

*Bank Palestinian*. New York: Adama Books.

Songs for Peace and Justice in the Middle East. 1985. *Broadside: The National Topical Song Magazine*. February(159).

### *SUGGESTED LISTENING*

*Palestine Lives! Songs from the Struggle of the People of Palestine*. Paredon P 1022.

Sara Alexander. *Peace, Shalom, Salam, Paix*. Sapem Sap 212.

## SILENCE AS PROTEST

*Silence*. Not all societies have protest songs. Some use silence. Silence doesn't express much unless everyone *else* is making noise. But there are some situations (singing a national anthem, a school song, a required chorus) when silence can be a statement of opposition. In some societies silence is more elaborately used.

Among the Suyá Indians of central Brazil, dissatisfaction was often expressed by non-participation. Living among them for two years, I never heard a lullaby or a work song, much less a protest song. Even direct verbal confrontation was relatively rare — anger was expressed through silence. All music was ceremonial; all song texts were said to be “revealed” rather than composed by human beings. Complete community participation in ceremonies was considered “beautiful” and good. But if a person was angry (and anger was sometimes related to politics) he could sing along without enthusiasm (a weak but public form of protest), go out fishing when everyone else was singing (a stronger form of protest), or sit silently and refuse to sing at all (a strong public declaration of anger). Each of these attitudes would be noticed and mentioned. Silence was protest in this society where music itself was only used as a statement of community.

## SINGING AN OLD SONG IN NEW CIRCUMSTANCES

Members of a social group engaged in political struggle sometimes perform traditional songs without changing them at all — neither lyrics nor music refer directly to their struggle. It is rather the larger context of the performance that lends political significance to the event and makes the unaltered traditional music a music of struggle. Many American Indian communities maintain traditional musical styles in spite of intense political and cultural pressures. Few if any protest song movements grow out of their traditional musical forms. Instead the songs are sung as they have been. Performing traditional music and speaking local languages not only recalls a past when that was normal, but can be a strong statement that the present situation is wrong and that the future should embody continuities from the past in these and other ways.

Unaltered traditions performed in situations of very severe oppression attest that simply maintaining an old tradition is itself part of a larger struggle for survival. To many North and South American Indian communities, whose social, political, and religious institutions have been suppressed for centuries, the musical performances have complex meanings. But to people outside the society the message is often, “we continue to survive” and “we are not completely members of the surrounding society.”