

Article

Rerooted and Reimagined: Dance, Palestinian Women, and the Reclamation of Urban Spaces

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Abstract: Manar Hasan employs the term “memoricide” to describe the systematic eradication of Palestinian society from modern memory, a process, she points out, that occurred not only through the destruction of its major cities, but also through the erasure from public consciousness the inhabitants of those cities, and specifically the Palestinian women who once played highly visible, integral roles within them. This paper enters into conversation with Hasan’s argument in its exploration of the work of Palestinian choreographer Shaden Abu Elasal, focusing on dances performed in urban spaces—locations from which she draws historical and creative inspiration to imbue her choreography with layers of meaning. I show how through her choreography, Abu Elasal reroots and uproots herself from the place in the very same acts of dance. She resurrects both the city and the women, revealing the obscured and retrieving the forgotten. I argue, then, that in staging dances in what Marc Augé terms “anthropological places” in Israel/Palestine, locations saturated with historical and conceptual significance, Abu Elasal both deepens her roots to the land, *her* land, and rises anew from it, freeing herself of its heavy shackles. Moreover, by reintroducing specifically Palestinian women dancers as elements of the “flesh and stone” of Israel/Palestine, spaces rife with histories of trauma, dominated by patriarchy and a Zionist ideology that privileges Jewishness and whiteness, Abu Elasal excavates a forgotten past, negotiates a restrictive present, and shapes a future for herself and her community. The paper brings together the ideas of *anthropological space*, which recognizes the identity of place as not merely physical but comprised of the breadth of human activity (symbolism, history, imagination, vision) that has taken and is taking place in it; and dance’s power to inspire a sense of *losing oneself* or *transcending* the existing, tangible world. In both ideas, consciousness and the material, stone and body, entwine and shape one another in the ongoing process of (re)forming identity and reclaiming history.

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A battle fought yesterday over the promises of emancipation and the illusions and disillusion of history continues today on aesthetic terrain.

(Jacques Rancière)¹

Introduction

“Reality is stronger than anything. The concrete reality, the *place* and all its particulars. This is why I always turn to the actual, live place for inspiration. Our reality is so charged that you don’t need to think much, it’s all there. You just need to see it.” (Shaden Abu Elasal, conversation with author, 12 December 2019)

Palestinian contemporary choreographer Abu Elasal’s fascination with places leads me into an exploration of dance, place, memory and history. Her site-based art performed in urban spaces—locations she employs as inspiration and historical simulation to imbue her choreography with layers of meaning—is the focus of this article. I follow her footsteps through narrow alleyways, across stone-paved paths, steep staircases and rusted gateways in a quest to trace the ties entwining bodies and spaces in the course of creating and

experiencing dance. My inquiry pays close attention to *matter*, in this case, human–feminine–dancing bodies, and the stone, cement, and steel with which these bodies engage; and to *movement*, women’s expressive movement on, with, and through constructed environments. I also look at the movement of time and the sense of its flow and ruptures in the construction of (hi)stories in dance.

My reading and analysis of Abu Elasal’s work are founded on and part of a wider anthropological study I conducted between 2013 and 2017 with (mostly) women Palestinian dance teachers and choreographers in Israel,² one of whom is Abu Elasal. She was born and raised in the city of Nazareth, where she continues to live, teach, choreograph, and curate dance performances to this day. In the years following my formal research, I continued to attend her group’s performances in Nazareth, Jaffa, and Tel Aviv, particularly intrigued by the ways she worked with urban public spaces, and the ways she adapted her work from one location to another. During 2020, with the pandemic creating unexpected time and space to actualize a broader vision, she founded her own company, the first professional contemporary dance company in the Arab community in Israel. In December of 2019 and in March, 2021, I conducted two additional, formal interviews with her in her home town of Nazareth,³ diving more deeply into topics only briefly touched upon previously, into her interest in and perceptions of spaces and places, and the ways she choreographs dialogs with these environments. This article is the outcome of this long, still unfolding, inquiry.

In examining matter and movement in Abu Elasal’s works set in what Marc Augé (1995) terms “anthropological places” in Israel/Palestine, locations saturated with historical and conceptual significance, I ask about the interweaving of bodies and places in processes of creating dance, identity, and history. As further context for this exploration, I embrace Manar Hasan’s term “memoricide” (2019), which she employed to describe the systematic eradication of Palestinian society from modern memory; a process, she points out, that occurred not only through the destruction of its major cities, but also through the erasure from public consciousness the inhabitants of those cities, and specifically the Palestinian *women* who once played highly visible, integral roles within them. This effacement, Hasan argues, led to the distorted notion that Palestinian society has always been rural, primitive, and sparse, devoid of substantive presence or of characteristics of urbanization, feminization, or modernization. Looking through this lens at urban choreographies by a woman Palestinian artist, then, becomes particularly intriguing: both the city and women are at the front of the conceptual stage here, and with them are notions of history, identity, erasure, and denial, but also return, repair, and re-envisioning. When zooming in, this scene invites asking: how do bodies-of-subjects and places shape and reshape one another in processes of making and performing dance? What influence might dance have on perceptions of a place? How might dance generate new ideas of a place? Tell new stories of it? Re-assign identity to it? How do places themselves determine choreography, reveal the aesthetic, as Abu Elasal suggests above?

Abu Elasal’s work is a fertile terrain for exploring these questions, I contend, because of her unique way of perceiving places and spaces, and therefore of engaging with them. Bodies and places to her are intimately interrelated and interconnected: “I see my body exactly as I see a place,” she told me, “a place *is* a body, and when I come to a place I look for the ways these two bodies may talk to each other, may lead a life together.”⁴ Her frequent use of the term “tissues” to describe a place’s substance offers further insight into this perceived affinity and interrelatedness: the place had “tissues of memory” she had to face; what caught her attention was the life that had “become the tissue of the place.”⁵ Invoking a *live* matter, dependent upon exchange with other substances for survival, these “tissues,” to Abu Elasal, render spaces and the bodies that inhabit them animated, ever-changing, multi-layered entities that intertwine, and ignite the artistic imagination.

With these conceptual frameworks in mind, I return to anthropological places in Israel/Palestine, spaces rife with histories of trauma, dominated by patriarchy and a Zionist ideology that privileges Jewishness and whiteness. I argue that in staging dances in these spaces, and by choreographing intimate, fleshy encounters with them, Abu Elasal

both deepens her roots to the land, *her* land, and rises anew from it, freeing herself of its heavy shackles. Moreover, by reintroducing specifically Palestinian women dancers as elements of the “flesh and stone” of urban spaces, Abu Elasal excavates a forgotten past, negotiates a restrictive present, and shapes a future for herself and her community. Thus, the aesthetic forms and experiences she composes “create situations apt to modify our gazes and our attitudes with respect to th[e] collective environment” (Rancière 2009, p. 21).

Deepening roots to the land resonates with the Palestinian cultural notion of *sumud* (steadfastness—particularly in the context of holding onto or being tied to one’s land—see Shehadeh 1984), a major theme in the ideology of Palestinian indigenism and politics of resistance.⁶ In the realm of performance, this ideology is commonly expressed and embodied through *dabke*, the folkdance that through its intricate steps, hops, and stomps (establishing accentuated contact with the ground) became a marker of Palestinian nationalism, a way of expressing identity and belonging, and a prominent source for contemporary choreography in the West Bank (Kaschl 2003; Rowe 2010, 2011, 2016; Van Aken 2006; Martin 2016). Though Abu Elasal’s work stems from and engages with very different dance traditions and aesthetics, an essential inspiration for her work is, nevertheless, a deep emotional and intellectual commitment to honoring the connectedness of (wo)man to place, thus her choreography can be read as an act of *sumud*. For Palestinians in Israel/Palestine, rising anew from the land is, I argue, both the essence and outcome of dance in these anthropological places, as it affords both holding onto and breaking away from a homeland burdened, at times, by an unbearable weight.

Wounded Places and Pasts, Performance and Revision

Artistic engagement with places and their violent, ruptured (hi)stories, creating novel ways of seeing, sensing, and imagining these spaces and narratives, as I argue Abu Elasal does, has been extensively documented and theorized in scholarly literature.⁷ Within these accounts, performances in contested, traumatized sites have been understood as constituting part of the place’s memoryscape (Lee 2017)—“its geographical dimensions of cultural memory” (Ibid, p. 72)—and as playing a significant role in contesting, challenging, and refuting dominant representations of place and past by creatively (re)shaping and reconstructing these images (Lee 2017; Gómez-Barris 2009; Carrico 2020; Hochberg 2015; Hirsch 2019). I continue this line of thought and examine it in the context of Palestinians in Israel, where the past Palestinians witnessed and collectively experienced is to this day denied and silenced (Rouhana and Sabagh-Khoury 2017; Yiftachel 2021; Benvenisti 2002); where hostility, dispossession and intimidation are conditions that Palestinians still endure; and where they are subjected to institutionalized inequality and (legally structured) discrimination (Rouhana 2017; Rouhana and Sabagh-Khoury 2015; Yiftachel 2021). In the past few decades, however, the Palestinian society in Israel has also become characterized by the remarkable growth of both an educated middle class (Jamal 2017; Reches 2014), and women artists.⁸ In this context, Abu Elasal’s art may be conceptualized as part of a wider process taking place in the Palestinian community in Israel since the mid-1990s, a process Rouhana and Sabagh-Khoury (2017) described as a “return of history”, in which “a dormant past is reconstituted and becomes a constitutive force in present collective consciousness and in envisioning the political future” (Ibid, p. 394). Dance in this process affords women a nonverbal means of expression and experience that breaks free from the chains (and risks) of language, as “the vibrations of history” (Lee 2017, p. 76) that resonate through stone and mortar are absorbed into the bodies of dancers and viewers. Yet dance, by its very nature of dynamic, vigorous bodily movement, can also become a channel allowing a *transcendence* from these localities and their burdens,⁹ offering a temporary “way out” of a doomed reality.

I contextualize my argument also in literature pertaining to women-Palestinian performance artists in Israel.¹⁰ These writings illuminate *gender* and its intersection with tradition, class, religion, ethnicity, and nationality as key in shaping these artists’ life experiences, and in turn, in forming their views, modes of expression, and social critique (see Nasral-

lah 2011, 2018; Dekel 2015; Abu-Lughod 2021; Yerushalmi 2007; Meller-Yamaguchi 2015; Ophir 2021).¹¹ Though profoundly informed by personal biographies (and almost always performed solo), the works discussed in this literature touch upon universal experiences and speak both outward, to confront worldwide colonial, orientalist, and patriarchal discourses, and inward to the Arab-Palestinian society (Nasrallah 2011). The female body, these writings demonstrate, becomes a site for performing the personal, the social, and the political as it engages with myriad themes, some of which clearly resonate in Abu Elasal's work: the prominence of place, memory, and cultural heritage in the making of individual and collective identity; visibility and being made invisible; strangeness and alienation; and the search for home and belonging. Joy and pleasure are also expressed in some of these performances (Nasrallah 2011; Ophir 2021), and though less common, the depiction of such once again challenges common notions of the victimized Arab woman or the ever-suffering Palestinian.

A recurring theme in Palestinian women's performance art is the employment of the "minor" senses of smell, taste, and touch—senses often culturally associated with women¹²—as means of viscerally stimulating thought and feelings within spectators. The highly evocative smells of Za'atar (wild thyme) and olive oil, or black coffee brewed with cardamom might be employed in a performance, for example, to invoke "the aroma and taste of Palestine" (Rana Bishara in Abu-Lughod 2021, p. 137); or milk—used to wash the performer's (Anisa Ashkar) face and hands as she reads out loud the stages of purification according to Islamic law, to blur the lines of the feminine (body) and the masculine (law) (Dekel 2015), or the smell of rotten meat, worn as a dress on the performer's (Raeda Saadeh) body, arousing the sense of disgust society has directed toward the female body, and awakening the audience to "her society's obsession with female purity and the family honor attached to it" (Nasrallah 2011, p. 144).

Considering the multisensoriality of these artistic performances, I argue that the power of Abu Elasal's work also has its roots in the sensorium, in the kinesthetic, the sensation of bodily movement, and the tactile, as the dancers in her works perform rhythmic, meticulously choreographed and coordinated movement in public spaces, rolling and crawling on cobblestone passageways, hopping, bouncing or "dripping" down staircases, leaning, stroking, and pounding their bodies against walls, rails, and gateways. The ensemble performance of the dances, rather than solo or duet, amplifies the kinesthetic experience, as movements are duplicated in three, four, or five bodies, or flow between dancers as they interact configurationally or symbolically with the "tissues" of the space. The proximity of audience members to dancers in built, constricted, urban environments also heightens the sensed experience of both dancers and viewers. The dancers' breathing is audible, as are their footsteps and their contact with various surfaces; the audience can sense the feeling of the dancers' movement and grasp the effort put into it; they can hear and feel the pebbles grinding under their own feet, as well as under the feet of the dancers as they stand or dance on the uneven, stone-paved walkways; and they can sense the shared environment in which this movement, this dance, is taking place: a soft breeze or the humid standing air, the changing light of the afternoon, the background sounds of everyday urban life. Kinesthesia, argues Noland (2009), plays a crucial role in assuming and experiencing *agency*, since without it, we wouldn't have the sense of our capacity for independent movement and wouldn't be able to discern our own bodies from others (ibid, p. 9). This leads me to suggest that dancing, as the performance of intentional movement, and being present and sharing the space in which this movement is performed, can be the catalyst for a heightened, or clearer sense of agency. Both dancers and audiences, then, take part in events that arouse a clear sense of *presence* in a place, and since these sites themselves are "places of identity, of relations and of history" (Augé 1995, p. 52), participants are involved in the (re)making of consciousness.

In what follows, I demonstrate how Abu Elasal promotes these processes, examining some of her recent choreographies staged in two historically significant sites: the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre in Tel Aviv, and the marketplace of Nazareth's old city.

(Women) Returning to Yaffa

Echo is the first piece of a work titled *Trilogy* (2020), which Abu Elasal choreographed for “International Exposure,” one of Israel’s most prestigious dance events, produced by and staged at the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv.¹³ During a preliminary visit to the site in order to “get the feel of the place,” Abu Elasal told me,¹⁴ she overheard a tour guide explain that one of the Center’s main buildings was once a Jewish school for boys, out of which the underground militant Jewish organization “Etzel” launched a fatal attack on the Arab neighborhood of “Al-Manshiyya”, Jaffa, in 1948, resulting in its complete destruction and the deportation of its inhabitants to Gaza. “So this beautiful Israeli cultural center,” Abu Elasal said, “where the best dance companies in the world come, and which represents the cultural life of the democratic state of Israel, is the birthplace of war crimes. I knew a lot about the occupation of Yaffa, but I didn’t know it was launched from this particular place. I couldn’t avoid working with this.”

The choreography and visuals of the piece hint at a funeral ceremony: set on the grounds of the Suzanne Dellal center, the dance features six young, female Palestinian dancers in black dresses reminiscent of the stylish funeral attire of mid-twentieth century, middle-class Palestinian women, each on a separate bench along a limestone path leading to the main buildings. Accompanied by a violinist, also in black, playing a nocturne by Chopin, one dancer at a time rises from her bench, the first walking slowly toward the building, then stopping suddenly, tilting to her side and turning her head and torso to look behind her into the distance, her arms stretched downward, fists tightly clenched. She is joined by the next dancer, who stops near her and assumes a similar pose, while other dancers seem to struggle to leave their benches, standing then sitting then standing again until they too slowly move toward the group. One dancer lies on her back on the stone path, her head toward the exit, and begins a spastic movement with her feet, legs, and fists, contracts into a fetal position, then opens again and slides along the path on her back, twisting and wriggling until rolling to a crouching position, her arms tightly wrapped around her body. Another dancer lunges backward, arms and one leg outstretched, then lunges another step backward to come closer to the two dancers, all of them now standing, bringing their hands to their stomachs in unison, sharply contracting their bodies as though in pain.

Three dancers break away and run in straight lines from the courtyard toward the main building, then turn around and stand still. From afar, their long, dark, figures seem to continue the lines of the dark narrow windows of the building behind them. This blending of bodies and buildings appears again when three dancers latch from behind onto the three main pillars at the entrance of the building, performing a movement sequence as the three other dancers, lying on the ground just in front of the pillars, mirror them. The aesthetics emphasize the changing shapes and relations between the fluid dancers and the stationary buildings, the dancers in black against the bright limestone, the human living matter against the fixed substance supporting them, evoking the permanence and impermanence of people, their histories, and their artifacts.

Children’s play is introduced to the piece through a hide and seek game—one dancer facing a wall, counting loudly to ten, then sharply turning around—as the game leads the audience behind the building to its hidden, less visually pleasing side. Though the dancers are seemingly playing an innocent game, their bodies, as they hurry to “hide” in group-freezes by the wall, express horror and urgency (Figure 1). A woman drummer steps into the scene: she follows them as though in a parade while adding an irregular rhythm that enhances the drama.



Figure 1. *Echo: Hide and seek.* Dancers: Shahed Jabarin, Layal Mazzawi, Rand Taha, Rima Naser Eeddin, Maria, Alkeesh. Violinist: Ibrahim Boulos (Photograph: Issa Freij).

The dancers now perform long sequences in unison, repeating those introduced earlier—crawling, twisting wriggling, contracting. For me, an audience member, these movements intensify the sense of the young women’s vulnerability— or perhaps lead to a realization of it - as they lie on their backs, their fronts exposed, on paths typically crowded by visitors ambling freely. The group then passes through the large wooden gate of a second building into an internal yard with areas of soft green grass planted with orange trees. In the center is a small, square, three-stair amphitheater surrounding an abandoned well now covered by heavy, black steel lattice. The dancers sit in a row on the bottom stair by the well, cautiously peering into it as the violin music resumes (Figure 2). They alternate between sharp movement sequences on the bottom stair of the well and running away then returning to stand at the edge of it, repeatedly crying out with increasing intensity and speed: “There was torture! There was fear, there was death!”, “We were expelled six times from Al-Manshiyya!”, “They collected us up from the water” and more.¹⁵ The dry well, once a source of water and life, is now a grave, or perhaps a tunnel to what is buried deep down, what is hidden in the dark. One dancer lies down on the lattice and reaches in with her arm, until slowly the dancers withdraw, the piece ending with the last of them disappearing from sight.



Figure 2. *Echo: The well.* Dancers: Rand Taha, Rima Naser Eeddin, Shahed Jabarin, Maria Alkeesh, Layal Mazzawi. (Photograph: Issa Freij).

Abu Elasal titled her piece “Echo,” perhaps inspired by the renowned Palestinian poet, Mahmud Darwish (1941–2008), in one of his last poems, *The Dice Player*: “Had that field not fallen / I could have become an olive tree [. . .] or a guardian of echo.”¹⁶ In dancing the story of Al-Manshiyya, placing her dancers in the vicinity of the obliterated neighborhood now the heart of the cultural capital of Israel, whose story it tells itself and the world is only its own, Abu Elasal is a guardian of memory, echoing the life of “families of Al-Manshiyya who are absent in body but whose voices and shadows are present forever,” the families to whom her piece is dedicated.¹⁷ A few lines of another of Darwish’s poems (“*Returning to Jaffa*”) appear in the program notes, providing reference points to the performance—most saliently the act of *returning* to the wounded city (“pines grow on a gallows”, “fires grow on a lily”), and of *knowing* it “stone by stone”.¹⁸ Intimately knowing the land and longing for (or actually) returning to it are recurring motifs in Palestinian consciousness and art (Ben Zvi 2014), as well as expressions of *sumud* (steadfastness), but while the poem speaks of a single man’s return, the dance presents a group of women—young, confident, talented, “global-dancing-bodied” women (Ophir 2020), who too know the city “stone by stone”—in their bodies. They know it in the ways they run, crawl, and play in it, in the blend of dust and sweat on their skin, in the fusion of city sounds and their own voices. Both the poem and the dance depict a *journey*, one in which the passing of time and inevitable changes leave those standing on the dock with an everlasting yearning.

In staging *Echo* in this particular location, Abu Elasal also takes advantage of the city as a democratic space (Sennett 1998) which, according to Yiftachel (2021, p. 32), “provides many opportunities for de-colonizing the ethno-national relations [in Israel/Palestine] and creates a more ‘liquid,’ open and mixed social life,” to challenge the predominantly Zionist, Hebrew-speaking public sphere. She reveals a different side of history, tells an unspoken story, brings Arab women performers to the center of the (Jewish) city square. By echoing the story of Al-Manshiyya, she also strengthens the Palestinian collective identity, thus deepening her own roots in the land. “Part of our struggle here” she told me when we first met in the summer of 2015, “is over our cultural identity. When we have culture, it shows how deeply we belong to this place, how we’re a part of this place. It’s the evidence that we’re a people that exist here.”¹⁹ As women artists then, she and her dancers are agents excavating a forgotten past—not only of tragedy and crisis—but also of prosperity, joy, vitality, and modernity, an urban cultural life in which women were actively engaged, contributing to numerous aspects of its professional, recreational, artistic, and social activities (Hasan 2017). Thus, Abu Elasal and her dancers—like other women Palestinian artists, journalists, activists, business owners and entrepreneurs operating in cities—are key agents of change to the gendered order of Palestinian society in Israel, of (re)construction of consciousness, nurturing women’s visibility, communion, and solidarity.

Yet along with attending to the Palestinian cause and “deepening roots” through performance, Abu Elasal does something else through space in this piece. The children’s game and the visual aesthetics described above are cues to this “something,” and the other two pieces of *Trilogy*—together with a former piece of Abu Elasal’s which I discuss in the next section—provide further insight into this other “thing.” Choreographing and dancing, for Abu Elasal, are also ways “to fly,” as she put it. They are ways to create and live in an imaginary world that in many ways has its origins in her childhood. “I like flying,” she told me, “as much as I can keep my roots in the land, I like flying. I like having the ability to detach myself.”²⁰ This imaginary world of hers, as revealed in our conversation, is one of innocence, as well as one in which she belongs, and in which she wields the power to influence and shape a space through moving bodies. “This draws me,” she explained, “to feel in control, to feel you can control the place you’re in—in a reality where you have no control over minor, basic things. [. . .] and when I have an opportunity to enter [a place], I create an experience, I create a world. In this place I play, I count to ten, I play like I played in my childhood in Nazareth. In this place I lose myself, I let go completely.”²¹

Dance as transcendence—as a practice that can evoke a sense of rising outside oneself or transcending the mundane—has received considerable scholarly attention (Njaradi

2012; Hamera 2007), and acknowledged, for example, as part of the attraction of young Palestinians in Israel to the rave dance culture (Karkabi 2020). Dance's transcendent potential is alluded to also in the narratives of Arab women dancers who have described these experiences as transformative, and as influential in their pursuit of dance (Martin 2016, pp. 45, 75). Importantly, however, the interplay of the *aesthetic dimensions of art*, imbued according to Marcuse (1978, p. 6), with radical qualities allowing the transcendence of "a given universe," and these *anthropological places*—places seeped in history, and at the same time grounds for dream and play (Augé 1995; Merleau-Ponti [1945] 2002)—the interplay of these two elements creates the alchemy that both reroots and reimagines, evokes a sense of being as firmly bound to as freed from the earth at the very same time, in the very same gestures. It is finding out, as Abu Elasal described above, "how my body speaks with a place's body, how we may lead a life together." It is wondering "how a place can lose itself and grow new tissue. What happens to the old tissues? What are the dynamics between them? And who am I in this place?"²² Rerooted and reimagined means, in a sense, "making myself a place."

Play, Imagination and Activism in Nazareth's Old City Marketplace

Nazareth's old city and the marketplace at its heart is home to Abu Elasal, and what she referred to as "my place." She grew up near the marketplace, finding her way through its many narrow passages, and passing through it each weekday on her way to school and back. Her childhood memories were shaped in its cobblestone alleyways with their overhead arches and hidden staircases, and through the vivid sensory experiences this environment cultivated: the darkness of the niches and narrow spaces, the play of light and shadow, heat and cold, noise and stillness, and the colors, smells, and clatter of a vibrant Arab market. In this section I will look at three pieces Abu Elasal choreographed specifically for performance in this place, each of which converse with more recent histories: her own childhood (roughly in the 1980s), and the emptying out of the market in the 2000s due to a city renovation project—a shock from which it never fully recovered. These points in time, though, and the way Abu Elasal threads them into her story, harken back once again to "the catastrophe" (*al-nakba*) of 1948,²³ and to her family's roots both in Nazareth and in the destroyed village of Ma'alul.²⁴ "Every year as a child," she told me, "on the day Israel celebrates its independence, we used to go with my mother's extended family and other families to Ma'alul and spend the day in the devastated village. Since then the issue of an eradication of a place, of a whole life lived in it, is always on my mind."²⁵

This existential questioning, rooted in and mixed with childhood memories, is expressed in the ways Abu Elasal spoke about the marketplace and her interest in it:

"In the 2000s the market was ruined. There were plans to revive it, so they closed the merchants' stalls so they could do some renovations. But the process took too long and the merchants never came back. It became a place of the very vulnerable, of distress, there were lots of drugs. And I'm always concerned about . . . I always wonder how a place loses its meaning, its identity, and how I can face such places, with all their tissues of memory and reality."²⁶

In a later account, she elaborated:

I started going there and taking pictures. It was a whole world! The homes, the deserted place . . . this place has undergone trauma! In my childhood it was a central place for the whole region: people would come and do their shopping, brides from all the villages around would come, middle class people would live there. And little by little, along with neoliberal development, the place lost its centrality. People started driving private cars, and there was no parking so they left, the warm atmosphere that characterized the place changed, and gradually the place lost its identity. They tried to rehabilitate it and turn it into an attractive tourist and trade center, but that never really happened. It became a distressed

neighborhood. Today there's a revival thanks to the initiative of Nazarethian women who've opened cafes and small businesses there."²⁷

Her childhood memory of walking through the marketplace on her way to school was the basis for Abu Elasal's first work in this location, titled *On the Way* (2017). She wrote a poetic text, later printed in the performance program, in which she described a secret, imaginary world of a girl, herself, on her way to school. In this journey she follows endless stairs into new alleys that lead her in turn into new ones. She is obsessed with stepping on each one of the stairs and leaving a mark on it ("obsessed" being *her* term), so to avoid confusion she starts counting them and memorizing how they look. At some point she gets lost and feels terrified until she "reach[es] the magical stair, step[s] on it," and regains her route.²⁸

On the Way was choreographed and performed on a carefully chosen steep staircase. Eleven dancers dressed in tight black pants, black t-shirts, and sneakers were the original cast for the piece, though the number varied slightly from one performance to another. The audience was seated at the bottom of the stairs, on an evenly paved area where plastic chairs had been placed.

The work was composed of many different occurrences, different segments danced solo or duo, in which dancers performed movement sequences engaging with the matter and shapes of the place—cement stairs, metal rails, stone walls, a steel doorway (Figure 3). A dancer would, for example, make contact with a wall: lean on it with different parts of her body, push against it, move close to it and embrace it. These small sequences gave way to longer phrases of movement performed by larger groups and then by the whole ensemble on different rungs of the staircase. The visual had the look of a funnel, with the narrowing street of stairs as it went up and further away. The dancers, near and far, filled the space when dancing in unison, which also built momentum and drama. Motifs of children's play—hiding and reappearing from behind a wall, loudly counting to ten, crying out "Ahhhhh" to hear an echo, hanging from a railing, peeking through a hole or knocking on a closed door to discover what's behind—all these gave the piece its initial aura of wonder and curiosity. Yet darker shadows soon became apparent, as the very same images that alluded to play also evoked sensitive Palestinian themes: disappearance from sight, intimacy with place, bare bodies facing closed doors, cries no one hears. The piece ended with the dancers gathering to form a tight group that slowly climbed the stairs until gone from sight. When the group was about a third of the way up, a young girl of about 6 years of age dressed in a white dress stepped out of the audience and followed the dancers up the stairs until she too disappeared.



Figure 3. (Left) *On the Way*: Duet on stairs. Dancers: Adan Azzam, Haya Khouriyeh; (Right) Solo on wall. Dancer: Shahed Jabarin (Photographs: Friend of Aida Dance School).

On the Way, then, was a blend of play and melancholy, of past, present, and future (encapsulated also in its title), which at once told the story of a single woman, a people, and the human condition: yearning for past times, struggling to make sense of memories and of current existence, imagining futures. The original soundtrack for the piece, composed by Said Murad, introduced a cacophony of sounds and noises that gradually reduced to a soft, recurring melody accompanied by *darbuka* drumming, adding a meditative sense of a journey in time, as did the natural lighting of the soft, dimming afternoon sunlight.

After the premier of the work in the fall of 2017, Abu Elasal's group performed *On the Way* on many different staircases of varied design, substance, and symbolic weight, in Haifa, Ramallah, and Tel Aviv. The nature of stairs as stairs, a geometric structure people can climb up or down to reach places, as well as the anchoring movement phrases and motif of children's play made it possible for Abu Elasal to knead the materials of the work to fit different locations yet maintain the artistic identity of the piece. She liked these challenges. "Nazareth's stairs are already embodied by the dancers," she said when I asked her about these transitions, "and I find it interesting to learn how a body that was formed in one place converses with another. It interests and challenges me - both aesthetically and in terms of the meaning that's created."²⁹ Originally conceived in her home environment, *On the Way* and the process of creating, rehearsing, and performing it, deepened roots into "tissues of memory," yet also rose above these to create further visions. The streets of the marketplace were once again, if only for a short while, filled with life, music, and movement, with young women dancing, telling a story, inspiring imagination. Community became sensate in these experiences; whether the local community-passerby who stopped to watch rehearsals, chat, and ask questions, or neighbors who offered fresh coffee and cold water, often lending a hand with logistics and needs—or the larger, imagined community of Palestinians, sharing a land and a history. Marking the beginning of her artistic journey into *her place*, as Abu Elasal attested, *On the Way* demonstrated the significance of matter and materiality—prolonged by the sensing body - in play, imagination and experience, in retrieving and forming one's own place and sense of belonging.

Abu Elasal's two other pieces performed on the streets of Nazareth's old city contribute a *gendered* angle to this discussion. Though she did not explicitly address gender in her work, and purposefully avoided portraying Palestinian women as oppressed or vulnerable subjects, she attested to the fact that her political conscience was informed by her identity as a Palestinian and a woman, as well as by her family's socialist views. In discussing these works, then, my intention is to demonstrate the subtle ways in which she employs a position of power to bring women's interests into her work.

The piece titled *This Place* is a 12-minute video-dance, the second section of her work *Trilogy*. The medium of film opened a new set of expressive possibilities for Abu Elasal: it enabled moving through much larger terrain to show a varied landscape, on the one hand, and to zoom in on small niches, textures, body parts, and expressions, on the other. It afforded playing with the angle of the gaze and the width of the lens, and manipulating images through the editing process to evoke emotions and impressions. I argue that *This Place* is a woman-choreographer's critical contemplation of her own, much-loved home.

The work is performed by five women dancers wearing soft, light colored pants and tops, and dark sneakers. It opens with a close-up shot of the head and upper body of a dancer against a stone wall as she moves her head and gaze slowly from side to side. The camera gently moves across the wall to capture another dancer, then the third, moving their heads and gazes from side to side. Soft piano notes in simple sequences of notes rising on the scale and ending, as if questions hanging in the air, accompany them. In the next scene we see a dancer sitting on a high stone ledge in a closed-in area, her face tilted upward, feet dangling, and in the next shot a dancer on a balcony looking down into the street, then turning her gaze far into the distance. This is the exposition of the piece: women looking at their surroundings with open eyes.³⁰ From here the story, and the dancers, start rolling: they slowly move through the streets, at times relating in movement to walls, street corners, arches, stairs or large closed gateways. An old woman wearing a simple,

white *thob*, (traditional loose-fitting long dress) and dark scarf enters the frame, moving slowly along the pathway with the support of a wooden cane, a random passerby. She is the only other human being aside from the dancers who will appear in the video. Later in the background a soft humming of an Arabic song can be heard, the voice indicating that of an elderly woman. There is no sign or presence of men. The choreography plays with dancers hiding and reappearing as they move down and up the streets, alternately running and pausing, performing composed phrases and continuing into new alleyways. Abu Elasal also plays with shape: diagonal lines of a staircase are met with vertical lines created by dancers' bodies: a duo run up the stairs and another pair lie still on their backs across the stairs, drawing the eye to capture this geometry. In another play with shape, a dancer performs a movement sequence on a plaza whose surface is decorated with colored stone tiles that form a geometric pattern. At first she is lying on her side in a fetal position, then rolls into a crouch and steps backward in small steps - a movement pattern reminiscent of *Echo*. When the camera lens opens and the angle slightly shifts from above, the group of dancers crouching on the path create their own pattern to complement that of the colored stones. Running through the streets becomes frantic, with the dancers grabbing and banging on closed shop-gates on both sides of street as they run from one side to another. The soundtrack mimics this banging and becomes a percussive rhythm that intensifies the visual. The group of dancers are now performing more exaggerated rhythmic phrases with sharp transitions from one position to another: on a narrow staircase leading to a private home, against a rough wall, in the street, as they travel through it in wide lunges, shifting weight from side to side. Suddenly there is a halt: the dancers stop as a group and look up, the rhythmic drumming ends. The next image is a long shot of a high balcony with a large arched window at its back and a decorated black rail in front, with laundry lines stretched on the rail and laundry hanging down on them. It is the first (and only) sign of domestic life in this environment. A dancer holding her head in an expression of distress is standing by the rail; a new musical motif played by a cello and scattered piano notes begins. This is the classic image of "the woman at the window" found in so many cultural (literary, cinematic, artistic) representations.

Women at windows, specifically those in familiar biblical narratives, perhaps still resonate in present day Middle East cultural imagery and norms. This image, goes the argument, signifies women's societal position as confined to the domestic realm, "removed not only from geography but also from history" (Aschkenasy 1998, p. 17). Seeman, however, offers a different reading, arguing that [biblical] women watchers are "always elite personages (e.g., members of a ruling house) whose gaze should carry social and political weight" (Seeman 2004, p. 15). Like their male counterparts, Seeman continues, "[women's] gaze is always deployed in contexts where danger threatens," but contrary to men watchers, whose gaze serves to prevent disruption, women watchers "are inevitably the victims of disruption that cannot be avoided" (ibid). This interpretation, though still rendering women inferior, nevertheless suggests women's agency in their ability to see and understand reality. Thus, their gaze carries political weight. The window, as other in-between spaces like balconies and doorsteps (Savin Ben Shoshan 2020), seems to provide women an important vantage point from which to look out and see. Viewing these moments evokes introspection in us, spectators or readers of cultural texts (ibid). Given this understanding, Abu Elasal's dancer on the balcony and this specific moment in the work, I argue, is made to stand out—through the long shot, the recognizable image, the change in music, the sudden halt of intense movement and lifted gaze of the dancers—because of its importance. It is a moment in which the gendered political critique becomes unmistakable.

The dancer holds her head, her upper body contracted. She carefully moves her hands away from her head then brings them back a few times. She is restless. She brings her hands to her chest as though holding her heart, her shoulders raised, body tense, then twists her torso from side to side. Her hands then move downward, tracing the sides of her body as she comes to a forward contraction, then abruptly move back up to her head again, her head and chest arched backwards. The image is of agony and pain. The dancer now

leans on the railing and gazes down into the street, where the group of dancers is passing, then looks far out into the distance. At this point we see images shot from below of dancers moving along a high building edge, with blue sky in the background. These pictures evoke a sense of danger, but also of hope and a widening horizon. The camera returns to the dancer on the balcony, then follows her frightened withdrawal along a shadowy wall as she “rolls” her back and chest against it, her chest and shoulders still contracted, her look still terrified. Images of horizontal rolling dancers with their heads hung down a step, and of dancers cautiously moving along walls follow her retreat. She keeps rolling until she slips behind a dent in the wall and disappears. At this ending point the camera remains on the dappled gray shades of the wall.

Whether pointing to the harsh consequences that major economic crises bring about particularly to women, frequently leaving them exposed to exploitation and poverty, or to the conditions created by war and loss which too often leave women extremely vulnerable as they struggle on their own to raise their young, Abu Elasal clearly asks that we *see* women. She asks that we realize their unique existences. At the same time, she portrays women as powerful observers, perhaps thanks to their societal positioning in liminal spaces. The women observers in *This Place* look reality “in the eyes,” but they also act on and change it. They fill the deserted streets with their dancing bodies, widen the narrow passageways with their movement and mark openings for revision and hope. Abu Elasal thus indeed explores her own place, her own dialog with the past and the lives of those who once inhabited this place, yet her art weaves a much larger net of context as it joins long-lasting traditions in art history and feminist ethics of mobilizing memory and of connectivity (Hirsch 2019). *On the Way* reveals Abu Elasal’s commitment to women’s causes and her belief in the power of women to both clearly see reality and take action to enhance it.

Abu Elasal’s third piece performed in this space is untitled, and unlike the other two dances discussed above, was created in the studio and only afterward set outdoors. The streets of Nazareth’s old city were only a stage in this case, yet again, a highly symbolic one. The piece was choreographed for the 2021 annual Christmas Market, a festive event that took place in mid-December in Mary’s Well Square—the heart of Nazareth’s entertainment area. Every year this event brings together the local community, visitors, and tourists for an evening of activities, performances, and celebrations, and an opportunity to stroll through vendors’ stands selling fresh produce and local arts and crafts, or visit the local cafes and restaurants. For Abu Elasal, the evening was an important opportunity to gain exposure for both her dance school and her newly founded company, and therefore worth the effort it would take to stage a dance performance outdoors on a freezing December night. Abu Elasal, though, did not think highly of the piece she had choreographed for that night, a trio set to the music of Eric Aron. She felt it did not represent what she considered to be her art, rather “just a piece for celebrating life, for the pleasure of it,” she told me when I visited her studio a few days before the event. She had made the choice not to hold formal rehearsals of the performance, and instead taught the dancers the movements and let them rehearse on their own. “There are more important things for us to work on in the limited time we have together,” she said. The dance was a lively, virtuosic trio performed in unison, displaying highly trained dancers who moved their bodies in playful ways to create different shapes and forms. The three dancers, dressed in tight white pants and tops, danced side-by-side yet their individual movements created changes in their relations to one another and to the space. With quick movements of their arms, shoulders, hips and head, accompanied by plies and lunges, changing their heights and shifting their weight, they created myriad feminine images that played with the musical beat in a mischievous manner. White, precise, delicate and minutely carved, the image reminded me of snowflakes. The piece was performed at the Christmas Market, then made into a short video that was distributed to members of the dance school community and posted on social media as a blessing for the holidays with the message: “From Nazareth we send you our greetings of peace and love.”³¹

Three months later, on Saturday morning, 12 March 2022, the dance was performed once again, this time in celebration of International Women's Day, along with a performance by a group of Palestinian women musicians. Above a video of the event uploaded to her company's Facebook page, Abu Elasal posted these words: "Today in the old city in celebration of women's day, Shaden Dance Company, Aida Dance School and Aya Khalaf and her group, *Song and Dance*, firmly and clearly delivered the message that the public space belongs to all and that women are the first to courageously ward off darkness and reactionaries in their various forms."

A bit of a stepchild in relation to her other works, this nameless piece nevertheless takes part and plays a role in Abu Elasal's engagement with place, aesthetics, and the political. Through this dance she celebrates with her community in one of its largest celebrations of the year, bringing joy and beauty to it with the art of dance. She once again places women at the forefront of celebrations, stressing their independence and competence as well as their social commitment, and choreographs movements that express vitality and bliss. It is also with this dance staged in the old city of Nazareth that Abu Elasal transcends this locality and reaches beyond it. As the cradle of Christianity, Nazareth's symbolic weight is immense, and "greetings from Nazareth" carried by women contemporary dancers hold special promises. Abu Elasal taps into these sentiments and into her and her dancers' highly visible, global dancing bodies to connect with people and cultures around the world, and with the shared, simple joy of holiday celebrations invoking hope for peace and love. Similarly, celebrating International Women's Day by dancing in the streets of Nazareth's old city offered an opportunity to display not only women's (active) presence in public spaces, but also solidarity with women around the world, and their right to space, voice, and safety. It was part of both a local struggle and a wider political pursuit.

Abu Elasal's work in Nazareth's old city reveals how she strengthens her ties to the place, her home town, by further embodying its shapes and sensations and by amusing herself within it as she plays with its materiality to inspire her art. Yet her own story, her own "ride" in this amusement park, always holds wider social and political significance, even when initially unintended. It is within her, as she said. "I never think politics in my work, but I guess it's already there,"³² she said with a laugh. History keeps coming up through the stones and alleyways of Nazareth and through her body that knows this place in each of its muscles and senses. The marketplace's loss of identity in the 2000s, as a painful recent memory, rings back to the loss of Palestine in 1948 through a childhood embodied memory of Abu Elasal's and the story of her own family, and through Nazareth's urban geography itself, which holds its own scars of the Nakba.³³ Perhaps it also rings back to the loss of childhood itself and a more naïve, wonderous state of being, as we could hear earlier echoing in her words. Weaving the personal and the collective, her work in the old city retrieves bits of these losses, gives them new form and sets them anew in space, memory and history.

On and Off the Ground: A Gendered Aesthetics of Ruptured Places and Histories

Abu Elasal's urban choreographies are explorations of the interplay between matter and moving bodies as much as they are contemplations on places and their (hi)stories. The aesthetic form and experiences of her works are created in this play, this exchange and dialogue between substances and dancers, the stationary and the moving, producing a heightened sense of *presence* in and *awareness* of place. These fleshy encounters with design, shapes, textures, and matter, and with the history and cultural significance of a place create situations "apt to modify our gazes and our attitudes" toward these environments (Rancière 2009, p. 21). Here is where *sumud* materializes as actions that "sustain and advance a Palestinian sense of community within the land of historic Palestine" (Rowe 2016, p. 30); and where it is realized as constituting political agency through the body (Meari 2014). Carrie Noland's (2009) understanding of *kinesesthesia* as the source of agency further elucidates the power of dance to create this shared sense of community through the intersubjectivity it facilitates (Ibid, pp. 13–14). Sensing ourselves and others through

moving, watching or imagining movement in specific environments, then, brings Rancière's assertion of aesthetics as politics even a step further.

When Abu Elasal stages a procession of young Arab women in black stylish dresses on the Suzanne Dellal grounds (whether or not it is associated with a funeral procession), viewers are offered a vision of Arab urban life—prior to 1948 as well as today—right there across the street, on the outskirts of Jaffa, and specifically of Arab women without need of anyone's patronage—either then or today. This image is radical not only because it brings Arab women into the White City,³⁴ challenging Tel Aviv's whiteness and Israel's separatist ethnonational practices, or because it alludes to the Nakba, a generally taboo topic in Israeli public discourse (Rouhana and Sabagh-Khoury 2017; Manna 2017). The image is profound also because it retrieves and re-imagines the forgotten *Palestinian city* and *Palestinian urban women* (Hasan 2008, 2017, 2019), replacing the image of the traditional, rural Arab woman³⁵ with strong, confident, politically aware and culturally engaged women. Abu Elasal's work thus becomes political also in that it introduces “new subjects and objects to render visible what had not been” (Rancière 2009, p. 25).

Rendering visibility to Palestinian cities and urban women, in both historical narratives and present-day Israel/Palestine, challenges powerful “visual arrangements” (Hochberg 2015) organizing Israel's policies toward Palestinians—in this case, practices of concealment and effacement. At the same time, it confronts conservative morality within Arab society itself. Setting and sourcing artistic performances in Nazareth's old city, where Arab architecture and urban design stand out so distinctly, creates an immediate, sensate, association to lively Palestine and generates a sense of a wider community. Young women dancing in these landscapes and engaging with their “tissues of memory” bring these places and histories back into collective consciousness, and importantly, they do so from the viewpoint of women. A full range of life experiences, from a mundane walk to school, to traumatic episodes, festive celebrations, and acts of protest are expressed in these performances through the bodies of women, and from a woman-choreographer's stance. Abu Elasal gives form to a young girl's daydreams and imagination, to women's right to safety and free movement in the public domain, and to women's horrific experiences of the Nakba—stories that largely remain untold (Manna 2017; Kassem 2011; Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 2007). Thus, her work can be conceptualized as creative acts of *repair* and *recovery* (Hirsch 2019; Gómez-Barris 2009) that attend to the past's wounds yet enable the imagination of other parts of history and the envisioning of a future. In the context of Palestinians in Israel, the recovery of silenced events is a process that leads to the consolidation of a collective consciousness, “the return of history” (Rouhana and Sabagh-Khoury 2017). Within this conceptualization, her work is a manifestation of a wider process taking place in the last two decades in Israel, in which the Nakba has re-emerged to become “a defining force of the current national, political, and cultural consciousness of Palestinians in Israel (Ibid, p. 393). Here, dance serves as a window to realize this process at the level of the body.

Yet dance is also in this context an avenue for transcendence; for losing oneself and detaching from a tangible, concrete, harsh reality. When practiced and performed in anthropological places, themselves concrete and imaginative, the loss of self becomes entwined with a rooted consciousness. Breaking free of and being anchored to the ground and the real in the very same movements, dance thus becomes a realm of (temporary) emancipation and a source of meaning. It is through dance in these site-based choreographies that consciousness and the material, stone and body, entwine and shape one another in an ongoing process of (re)forming identity and reclaiming history.

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Notes

¹ Rancière, Jacques (Rancière 2004), *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, p. 9.

² Names and naming are highly politicized in the context of Israel/Palestine. I use the term “Israel” in accordance with international designations that distinguish between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, geographically demarcated by the Green Line—the 1949 armistice line that separated Israel from its Arab neighbors. Palestinians, however, often use different terms to distinguish between parts of the land, as well as between themselves. In this discourse, reflecting the cycles of violence Palestinians endured, the “48 territories” are what is now Israel, hence “48 Palestinians” are those Palestinians living within the internationally recognized borderlines of Israel. The “67 territories” refers to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, hence “67 Palestinians” are those living in these areas (Karkabi 2020, p. 705; Belkind 2021, p. 9). Most of the participants in my research spoke of themselves and their communities, at least to me or in my presence, as Palestinian or Arab citizens of Israel. Between September 2013 and December 2017, I conducted an anthropological study with fourteen women and one man Palestinian dance practitioners in Israel, who teach, dance and choreograph Western forms of concert dance. I held in-depth interviews with all participants and observed their work in classes, workshops, rehearsals, performances and community activities in various Arab towns and villages in the country. I also participated in conferences on Palestinian art and attended performances in the annual Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival. For a discussion of my position as a Jewish researcher of Palestinian dancers in Israel, see (Ophir 2021).

³ An edited version of one of these interviews was published in the *Dance Now* journal, in Hebrew. See (Ophir 2022).

⁴ Interview, 19 March 2021.

⁵ Ibid. The Hebrew word for “tissue” which she used in our conversation (*rikma*) also means “embroidery,” which resonates with the Arabic term for “tissue” (*naseej*), meaning also a woven fabric. Both provide an image and a sense of the perceived nature of interwoven relations of bodies and places.

⁶ Sumud has no fixed meaning and is perceived, expressed and manifested in multiple significations and practices, at different times, by various Palestinian communities (Meari 2014). Employing a concept by Deleuze and Guattary, Meari argues that “sumud becomes ‘a line of flight’ for escaping the regulative forces of control” (Ibid, p. 550). Simply maintaining life in their homeland and embracing pleasure is considered by Palestinians a political act in the vein of sumud, contends Karkabi (2020, p. 694).

⁷ A few examples of these accounts are: (Gómez-Barris 2009; Schneider 2011; Carrico 2020; Lee 2017; Hochberg 2015; Niaah 2008; Hirsch 2019).

⁸ Housni Alkhateeb Shehade, oral presentation in a course titled “Gender and Identity in the Works of Contemporary Palestinian Artists”, Institute for Israeli Art, 14 July 2020.

⁹ On manifestations and qualities of transcendence in contemporary dance see (Hamera 2007; Njaradi 2012).

¹⁰ My choice of contextualization, focusing on accounts of women-Palestinian performance artists in Israel (rather than including some of artists from the West Bank and Gaza) stems from an understanding that while these communities share a culture and (parts of) history, they are sharply divided not only geographically but also by being subjected to a “distinct form of Israeli rule” which “creates different modes of political expression” (Bishara 2016, p. 306).

¹¹ These writings examine performance art pieces of the artists Raeda Saadeh (رائدة سعادة), Anisa Ashkar (أنيسة أشقر), Hannan Abu Hussein (حنان أبو حسين), Rana Bishara (رنا بشارة), Raida Adon (رائدة أدون), Manar Zuabi (منار زعبي) and Sahar Damoni (سحر داموني).

¹² Taste, touch and smell are positioned on the lower side of a culturally created hierarchy of the senses, points out Duncum (2012), and within the cultural mind–body dualism they are associated with “body.” Sight, on the hand, is associated with the mind, thus with reason and logic (Ibid, p. 148). It was feminism that linked the mind–body and man–woman dualisms to show how “body” becomes closely related to “woman,” or how woman is understood as body (Bordo 1993).

¹³ *Trilogy* took place in three parts: It started outside in the courtyards of The Suzanne Dellal Center with *Echo*, then moved indoors for the screening of a video-dance titled *This Place* (discussed later in this article), and then onto the stage with a live performance of a duet titled *Twin Flame*. The event program notes offered these words: “*Trilogy* looks at the idea of “place” as a space that holds memories, hopes, disappointments, aspirations, experiences, moments of anguish and joy. A place brimming with sounds of life of the ghosts that inhabited it in the not so distant past. A place full of colors, tastes and smells. A place where the shadows of the bodies that lived in it still float, trying to go back to the moment where they froze forever” (*Trilogy*/Tel Aviv Dance Festival 2021) <https://www.facebook.com/suzannedellalcentre/videos/993604571211543/> (accessed on 18 August 2022).

¹⁴ Interview, 19 March 2021.

- 15 These quotes are from the testimonies of former Al-Mamshiyya residents presented in a short film made in memory of the neighborhood. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUHp9T3fbCU> (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 16 <http://oweis.com/dice-player/> (accessed on 18 August 2022). “Echoing Yaffa” are also audio tours telling the stories of Palestinian refugees of Al-Mamshiyya, who as current residents of Jaffa are subjected to ongoing processes of displacement and dispossession. <https://www.zochrot.org/en/event/56229> (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 17 Shaden Dance Company performance program, 5 August 2021.
- 18 https://web.archive.org/web/20110727063419/http://www.zajel.org/article_view.asp?newsID=2331&cat=1 (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 19 In: (Ophir 2020, p. 53).
- 20 Interview, 19 March 2021.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 *Al-Nakba* is how Palestinians refer to the war of 1948 that led to the creation of the state of Israel and to their own society’s devastation. Both in Palestinian memory and history, the Nakba has become a focal point, abruptly splitting time into “before” and “after” very different periods (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007). Though specifically marked by the violent events of 1947–1948, the Nakba is perceived as still on going to this day (نكبة مستمرة), where violence, dispossession and uprooting of Palestinians continues (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007; Manna 2017).
- 24 The village of Ma’alul was located 6 km west of Nazareth: https://www.zochrot.org/villages/village_details/49281/en (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 25 Interview, 16 December 2019.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Interview, 19 March 2021.
- 28 *On the Road* program, 6 October 2017.
- 29 Interview, 19 March 2021.
- 30 <https://www.facebook.com/shadendancecompany/videos/465843151188928/> (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 31 <https://www.facebook.com/shadendancecompany/videos/5130211567029048/> (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 32 Interview, December 2019.
- 33 Nazareth was the only Arab city to survive the 1948 war, thanks to its religious importance to the Christian world and the Vatican, thus the refrain of Israel’s prime minister Ben Gurion from hearting the city’s residents and sacred sites. Also, Nazareth’s leaders’ decision to surrender to the Israeli forces approaching the city saved thousands of people—both from Nazareth and the villages around it—from uprooting and displacement (Manna 2017, p. 68). Yet Nazareth’s special status made it refuge for thousands of villagers whose homes and communities were destroyed, a course leading to a radical change in the city’s class and religious composition of population and damaging even to the small amount of urbanism the city had then had (Hasan 2008, p. 210).
- 34 “The White City” is a name of Tel Aviv after UNESCO had declared in 2003 “The White City of Tel Aviv” a world heritage site for its singular concentration of interwar modernist architecture. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1096> (accessed on 18 August 2022).
- 35 Palestine as a rural society is an image constructed in both Israeli and Palestinian collective imagery (Hasan 2008, 2017). It serves Israel in legitimizing its “progressive” rule over Palestinians as well as its narrative and self-image of the modernizing force of the region and the emancipator of oppressed Palestinian women. It serves Palestinians as well in their struggle for land rights and recognition as the indigenous people of the place, through a strong tie to the land embedded in this image.

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