 (2012): 1–26.

26 David A. McDonald, "Carrying Words Like Weapons: Hip-Hop and the Poetics of Palestinian Identities in Israel," *Israeli Studies in Musicology Online* 7, no. 2 (2009): 116–130.

27 Louis Brehony, *Palestinian Music in Exile: Voices of Resistance* (American University in Cairo Press, 2023).

competition in 2013.²⁸ In particular we watch the video of his performance of “Ali el Keffiyeh” from the Arab Idol final. This allows us to discuss not only the significance of the keffiyeh as a nationalist symbol but it also introduces students to the *dabke* musical style in addition to his inspiring personal story, which was dramatized in the film *The Idol* by Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad.²⁹ We also listen to Shadia Mansour’s song “El Keffiyeh Arabiyah” and discuss the historical context of what led to this song as well as analyze the Arabic lyrics she sings and the English lyrics sung by American rapper M-1 of Dead Prez.³⁰

The Diversity of Jewish Identity in Israel

I like to play music from the Idan Raichel Project on the second day of the semester in order to discuss the cultural mosaic of Israel’s diverse society. While I do usually play a Hebrew language song or two from the group, I also play multiple songs in Amharic to introduce the Ethiopian Israeli community to students. But playing this band enables students to complexify Jewish Israeli identity by showing them the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, in addition to the political diversity of Jewish Israeli society.³¹ This is only the introductory music to the complexity and diversity of Jewish Israeli identity. In addition to playing songs in Amharic by the Idan Raichel Project, we also listen to Cabra Casay and the incredibly fun and funky music of Gili Yallo, which students always love.

We also listen to a lot of music from Mizrahi artists which leads us to many different conversations. On the day when we discuss the Yemenite Babies Affair and other issues of intra-communal strife between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi communities we listen to the music of A-wa. The Yemenite Babies Affair refers to the disappearance and kidnapping of mostly Yemenite babies and children in the early years after the foundation of the State of Israel who were alleged to have then been given to Ashkenazi families.³² In addition to this controversial and disturbing episode of Israeli history, in class

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- 28 Louis Brehony, “Mohammed Assaf’s Victory Five Years on: Arabi Idol and the Zionist Colonization of Palestine,” *Arab Media and Society* 26 (2018): 19–29.
 - 29 *The Idol*, directed by Hany Abu-Assad (Adopt Films, 2015).
 - 30 Meghan Drury, “Counterorienting the War on Terror: Arab Hip Hop and Diasporic Resistance,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 29, no. 2 (2017): 1–11.
 - 31 Ilana Webster-Kogen, “Song Style as Strategy: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Citizenship in the Idan Raichel Project’s Ethiopian-Influenced Songs,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 23, no. 1 (2014): 27–48.
 - 32 Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal Conflict: The Yemenite Babies Affair* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

we discuss the systematic discrimination against Mizrahi communities in Israel, which is exactly what the music of A-Wa analyzes with a critical lens. Mizrahi Jews immigrated to the fledgling State of Israel expecting to be welcomed as part of the Jewish collective only to be treated by the Ashkenazi elite as inferior others undeserving of equal treatment.³³ In particular we watch the music videos for “Habib Galbi” and “Hana Mish Hu al Yeman,” which discusses the struggles that Yemenite Jews experienced when immigrating to Israel.³⁴ The lyrics of the bridge provides the most meaningful substance for conversation, analysis, and reflection: “I came to you fleeing / you saw me as primitive / I saw you as a last resort.” Since students love this music so much, I also play them music by Yemen Blues and Bint el Funk, which describes itself as “a pioneering groove band who has founded the genre Yemen Funk. Their style is based on a combination of funk with traditional Jewish Yemenite music.”³⁵

The Diversity of Palestinian Identity

Just as we listen to music to enhance exposure to the diversity and cultural mosaic of Jewish Israeli society, throughout the semester we listen to music that similarly addresses the vast religious, geographic, and cultural differences inherent in Palestinian society. Early in the semester we list to the band 47Soul, which is a contemporary Palestinian musical collective that blends traditional Arabic *dabke* dance music with modern electronica, hip hop, and reggae. 47Soul was formed by Palestinian musicians in Jordan who self-describe their music as “blending traditional Arabic instruments like the *arghul* and *mijwiz* with hip-hop, electronica, and R&B, and melding these with Dabke and other Shaa’bi roots music ... [to create] a unique sound that is both deeply rooted and innovative.”³⁶ Having formed in Jordan but with musicians currently residing in London and Palestine, the music of 47Soul is both in Arabic and English and further reinforces the fragmented nature of Palestinian society for students.

Early in the semester we also listen to the band Sabreen, a pioneering Palestinian musical project based in Jerusalem that expressed the political and social ideas of a new generation of Palestinians and is celebrated for

33 Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism From the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1–35.

34 Oded Erez and Nadeem Karkabi, “Sounding Arabic: Postvernacular Modes of Performing the Arabic Language in Popular Music by Israeli Jews,” *Popular Music* 38, no. 2 (2019): 298–316.

35 See Bint al Fink website, last updated 2026, www.bintelfunkmusic.com.

36 See 47Soul website, last updated 2025, www.47soul.com.

modernizing Palestinian music. Additionally, Sabreen created an NGO dedicated to Palestinian music and cultural development, including creating a music studio that became one of the most important recording locations for Palestinian musicians.³⁷ I often refer back to this recording studio and the Sabreen Association for Artistic Development at other points in the semester when we listen to music that was recorded in the studio. Kamilya Jubran, a Palestinian Christian woman, was the lead singer in Sabreen who has also had an illustrious solo career. Listening to her music is an avenue to discuss the Christian community in Palestine, which usually piques the interest of the students at the Jesuit Catholic university where I teach. One of the musical groups that recorded at Sabreen Studios is Apo and the Apostles, a fun folk-rock group from the Armenian community in Jerusalem. Although the music is intentionally apolitical, it's fun and uplifting sound is a great way to expose students to the Armenian presence in Palestine, which dates back to the fourth century. We also listen to TootArd, a Syrian Druze band from the village of Majdal Shams, that combines a mix of reggae, Toareg blues, and psychedelic rock. In their song "Laissez Passer," they reflect on the political condition of Druze Syrians living in Israel, a community most students know nothing about. Finally, we always listen to the music of Bashar Murad as an avenue to discuss queerness and masculinity in Palestinian society. Murad, the son of Sabreen founder Said Murad, reflects on his queer identity in his music, and students are most intrigued by his song "Ana Zalameh," which they generally find simultaneously inspiring and challenging.

Destruction of the Other

In class we also listen to music that reflects the deep-seated animosities that fuel and perpetuate the ongoing conflict. The two main songs I use to illustrate this point are "Udrub Udrub Tel Aviv" by Palestinian artists Shadi Al-Bourini and Qassem Al-Najjar and "Harbu Darbu" by Jewish Israeli singers Stilla and Ness. Both songs, with their aggressive lyrics and calls for destruction, exemplify how popular music can serve as a vehicle for nationalist fervor, reinforcing a cycle of violence and mutual demonization and destruction. These songs use music as a medium to express deeply entrenched hostility, reflecting the intensity of nationalist sentiment and the desire to see the "enemy" crushed. "Udrub Udrub Tel Aviv" (Arabic for "Strike, Strike Tel Aviv") is a pro armed resistance song that celebrates attacks on Israel, particularly missile strikes on Tel Aviv. The lyrics glorify

37 Sabreen Association for Artistic Development website, <https://sabreen.org/>.

violence against Jewish Israelis, framing it as a form of justified retaliation against oppression. The song uses intense language to mobilize Palestinian pride in resistance, reinforcing the narrative of armed struggle as a legitimate and necessary response to Israeli policies of occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. “Harbu Darbu” (loosely translated as “Fight and Strike”) takes a similarly aggressive stance from the Jewish Israeli perspective. The song promotes the idea of Israeli military dominance and power, encouraging genocidal violence against Palestinians. With its violently militaristic tone, the song refers to Palestinians as “a bunch of fucking mice coming out of the tunnels” and “children of Amalek,” thus portraying Palestinians as enemies who must be defeated through genocidal force. By referring to Palestinians as mice and by referencing the Biblical directive to commit genocide on Amalekites, Stilla and Ness articulate with venom the ways that Israeli culture dehumanizes Palestinians and justifies the destruction of Palestinian society. Both songs, in their own ways, reflect how cultural expression can be weaponized to sustain cycles of violence. Instead of promoting reconciliation, they reinforce the idea that the only path forward is through destruction of the other side, thus reproducing the notion that this conflict is a zero-sum game where only one group can be victorious, and that victory will only come through violent domination and destruction. This dynamic illustrates how deeply ingrained hostility is in the region, shaping and reinforcing popular political ideologies through music and media.

Collaborative Projects

I am also committed to playing music that serves as a counterpoint to the hyper nationalist antagonism we so often discuss in the class in order to demonstrate how collaborative music-making can bridge divides between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. Though there are many examples of this, I often focus on the rap duo DUGRI, David Broza’s collaborative album *East Jerusalem West Jerusalem*, and the music of the Jerusalem Youth Chorus. DUGRI, a hip-hop duo featuring Palestinian rapper Sameh Zakout and Israeli rapper Ori Shochat, blends Arabic and Hebrew lyrics to promote direct, honest dialogue about life under conflict. Broza’s album, recorded in East Jerusalem with Israeli and Palestinian musicians, embraces the power of cross-cultural collaboration to foster understanding. Similarly, the Jerusalem Youth Chorus, made up of Jewish and Palestinian teens, uses choral music to create a shared space for dialogue, proving that artistic expression can be a

force for peace in a deeply fractured society.³⁸ With the Jerusalem Youth Chorus, I often play the music video for the song “Home” as it is an opportunity to think about Jerusalem as a shared homeland for both national groups. With DUGRI, I like showing them the video to “Munfas: Let’s Talk Straight Number 2” because it includes the lyrics “I can’t breathe.” Students are very quickly and easily able to make the connections between the song and Eric Garner’s fateful last words which have become a slogan in the Movement for Black Lives.³⁹ Making these types of connections illustrate why music is a valuable tool—as students can draw the connections between the conflict they are studying and the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they live.

I want to note that I also use these musical selections to complexify the idea of coexistence and to introduce students to the idea of co-resistance.⁴⁰ While these artists exemplify coexistence through music, they can be critiqued for failing to fully acknowledge or challenge the structural imbalance of power between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. These projects emphasize dialogue and shared artistic expression but often sidestep deeper questions of occupation, dispossession, and asymmetry in political power. By failing to address the dynamics of power inherent to these musical collaborations, they risk ameliorating rather than dismantling oppressive structures, offering feel-good narratives of peace that do not directly confront the realities of systemic violence and Israeli state power. While meaningful in fostering relationships, such initiatives can inadvertently reinforce the status quo by suggesting that mutual understanding alone is sufficient for change, rather than collective struggle against injustice. And yet, they are valuable pedagogical tools to introduce complicated topics to students in the classroom, all of which becomes central to our class conversations as a direct result of the music.

Other Music

I’d like to also highlight a few other pieces of music I use in the classroom that don’t fit neatly into these themes but nonetheless serve a valuable pedagogical purpose. In one class students are assigned Mahmoud Darwish’s

38 Shoshana Gottesman, “Hear and Be Heard: Learning With and Through Music as a Dialogical Space for Co-Creating Youth Led Conflict Transformation,” *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* 17, no. 1 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v17i1.857>.

39 Matt Taibbi, *I Can’t Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street* (Random House, 2018).

40 Oren Kroll-Zeldin, “Co-Resistance Activism in Palestine/Israel After October 7,” *Peace Review* 37, no. 1 (2025): 13–19.

poem “Passport.”⁴¹ On the day when we discuss that poem, we listen to Marcel Khalifa’s musical interpretation of that song. When we watch the documentary film *5 Broken Cameras* we listen to the music of Le Trio Joubran, which is the group whose music is on the soundtrack for the film.⁴² This also gives us the chance to discuss the fragmentation of Palestinian society since each of the three brothers who play in the trio live in different places—Nazareth (Israel), Ramallah (Palestine), and Paris (diaspora). When we discuss LGBTQIA+ issues, we listen to the music of Sarit Hadad. While we listen to some of her more popular songs of the Mizrahi music genre, we also listen to the song “A Love Like Ours,” a song co-written by her partner in which she comes out as queer. Although many Israeli stars have publicly come out as queer, Hadad’s revelation broke down barriers in the Mizrahi musical community and opened a pathway for others to come out. We listen to plenty of other Palestinian women such as Sanaa Moussa, Nai Barghouti, Lina Makoul, Dalal Abu Amneh, and Amal Murkus in addition to contemporary Jewish Israeli women singers like Alma Zohar, Efrat Gosh, Noa Kirel, Eden Ben Zaken, and perhaps most interestingly Netta Barzilai. I say this about Netta Barzilai because we listen to her winning song from Eurovision, talk about the competition, address questions like why Israel performs in Eurovision (and also competes in UEFA instead of the Asian Football Federation), and then we also discuss the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement through the conversation about Eurovision.⁴³

One final example I think is pedagogically interesting and relevant is that sometimes I go off script from alternating between Israeli and Palestinian musicians if there is other music that illustrates a particular theme we are discussing. The most interesting example of this, in my opinion, is that we listen to Bob Marley’s song “War” when we read Frantz Fanon and discuss structural violence, power, and armed resistance. The lyrics of this song were written by former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in a speech he delivered to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1963 that illustrate in similar ways one of the key messages from Fanon’s chapter “On Violence” in *Wretched of the Earth*.⁴⁴

41 Mahmoud Darwish, “Passport,” *Languages of the Middle East*, Yale University, April 28, 2024, <https://languagesofthemiddleeast.yale.edu/passport-a-poem-by-mahmoud-darwish/>.

42 *5 Broken Cameras*, directed by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi (Kino Lorber 2011).

43 Galia Press-Barnathan and Naama Lutz, “The Multilevel Identity Politics of the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 3 (2020): 729–748.

44 Haile Selassie, “Address to the United Nations (1963),” delivered to the United Nations General Assembly, October, 4, 1963; Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963).

Impact on Students: Transformative Learning

Integrating music into the classroom has been a powerful tool for me to facilitate transformative learning among my students. In reading course evaluations, students frequently cite listening to music and learning through the musical artists as one of their favorite and most impactful parts of the course. By introducing music from Jewish Israeli and Palestinian artists, I intentionally create opportunities for students to not only learn about the political and cultural dimensions of the conflict but also to reflect on their own identities and preconceptions through a medium they are already most likely predisposed to enjoy.

Student verbal and written reflections often illustrate how music personalizes abstract ideas and makes them more tangible and easier to comprehend. For example, after listening to DAM's "Who's the Terrorist?," one student expressed a newfound awareness of how narratives of power and resistance are constructed and contested in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This student had never previously considered the idea that Palestinians might consider the actions of the Israeli military to be an example of terrorism, thus challenging their understanding of the violence inherent in this conflict. When we discussed in class that this song was influenced by hip hop artists reflecting on police violence in Black communities in the U.S. this student expressed a shift in the way they approached violence perpetrated by state actors—whether or not that was police officers in the United States or Israeli soldiers. Similarly, exploring Mohammed Assaf's music and watching his winning performance of "Ali el Keffiyeh" on Arab Idol prompted a student in class discussions to connect the broader historical and political struggles to the lived realities of individuals within these communities. This student expressed shock at how difficult it is for people in Gaza to leave the territory under the Israeli siege and blockade but also noted how Assaf's persistence and success were signals of hope for the Palestinian people in Gaza amid constant bombardment. Connecting a song to the particular lesson or theme we are discussing in the classroom is thus a valuable pedagogy for learning about Palestine/Israel because it enhances engagement, deepens understanding, and fosters emotional connection to the material. Music is a powerful pedagogical tool that can contextualize historical, cultural, or political themes, making abstract concepts more concrete and relatable to students.

This approach also challenges students to critically examine their own positionalities and assumptions. For instance, some students may initially struggle with understanding how music can serve as a form of resistance or

as a political tool. By encouraging them to analyze song lyrics, explore cultural contexts, and reflect on their emotional reactions, the classroom becomes a space for open dialogue alongside personal political growth. For example, one student who came into my classroom last semester as an ardent supporter of Israel, noted at the end of the semester that listening to DAM's music and analyzing their song lyrics helped him understand the power and significance of music as a tool of cultural expression and nonviolent resistance for some Palestinian artists, which altered much of his understanding of Palestinian identity. Before the class he had mostly been exposed to Palestinians as terrorists, but the things he learned in class, and the music of DAM in particular, challenged him to see that Palestinians also use methods of nonviolent resistance, such as music, to challenge and contest Israeli power. Similarly, one Palestinian student said that she appreciated listening to and learning about Jewish Israeli artists such as the hip hop group Hadag Nahash and anarchist punk band Katzon Latevach because it exposed her to the fact that there are Israeli Jews whose anti-apartheid politics align with her own and they even sometimes express these politics in their music. As one student noted in an assignment after analyzing David Broza's collaborative album *East Jerusalem/West Jerusalem*, "I realized how music can simultaneously highlight the divisions in society and offer a way to bridge them." These moments of realization exemplify the transformative potential of using music as a pedagogical tool.

Despite its successes, this approach is not without challenges. Some students have resisted engaging with music that contrasts sharply with their existing beliefs or worldviews, particularly in the emotionally charged context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, these moments of discomfort can also be opportunities for growth. These "disorienting dilemmas," situations where students encounter perspectives that challenge their assumptions, are essential for transformative learning.⁴⁵ By guiding students through these moments with care and open-ended questioning, we as educators can foster critical reflection, encourage empathy, and develop the capacity for critical thought in the classroom.

Ultimately, using music in the classroom not only enriches students' understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also cultivates their ability to connect emotionally and critically with the material we cover in class. It transforms the classroom into a dynamic space where students explore complex topics in a fun and engaging way, leaving them with tools to navigate and analyze conflicts beyond the academic setting. This pedagogy

45 Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*.

underscores the potential of music to humanize narratives and foster critical thinking, aligning with bell hooks’ call for a transformative education that connects the personal with the academic and political.⁴⁶ It connects students to course material in a relatable way, which not only humanizes the narratives but also enables students to explore the emotional and cultural dimensions that traditional academic texts often overlook. This music-centered approach both enriches students’ understanding of the conflict and offers a humanizing perspective, showcasing societies beyond the conflict’s boundaries. Overall, music provides educators with tools to facilitate multi-narrative dialogue and critical thinking in the classroom in a fun and engaging way that stays with students long after the semester ends.

Oren Kroll-Zeldin is the Anne and Nick Germanacos Associate Professor in Contemporary Jewish Studies at the University of San Francisco where is also the Assistant Director of the Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice. He is the author of *Unsettled: American Jews and the Movement for Justice in Palestine*.



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46 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994).