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Palestinian *Dabkeh* as Expression of Remoteness

1. Introduction

In 2013 I met the Palestinian *dabkeh* dancing group *Somoud,* in Pernik, Bulgaria, which I later met again in the Palestinian occupied territories. I was working as a photographer in that time, and did a short photographic research on the *dabhek* group. All in all I spent about half a year in the Levant region, and had constant contact with a few of the dancers, but my interaction with them was always restricted to several short stays. As I will be further evaluate in the article, it was often not easy to have free travel access, and I even had the personal experience of being denied entry to Israel at Tel Aviv Airport and being sent back to Austria after having a two days stay in deportation jail. I experienced myself what is a day to day normality for the people in the Palestinian territories: the restriction of freedom in traveling, which makes a big part of creating and shaping the Palestinian reality. In the Palestinian territories I did not only photographic research but also interviews and participant observation, even though I was not studying Anthropology in an academic institution yet. For this paper I first want to give a short overview over *dabkeh* as a Palestinian dance to give an idea of what the research and the photographic project was about. I will treat my project in Palestine as an attempted anthropological project, on the example of which I then want to give a brief insight on the problems an Anthropologist might have in the field. I find this a good example of explicitly a problem that an anthropologist might have (and not the solutions) because I wasn't yet in an academic surrounding, but more or less autodidactic (with a background in documentary photography). Even though one might argue I wouldn't have had this specific difficulty if I had done my research with an academic education, I argue that it could still be exactly like it happened to me and that I was less influenced by ideas that would have taken my mind from the experience and therefore I was more „pure" in my research than I would have been otherwise with the academic background.

In this paper, I want to discover the topic of remoteness in relation to the Palestinian dance dabkeh. I will give a short personal insight in my own stay in the region and my research experience as well as it's problems. Also I will give a short insight in the history and meaning of the dance, especially for Palestinians and in the Palestinian context, since the cultural development of *dabkeh* is very particular in a Palestinian context. The paper will explore the meaning of remoteness in other regions of the world and compare them with the Palestinian situation. Remoteness is in itself something that can be found in the Palestinian region, and the dance *dabkeh* is an expression of it in many ways, which I will explore and explain in this

work. I do not want to make this work about every political, geographical and historical Palestinian issue, because it would simply be too broad and complicated for this paper. I'm basing the paper on the example of Palestinian dancers and their expression through dance, and compare it with their current political and geographical situation. Also I am including not only statements from my own research but I will also include information from online articles about other Palestinian *dabkeh* performers and treat those as a source of personal experience by dancers. My research question for this paper is therefore:

How is dabkeh an expression of Palestinian remoteness?

It is important to look at other examples of remoteness in remote areas, I will include the example of the Miao Pale in the Guizhou region in China that Luisa Schein talks about, as well as the Dolakha region in Nepal, written about by Sara Shneiderman. Those examples will give insights in what remoteness means and how the Palestinian remoteness is similar and can be compared with those examples. I will continue in the construction of remoteness and how the Palestinian experience shapes their remoteness, which is expressed by the dance *dabkeh*. The dance functions thereby as a way of communication and transmission of those personal experiences, that directly enact the political and social remoteness of the Palestinian territories. I will mention the fact that the palestinian identity is not only taking place inside the confinement of the Palestinian territories inside the Israeli country, but also outside exactly these borders in a situation of exile. It is important to talk about identity in the context of Palestinian remoteness and its expression through *dabkeh*.

2. Modern Palestinian *Dabkeh* Research

This first part of my paper attempts to give an insight into the dance *dabkeh* and the empirical and theoretical research. I will include a chapter about the empirical research that I did personally when I was visiting the Palestinian dance group in Ramallah as a photographer in the methodological chapter, as well as I will include a chapter about the theoretical background of Palestinian *dabkeh* in its geopolitical and historical context.

In the methodological chapter I will be explaing my own personal research and I will give an

insight in the problems that I had when I was trying to gather information, and speculate about these empirical research problems being hypothetically based on political and social backgrounds. Then further on I will be getting deeper into the dance and its political and social background over the recent Palestinian history. Elke Kaschl and Nicholas Rowe are both explaining the dance in its political and historical context not only in the Palestinian region, but rather in a broader geopolitical specter. It is important to me in this paper to focus on the Palestinian aspects, even though there would be a lot wider range of aspects to the dance in various geographical regions and the according political and historical situations, for example in the jewish history or in the Israeli state. These aspects are shall not be part of this particular paper though, even though they are also worth looking into, if one is interested in *debkah* (the Israeli/Jewish name of the dance) or *dabkeh* history.

2.1. The Ethnographic Fieldwork Problem: Methodology

Few anthropologists can state squarely that their fieldwork was a continuously exciting journey of exploration, full of pleasant experiences. (Eriksen: 25)

Anthropology uses fieldwork as its most important source of knowledge about society and culture. In that time in the field, Anthropologists often experience boredom, illness, personal privations, disappointments and frustration (Erikson: 24f.). Even though I did not engage in a long and extended anthropological field research, I faced many difficulties in my own work, of one of which i want to describe.

The *Somoud* group consisted of about 20 - 25 students at the age of 15 - 20 years, and three coaches. The first and main problem was the issue of the language barrier, which Eriksen also states as the first obstacle to master (Eriksen: 25). I was in close contact with three students who had a good background in english education and language. I was mostly communicating with the female students. With one of them I was working out a standardized questionnaire for the others in arabic language. One day after rehearsals we handed them out for the group to answer. More than half of the questionnaires came back empty. This is where my ethnographic strategy was unexpectedly different than I had planned. It was students, from age 15 - 20 – and what I hadn't thought through was that they didn't want to answer

questionnaires, maybe due to their age and lack of interest. The next problem was, that a lot of the girls didn't want to answer the questions, maybe because they felt like they wanted to have their privacy and didn't want to give out any information, not even the most simple and generalized questions. Also one guess was that partly due to their young age they just didn't have so much life experience in order to be able to write much. In the end I had about five questionnaires with real answers and about 3 with small details like only name and age. We translated those five back to english to see that also they were answered very generally. This example of fieldwork created many questions that unfortunately I couldn't research more and get more answers in my time there. It would be wrong to imply any reason for the unanswered questionnaires. Was it the age and lack of interest towards me or towards answering questionnaires in general, that made the students not answer my questions? Was it too personal for reasons of gender and religion? To write about the reasons for the non-answers I would have to make generalizations and drift off into fictional writing rather than ethnography (Narayan: 140).

I want to contribute the following description of the situation: The day of the survey it was a rather warm afternoon in spring (not hot like the middle east summers, but already warm enough to be sweating while dancing). The dance hall was a big almost empty building with no windows and doors that remained open during rehearsals. It was in between other empty houses, so the whole area consisted of houses that were not in use, or only sometimes. In between there were pine trees and little bushes, creating a mediterranean smell. When the rehearsal time was over, many of the students were just about to go home, or playing around in the area before the rehearsal hall, which was a balcony-like terrace, since the buildings were constructed on a hill on top of each other. Those who filled out the surveys were looking for the most distant places to sit and write in all kinds of places: Behind the house, on stairs at the 2nd floor, behind the house next to us, etc. A few were taking their time and you could really observe their concentration on my questions, others were not at all interested, before they came back and started laughing, joking around, and having fun together like any other youngsters would. So they were already in a mindset of being free and maybe just not in the mood of having more duties.

I want to add an emotional and self-reflectory statement from the time I was there and did not know why the answers that I got were so sparse, about the issue of coming to the field with certain expectations of how the fieldwork will be done and then getting something completely

different of what you wanted or expected or are even obligated to deliver. It was an experience of fieldwork where I had expectations of young people doing dance, and *dabkeh* is a quite expressive form of dancing through which the dancers show their culture and deliver a message of their heritage and roots, and then I had to discover that towards me, or rather on a personal level, they were not willing to tell many messages. This fact can to a great extent be based on structural reasons, in a way that a group of several people performing certain topics as dancers does not have to be formed of single individuals that all have those experiences in their personal life. The Palestinian dance *dabkeh* is in itself a way of communicating through movement on stage and to deliver certain messages. Traditional aspects of the dance as as important as historical and political messages. The dancer's personal experiences of their life in a restricted area and influenced by political conflict are shaping the dance and performances. For the dancers, *dabkeh* is often a mode to share their emotions. Not all dancers have personal experiences on behalf of being a Palestinian on their own, but their all take part in a larger representation of a collective experience and national identity. It is an identity and a culture that not only consists of political factors and tragical history but also of people who life a notmal student life and want to go home after dance rehearsals. The Palestinian culture is not only a made by Arab tradition and Israeli occupation but also by young people who are joking around after what they love doing in their free-time, and who are not excited about filling out forms that ask them about the negative aspects of their countries. Only later on I realized that the censored freedom of speaking and writing about certain collective traumatic experiences might have lead certain members of the group to not respond.

My full range of insight I had with the group consisted of the following: I met them in Bulgaria where I slowly got to know them and got invited to the Hotel where they stayed, and spent a few eveninga with the girls in their room, since boys and girls were strictly seperated. Later on I started travelling to the Levante region and my stay there was over the all in all about half a year, with many visits of one or two months length. I re-visited the dancers and attended not only shows and rehearsals but was also invited to their homes and families and stayed overnight, gaining insights into their private daily lives. In my time in the levant region I not only went to the Palestinian region but also to Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Egypt. In my stay I did not only talk to Palestinians inside the occupied Palestinian territories but also to Palestinians who fled to Lebanon decades ago and were living in a refugee camp since then, not able to have access to legal papers from the Lebanese state and not allowed to do

most occupations in Lebanon, as well as I was getting to know Palestinians who's families moved to in Jordan decades ago and had good education, legal Papers and good Jobs. Also I had a close insight to a family who was originally moving to Qatar, and further on in the next generations to Jordan, and again further on to turkey and other members of the family to other countries (like the USA and Rumania). That family was enjoying a wealthy background and really good education in US-american schools in Qatar, moving a lot, having high-income professions, who were also grieving to not be able to go back to their country of origin. All these insights gave me a broader image of the Palestinian identity on a wider range, not only inside the occupied territories but also being in a generational situation of exile with different conditions in different countries of refuge.

Again I want to mention that I didn't have any anthropological background in the time when I was in the Levante region as a photographer. I am not arguing that my personal research a methodologically correct anthropological study, but still it gave me some insight that I am treating it as anthropologically relevant research material.

2.2. Explaining the Dance: Theoretical Background

Dabkeh is a traditional dance in the Arab Levant region. Allthough there is not many scientific sources about the dance's traditional heritage, it is often described as a men's dance performed at weddings and other festivities. Dabkeh is usually presented as a social, not a political dance, but in the palestinian modern version it becomes a political expression. (Kaschl: 72) After the 1967 war, dabkeh becomes a prominent topic in scientific writing, mostly by Arabic and especially by Palestinian writers. In contrary to before 1967, when the dance was a generally Levant Arab, and also Jewish dance, then it was newly categorized as specifically Palestinian heritage. In that time, dabkeh was linked to a discourse of nationalism, and linked the existence of a people to territory and culture. (Kaschl: 73) A popular interest in folklore emerged, research institutions were founded, Universities organized folklore courses, for example in Birzeit, An-Najah and Betlehem. (Kaschl: 80) Since that time, *dabkeh* did not only function as a social practice, but rather as a performance of national identity. (Kaschl: 78) Traditionally it is a circling folkdance made up of intricate steps and stomps. The dance has helped construct three very different political communities

and cultural identities during the 20th century. It played an important role in Zionism, pan-Arabism, and Palestinian Nationalism, which have all gained political credibility through the public performance of the dance. In the 19th century and before, it had no associations with any of these ideals. These three Ideals provide a historical baseline from which new, innovative choreographic histories might be identified and celebrated. (Rowe: 363)

In the early 20th century, the Zionist engagement with dabkeh might have emerged from an Orientalist curiosity or speculations of what the Kingdom of Israel once might have been like, two thousand years ago, but it soon became a part of a wider political process that ultimately marginalized the indigenous population. The dance was studied and replicated for its aesthetic value; dance steps, formations, and movements were accorded to new symbolic meanings associated with Zionist nationalism. It was since then appropriated to express a new political ideal, not learnt so as to embody a set of meanings that would help new immigrants in Palestine integrate more effectively into the indigenous population. (Rowe 370)

The military conflict and establishment of Israel and Palestine of 1947-48, which in arabic is referred to as *al Nakba* (the catastrophe), resulted in the displacement and exile of the majority of the indigenous population. This collective trauma fragmented existing familial, social, economic, geographic, and political bonds, disrupting both the indigenous society and its intangible culture. Diverse dance practices were suddenly removed from the geographic and social environments that had provided them with contextual meaning, threatening their continuity as cultural practices. (Rowe 370) Inside Israel historical narratives were being constructed that denied any pre-existing, settled, indigenous community. At the same time, Jordanian public forums were attempting to redefine the displaced indigenous population of Palestine and to newly construct a Jordanian national identity and a broader shift to a Pan-arab folklore movement. (Rowe: 371)

The Arab League presented the first *Folklore Conference* in Egypt in 1964 to identify the commonality and diversity within Arab folk culture, to promote the region's peasants as bastions of cultural authenticity. By entwining folklore with political identity, this movement presented a struggle against European colonialism that at the same time emulated European methods for constructing political identity. The annual *Baalbek* festivals in Lebanon became a central cultural location for this anti-colonial movement. It illustrated defiance to both European and Ottoman cultural hegemony for example in their performance promotion

advertisements. (Rowe: 371)

The dance was subsequently taught in Jordan as well as in Palestine, where other festivals were created, as for example the *Ramallah Nights* festivals in the 1960. Through these festivals, dabkeh as a performed spectacle was redefined and accorded certain artistic traditions that contrasted markedly from local dabkeh practices in rural social contexts. From interviews with local participants in these festivals, Rowe states the following changes in the dance practices:

„- A physical separation between dancers, musicians, and audience, as opposed to a fluid interchange of activities between everybody present.
- The permanent use of a stationary flat location, diminishing the processional aspect of certain wedding dances.
- The function of dancers as mute performers rather than as chanter-dancers, and audiences as mute observers.
- The memorizing of choreographic patterns to pre-arranged music patterns, rather than the spontaneous improvisation of group dance patterns led by different individuals.
- The duration of choreographic sequences being determined by the length of particular songs and composed pieces of music.
- The exaggerating of gesture and lengthening of posture, to increase the size of actions and project dance images to an audience at a greater distance.
- A disciplined uniformity amongst movements and poses of the dance ensemble.
Dancer selection based on youthfulness and appearance rather than community standing.“
(Rowe: 373)

In the Westbank, the performance of dabkeh was especially positioned on a developmental pathway that was guided by distant cultural and political events. On the one hand, the expansion of Israeli military control in June 1967 resulted in one-fifth of the indigenous population of the West Bank going into exile, together with a cancelling of all cultural events in Ramallah over the summer of 1967, including the *Ramallah Nights* festival. On the other hand, the remaining population in the Westbank suddenly formed a demographic pocket that was politically isolated from the surrounding nations to the north, south, and east, and politically alienated from the nation to the west that now governed them, as non-citizens. These events redefined the collective identity and the appropriations of *dabkeh*. (Rowe: 374f.)

For example, before the 1967 war, *dabkeh* was presented as a distinctively rural practice – even at the *Ramallah Nights* festival. Older members of the community recall that *dabkeh* was looked down upon as a cultural practice from the lower classes and not part of weddings and celebrations of wealthy and urban people. From 1967 on, it crossed such class divides and became an omnipresent social activity, particularly amongst youth. (Rowe: 375)

From then on, dabkeh also served as a traumatic mediator of the pre-*Nabka* past, as its purposeful revival and performance was inextricably tied to memories of a violent break from that past. The dance gained a new nostalgic value particularly for classes, to whom the peasant dance was a relatively new phenomenon. The new performances at weddings in all social classes created the function of the dance as a signpost to traumatic social upheavals in the local collective history, investing *dabkeh* with symbolic meanings associated with resistance to oppression and dispossession. (Rowe: 375)

This history of the dance shows its uniqueness in it's development in the Levante region, from being a traditional folk dance at first but changing its meanings and its contents to a unique Palestinian way of expression, in contrast to other arabic countries where the dance may also have had its special and typical developments and progresses, but not in a similar way to the Palestinian developments.

3. Palestinian Remoteness

In the next chapter I am attempting to discover remoteness on the example of the Palestinian people, in connection to their experience through *dabkeh*. I will discover definitions of remoteness, following texts by Harms, Schein and Shneiderman, that speak about other cases of remote areas and what makes them remote. In the upfollowing chapter I am talking about the Palestinian experience in their daily life, and the factors that make the Palestinian situation remote.

The exploration of remoteness will look into the factors of remoteness in the Chinese region Guizhou, where the Miao people are living a certain amount of resistance against the Chinese governance and preserve their traditional culture. Also the Dholaka Region in Nepal will

serve as an example of State's agendas to create remote areas, which makes remoteness a relational and constructed category. Then I will move on to Palestinian experiences from the *Somoud* group, that are based on political experiences and will give examples of personal stories of dancers. I will show how the Palestinian dabkeh troup *El-Funoun* includes their experiences in their dance based on information of an online article.

3.1. What is Remoteness?

In a perverse dialectic, Miao ethnic alterity became imbricated with topographical inaccessibility, each buttressing the other. Alteric as excluded, but alteric as menacing. The responsibility for material remoteness was displaced onto a narrative of the unassimilable that was resistant, however, to full penetration by civilization—or by state power. (Schein: 371)

As Louisa Schein stresses, remoteness is contingent and relational—and inexorably coimplicated with power. She is talking about the Miao people in China's south west region Guizhou, when she speaks about the interior as remote. She reflects on the socially peripheral but not on any geographic edge. She looks at how the material interacts with the sociopolitical in the form of discourse and policy. In the case of the Miao people, poverty synergized with topography, where mountains limit transportation and generate a shortage of arable land. Isolation was the norm, and the dense concentration of minorities coincided with recalcitrance of the state in putting resources toward development. Minorities refused to be subdued and fought against incursions of the Chinese state and its civilizing practices. This example of the Miao trope of fierce independence is "good to think" as a social imaginary of remoteness. (Schein: 370f.)

She is asking, if it is the thinned out reach of the nation-space, or of the state, that configures which spaces are remote, and what it tells us when inhabitants of the remote are co-creators of its imaginaries. She explains about the self-created marketability of the remoteness of the Miao people. When the so called Miao pale was incorporated under the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the decades of the Maoist governance began, the Miao people refused to take on Chines culture as other regions did. The Miao people lost their access to

developments that other areas made by being connected to the Chinese influence, but also it became more accessible to tourism and more visitors in a sense of marketable remoteness through cultural difference.

The Miao *construction* of remoteness is also resonating with Sara Shneiderman's description in this forum of how a comparable construction in Nepal elicited donor funds. (Schein: 371f.)

Remoteness is thereby seen as a relational category, it's seen as a characteristic that fades in and out of visibility as a designation for specific locales, depending upon who is talking about them and why. She states that the concept has both pragmatic political uses—for states, the people who live in them, and non-state actors like this organization—as well as a range of psychological, emotional, and embodied affects for the people who use it. (Shneiderman: 373) All these factors of remoteness of the Miao Pale show great similarities to the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian remoteness is highly coimplicated with power and suppression, as well as the resistance against it. Being interior and remote is similar for the Miao people as well as to the Palestinian People, even though a lot of Palestinian people are outside their former land and live in an exiled situation. The social periphery is the same, no matter if being interior or exterior.

The History of the Dolakha region in Nepal demonstrates that *remoteness* can serve state agendas—not only in colonial or imperial contexts—but for a state asserting a unifying cultural paradigm in its peripheries through the discourse of development. Dolakha is classified as *durgam kshetra*, or a "remote region", by the Nepali government. The literal meaning of *durgam* is "impassable." While it was and still is classified as *durgam* when it has been relatively well-connected for half a century suggests that the criteria used by the Nepali state are not purely geographical but sociocultural remoteness to the normative caste Hindu ideals of the historical Nepali state, since Dolakha is extremely diverse, with many ethnic groups, none of which comprise a majority. Since the district has played a key role in negotiating Nepal's geopolitical relationships with Tibet and China over time, and was an early site of urban civilization predating the Nepali nation-state, Dolakha potentially challenges predominantly Hindu, Kathmandu-based elite views of the world because it is at once so close, and yet so far. Shneiderman asks, what the idea of remoteness means to people who are classified as such by the state. As stated already, *durgam*'s literal meaning is „impassable." But she also speaks about relations like „backwards", „uneducated", or „the corner people", in the case of Nepali remoteness. (Shneiderman: 373)

In the particular Palestinian case it is important to mention the factor of remoteness through censorship. Similar to the classification of remoteness of the Dolakha region by the state of Nepal, censorship is also used in the Palestinian region by the Israeli state in order to undermine a Palestinian national identity. The use of folk dance was an effective tool to promote a critical awareness of local heritage and history occurred in a political environment in which the Israeli military was maintaining tight restrictions on public expression. The publications in the West bank about indigenous heritage and folklore were permitted and heavily censored in the 1980is and further on. The scripts of local plays required approval prior to performance, often with the permission for such productions being cancelled at the last moment. Also and very importantly, this censorship was extended into the textbooks in use in West Bank schools. (Rowe: 376) The West Bank population was not permitted to use written and spoken language to speak about cultural trauma across generations and throughout the wider community, so the Palestinian nationalist movement required other cultural media that might provoke empathy towards, and a greater understanding of, collective experiences from the present and past. Since folkdance presented a medium that was seemingly more innocuous than spoken or written words, while laden with emotive potential and local historic associations, it was used to express the collective trauma in a surrounding of censorship. (Rowe: 377)

According to Harms, Hussain and Shneiderman, politically, socially and economically remote areas are encountered at the edges of modernity and its processes. They are experienced and constructed in the process of geographical exploration, border administration and control, and symbolic representation of national states. Remoteness is assosiated with inaccessability and lack of connectivity, and is ultimately seen as a construction and an idea, that is never complete. (Harms et al.: 378)

3.2. The Palestinian Experience

In the world of the 3rd millennium, mobility, displacement and exile are salient characteristics. More than 200 million people were living outside of their birth countries in 2008, the number is constantly rising. (Eriksen: 318) Cultural identity is being shaped in both

the inability of having access to one's own country, as well as in being restricted to staying there for most of the time and having not much freedom in moving. In my research I was also in contact with exiled Palestinians, sometimes exiled since several generations, living for example in the USA, in Lebanon, Qatar and Jordan since since 1948 onwards. The aspect of Identity for Palestinian people is next to the political aspects very much connected to aspects of im-/mobility and movement. It was very clear that the different political and economical situations in the different countries harshly shaped their social and cultural development and behaviors very differently. In the area of the occupied Palestinian territories, the dancers told me their personal stories about the daily life. Many of them talk about political issues, about their daily experiences of the political situation.

„As we came back to Palestine from Bulgaria through Israel, we had too many complications. They examined us, as if we were coming to a foreign land, not our land. It aggrieved me in my heart, how could we experience this? We wanted to get to our land." (Bessan, dancer)

Palestinians have found themselves both in an often over several generations lasting exile, as also in a more-generational situation of confinement. The connection to „their land" is of great importance, as much as it is for the state of Israel. It is in many cultures seen that the metaphorical concept of having roots involves intimate linkages between people and place, when often people identify themselves, or are categorized, in reference to deterritorialized "homelands," "cultures," and „origins". (Malkki: 24) Not only is the situation of the connectedness to the land, be it in a situation of exile or in a situation of confinement, very present in my own fieldwork, but so is the link between the life in occupation and dancing as a mode of processing personal experiences, as well as communicating them. One of the dancers is telling the story of the bombardment of his cousin's house and his widowed wife. He wishes for his country to one day be freely visitable and accessible like any other country. They explain being able to express their feelings about their daily life under the occupation through *dabkeh*. He says that dancing is making him happy, its sporty and motivating, and he feels able to share the culture of his people through *dabkeh*, and his responsibility as a Palestinian. Another dancer tells her story:

„I will talk about my father, he spent half his life in Israeli prisons, about eight years in different places. He experienced so much injustice, was tortured, he was with Palestinian

rebels, against Israel, 30.7.86. Once my father came out of prison after four months, and the next day the Israeli army and secret service came back to our house and knocked at our doors, at around 6:00 pm, and the secret service officer shouted at my father, and dragged him out brutally, in front of his wife and kids, and didn't even allow him to get dressed, and they kept him for one more day and then let him go. (…) Cultural dance is all my life. I can explain all my feelings and emotions through it, and I forget everything I endure – and I smile.“ (Balques, dancer)

The expression of both the traditional aspect of being a cultural dance and the political aspect of transferring stories of war and conflict seemed in my research similar important to the dancers. They were performing theater-like dance where they recreated their historical events like the 1967 war, as well as traditional dances that they would also dance during weddings and other festivities. They explained to me the content of the certain performances and each dance included very specific and detailed stories that they would deliver through their movement on stage.

In the article *El-Funoun: Dance as Resistance* in *This Week in Palestine* on 25.02.2006, the *El-Funoun-dabkeh-*group desribes their experiences of their daily life in Palestine and the background motivers of dancing. The troupe was established in 1979 to revive Palestinian music and dance folklore as a manifestation of national identity. In the beginning the group researched extensively in Palestinian villages, to create its early productions, preserving centuries-old songs and dances, including the *dabkeh*. In the article they describe their reality, experience and day-to-day-situation in the Palestinian region as following:

At the time, Israeli leaders liked to think and to publicly announce that Palestinians did not exist as a nation; and, to fulfill the prophecy, they attempted to destroy and/or confiscate the indigenous Palestinian culture, heritage, tradition, history and identity, if not explicitly then through convoluted schemes and arbitrary "laws." Flight attendants on board Israel's airline El Al were issued Palestinian embroidered costumes; the golden Dome of the Rock was prominently flashed on every Israeli travel brochure; hummus and falafel were served as traditional Israeli cuisine; a myriad of Arab-Palestinian slang expressions entered the Israeli idiom as native talk; and of course the colours of the Palestinian flag were not allowed to be combined in any shape or form, even on a painting. Any slight assertion of Palestinian identity was severely punished. Little wonder, then, that the group's struggle to portray the

roots of Palestinian dance and song was considered a dangerous form of subversion by the illegal Israeli military occupation, and was punished accordingly. Several El-Funoun dancers and managers suffered various measures of persecution, including prolonged detention without charge, torture during interrogation and travel bans.

Clandestine dance rehearsals were not uncommon for El-Funoun at times of military crackdowns. Performing in occupied Jerusalem was normally punished with a three-day, red-wax closure of the venue that had the audacity to host the show, and a military order hung on its door declaring that it was closed for conducting "illegal activities."

Nevertheless, with oppression came recognition. Soon after its inception, El-Funoun achieved unprecedented popular renown among Palestinians, both in Palestine and in exile. Its songs became household tunes, and its dances spread feverishly, particularly among the youth. When one particular music recording, "Sharar," was banned by the occupation authorities for its "nationalistic content" and all the cassettes confiscated, it was ubiquitously and defiantly reproduced on available home recorders all over, becoming by far the most listened to music tape in Palestine at the time.

The inability to freely move outside the occupied area, as well as the inability to have free access to the country, creates what Appadurai describes as *imagined worlds*. Through the media and online networks *imagined communities* are created, who are forming a Palestinian identity, that overcomes the obstacle of the physical borders. The dance functions as one way of identifying with this community and this shared identity, and operates as a commune form of representation. The dance itself functions thereby as a mode of communication. It speaks about emotions, about heritage, about tradition, as well as change and progress. It talks about pain and anger, and acts as a catalyst for all kinds of emotions that result from the ongoing political situation in the region.

Within Israel and Palestine, the search for historical precedents as a basis for contemporary cultural actions can be of particular urgency and interest amongst population groups that have experienced collective traumas. Experiences like war, exile, colonization, or other political and natural disasters can dislocate people from their cultural pasts, which often leads to threatening a population's existing bonds and networks. It is often helpful to revive elements of the distant cultural past. Reconstructing them as a shared traditions can demonstrate that

the past is not lost, but rather continues on into the future. The traumatic events themselves are also often projected across generations through cultural lamentations. Folksongs, dances, oral histories, and other arts and rituals can be a medium for these stories. The disrupted social bonds of a traumatized community can thus appear resilient to the traumatic events. Folk dances can therefore be perceived as carrying both an ancient cultural past and a reminder of the threats to a traumatized community. (Rowe: 364)

4. Conclusio

Remoteness can consist of various different factors. Remote areas are experienced and constructed as such. They can be politically, socially, economically remote, and function in the process of geographical exploration, border administration and control, and symbolic representation of national states. Remoteness is formed by inaccessability and lack of connectivity. The experience of traumatic historical, political and social events shape a collective identity and the construction of remoteness in many ways. So how does the construction of the Palestinian remoteness exactly look like? And how is Dabkeh a representation and an expression of this Palestinian remoteness?

The topic of inability of movement, and lack of connectivity marks one great factor of the Palestinian remoteness. The connection to the „own land" to the „homeland" is an important factor in the Palestinian identity and narrative. The roots of a people are often connected to their identity and heritage of land, this is both the main issue for the Palestinian as for the Israeli claim of their land, that the conflict is „rooted" upon. The remoteness of the Palestinian territories is a remoteness of the interior as it is similar to the Miao pale in China. It is built on a social periphery but not a geographical periphery, and isolation, directly coimplicated with power. Not only are the Palestinian People interiorically remote, but they also inhabit a state of generational exile situation, which is constricted by travel regulations and restrictions of nationhood.

Often the inhabitants of the remote are co-creators of their remoteness. The Palestinian identity is built on a collective history and binding social experiences. Lots of these identity shaping experiences are built on recent historical and political events, but also the ongoing

situation is constantly re-creating new and current experiences. Confinement and restrictions in mobility and movement is one aspect of the current Palestinian identity, where living under military siege is probably the biggest creational factor of a collective traumatic identity. Bombardments, police raids in private homes or having relatives and beloved ones in prison is not an exception in the Palestinian normal day-to-day-experience. The occupied situation includes not being recognised as a nation and having destroyed and confiscated indigenous culture, heritage, tradition, history and identity. Also the dance activities were over the times heavily restricted and controlled. Censorship took place in many ways, forming a restricted form of identity which oftentimes even lead to more popularity of certain symbols of the Palestinian identity, like songs or the *dabkeh* dance itself.

Also remoteness often serves state agendas, which is also described by Sara Shneiderman on the example of the Nepalese Dolakha region. The remoteness of certain regions or areas are often created by presenting them as „backwards“, „uneducated“, or as „corner people“. In the case of the Palestinian region this is applicable in many forms by the Israeli state, one of which is through censorship and tight restrictions of public expression. Over the time there was different forms of censorship on different occasions, and not only were public events heavily cencored, but also the cencorship was applied to school books in West Bank schools. Cultural trauma was not allowed to be spoken and written about. Folkdance became a medium to transmit and express the collective trauma and experiences. Louisa Schein also speaks about the marketability of of the Miao remoteness which certainly also makes one aspect in Palestinian dance. It may be unintended but it is definitely one aspect of the construction of Palestinian Remoteness to be able to market the Palestinian identity and heritage and for that reason also *dabkeh* to the rest of the world as remote and special. To me it is interesting, how it is possible to build a great part of expressing a collective trauma on the background of censorship and reduction of cultural expression of trauma.

In all this, a social imaginary is created, that according to Schein is „good to think“, and what Appadurai describes as an *imagined community,* within *imagined worlds*. It is a remote identity that co-exists both within and without confined borders and is transmitted through various shared aspects of this identity, one of which is *dabkeh*. *Dabkeh* was once and still is a traditional dance in the Levante region. It was usually performed by men at weddings or other festivities, but in the Palestinian context soon changed it expressional meanings. The Palestinian collective trauma of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict *al Nakhba* in 1947-48 marked

a starting point of including political events and experiences that resulted through them into the dance. In that time the dance in the Palestinian territories took on a different form of development than in the other Levante countries. Even though in countries like Lebanon, Jordan or Egypt *dabkeh* festival were spreading, the Palestinian *dabkeh* was creating a unique expression of the Palestinian historical and political events. Not only did the ways of meaning and contents change, also the ways of presentation changed. The dance developed from a lower-class wedding dance to a popular representation of a national community without a nation, presented on festival stages, before governmental events and high class audiences. It recreates the Palestinian experience, trauma and heritage in front of the whole world, both inside and outside its confined borders. And terribly ironically, *dabkeh* speaks about a people not only living within and without restricted borders and having a restricted and shattered identity, about rootlessness within confinement, trapped inside a governmental and military siege of a country that is also built on rootlessness, a restricted and shattered identity, and persecution.

The identity of the Palestinian people is in constant motion and is constantly re-shaping and re-creating itself, facing the creation and re-creational affects of the Israeli state and Israeli identity in this never-ending conflict-situation. Dance in form of *dabkeh* is therefore also an always newly-shaped mode of expression of this identity, that is both trying to re-create its traditional aspects, roots and heritage, and on the other hand always trying to be at the peak of its most modern and time-fitting version. The popularity of the dance is constantly re-shaping the Palestinian identity, as well as the Palestinian experiences are shaping the dance. Thus, also the Palestinian remoteness is a relational category that varies in its form in time and constantly re-creating identity aspects, that is constantly performed and represented by Palestinian *dabkeh*.

5. Literature

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