



«Sea Chant», deals with the life of the Palestinian fishermen before 1948, and their role in the struggle after the occupation. Life along Palestine's coast is one of four areas of the popular culture on which *Al Ard* has concentrated in its works. For the purpose of illuminating the Palestinian culture in detail, the group defined four areas: the village, the city, the desert (bedouin culture) and the coast. Covering all of Palestine in cultural terms, *Al Ard* has, through songs and dance, given expression to the village woman, the fisherman, the camp child, the old man who is still waiting to return to his home in Haifa, the fedai (freedom fighter) and all the Palestinian people - their pain and their hopes.

*Al Ard* has gained popularity because, as Abu Imad explained, it «adheres to the issues relevant to the masses, and dares to present them with courage.» The group has always conveyed a clear political message to its audiences, based on belief in mobilizing the masses. One example is their song against the Amman accord with the Jordanian regime, and against relations with reactionary regimes. One verse goes as follows:

*He who surrenders is not one of us.  
It is the Palestinian gun that speaks  
for us...  
Freedom must be taken, it will not  
be given...*

Describing the first time he watched *Al Ard* perform, Ahmed, eighteen years old and now a dancer in the group, said, «Their performance really touched my heart.» Ahmed had lived with his family in Egypt for many years, far from the arena of Palestinian struggle. He saw *Al Ard* while visiting Yarmouk camp in 1985, and today he tells that «I felt very close to home.» He joined the group the same year.

## HERITAGE COMMITTEE

*Al Ard* has formed a committee for collecting Palestinian heritage, which searches for old poems, songs and stories. The committee's main resource is elderly Palestinians. Abu Imad says, «The old people have committed a great deal to memory. By going back to them, we ensure the authenticity of the culture.» Members of the committee visit Palestinian camps, meeting with people to gather information about traditions and costumes in different parts of Palestine. All the material

gathered is stored in an archive for future reference.

There is also an educational committee which is charged with keeping in contact with progressive nationalist Palestinian and Arab writers and poets who sometimes contribute to *Al Ard*'s work.

The *Al Ard* 'family' believes that the Palestinian Expressive Artists Union should be more active in consolidating the role of cultural groups and enlisting more Palestinian artists from all over the world to contribute to protecting and developing the Palestinian culture. «Our revolution is not only with bullets,» says Abu Imad, «It's media and bullets.» Pointing to the need for the union to do more to expose Zionist theft of the Palestinian heritage, he tells how he saw «with my own eyes, the urghoul on display in European museums, labeled as an Israeli instrument.» He reminded that the stewardesses on El Al wear the Palestinian national dress as if it were Israeli heritage.

Abu Imad also spoke of the importance of the international allies of the Palestinian revolution supporting efforts to protect the Palestinian civilization and spread its cultural heritage. This can be by inviting folklore groups to perform, or offering Palestinian artists and musicians opportunities to study.

## PERFORMANCES ABROAD

Besides performing in Syria and Lebanon, and London as mentioned, *Al Ard* visited Libya in 1985, to perform in the September 1st celebration of the Libyan revolution. The same year, the group participated in the World Youth Festival in Moscow. In 1986, *Al Ard* was invited to the United Arab Emirates by the Department of Culture. The group toured the major towns of the UAE where it was enthusiastically received by citizens and the resident Palestinians. Sumayeh says, «People rushed to talk to us after each performance. They looked like they had yearned for their homeland.»

*Al Ard* has produced four cassette tapes: «The Political Song», «*Al Ard*», «Folklore Selections» and «Sabra»; in addition, there is a video tape of the group's performance in the UAE. ●