



# Community Care in Palestine: When Grief and Politics Meet in the Body

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## Abstract

This intimate reflection of time spent in the West Bank, Palestine, during the summer months of 2023 reiterates the intrinsically personal nature of ethnographic research. As a tangent from my main research focus, this piece explores a turbulent 24 hours whereby a family member died at home in the UK and a member of the Palestinian community was arrested by the occupation. This period also coincided with a dark milestone that, by July, 2023 had surpassed previous years as the deadliest for Palestinians in the West Bank due to Israeli violence since the UN records began in 2005. My background as a dance practitioner provided me with heightened somatic awareness which played a central role in how I observed my body's physical reactions to grief, shock, fear, sadness, and this political landscape. Despite the pain from these solemn scenarios, my time in Palestine was shaped by such joy. Beyond enjoying the surroundings, I experienced intense emotional elevation through the continuous warmth, embrace, and comradery of the dance network with whom I was. A seed of appreciation was sown during my initial encounters which deepened when I received so much support from the community when I needed it. These seeds continue to grow. This reflective journey through pain and care shows how my interactions with this locale, and therefore my research, are uniquely individual to my experience and the nature of this Palestinian community during this specific time. Such juxtapositions of the worst and the best of humanity extend beyond this discussion and shed light on communal activist

movements, which are currently serving as fundamental inspiration and support for millions of advocates worldwide, during a significantly challenging period for Palestine during the final months of 2023.

**Keywords:** grief, community care, embodied ethnography, Palestine

## Introduction

I set off on my 10-minute journey with a lump in my throat. Every step of my walk juddered the knot in my stomach. It was 9:50 am and already over 30°C in the Palestinian streets of the West Bank. Shielded behind my sunglasses, tears filled my eyes as I tried to keep them in their sockets. I tried to keep them from falling down my cheeks as I passed friendly shopkeepers and exchanged our daily “Sabah al-Kheir” (*Good morning*). Halfway through my route, I came to the street with a building-less strip that exposed the view behind. Rolling hills, light beige rocks peeping out of golden soil meandering through olive trees, green shrubs, and white square houses. My grandad loved everything Mediterranean and even though he only died a few hours ago, I already missed him so much. Overlooking this landscape, I let the tears release and I cried. I did not think I could get through the remaining 5 minutes of my walk, let alone the day or the rest of my trip (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The occupation's impact on the environment: the view of Palestine from a demolished home in the West Bank.

My deep thoughts in the serenity of this view were suddenly disrupted by an immense sound pounding from the road: a car roaring past, honking the horn, and blaring music with kids hanging from the windows yelling and waving at me. I could not help but laugh through my tears and smile! The ups and downs of life, I thought. One distinguishing feature of Palestine is that the highs accompany the lows and positivity prevails.

The landscape of the West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories, consists of low-rise houses that horizontally harmonize with the surroundings among century-old olive trees and ancient stone walls outlining millennia old farmland traditions. Contrastingly, many locations are dominated by miles of agricultural monoculture, densely packed areas of vertically towering residential blocks occupying the view and natural flora, divided by the unavoidable 8-m tall Apartheid Wall<sup>1</sup> that cuts through age-old land usage, communities, and traditions. The latter description depicts the architectural products of Israeli settlers<sup>2</sup> in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The apartheid reality of this region even permeates the landscape, making its presence unavoidable. The West Bank has been occupied<sup>3</sup> by the State of Israel since 1967 although this was by no means the beginning of oppression<sup>4</sup> enforced onto the people of Palestine by Israeli, and British, colonizers.

Israeli military forces occupy full control of all borders of Historic Palestine, which today includes the territories of Gaza, the West Bank, and the State of Israel, as well as internal boundaries within the West Bank called checkpoints.<sup>5</sup> Palestinians have resisted this subjugation in a multitude of different ways, including with dance. The “Great March of Return,” 2018–2019, was a series of protests in Gaza whereby Palestinians peacefully marched to the border to demand the right of

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1. <https://www.makan.org.uk/project/israels-wall-security-or-apartheid-credit-aj/>.

2. <https://www.ochaopt.org/2023-movement>.

3. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/06/israel-occupation-50-years-of-dispossession/>.

4. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>.

5. <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/great-dance-of-return-palestinians-perform-dabke-to-the-sound-of-bullets-video/>.

return for refugees displaced during the Nakba.<sup>6</sup> On the 14th weekly demonstration, activists staged a performance of dabke,<sup>7</sup> a Levantine folk dance, in front of Israeli snipers who killed two Palestinians and injured over 400 at this event.

This inclusion of dabke within “The Great March of Return” demonstrates the centrality of dance to Palestinian culture. During the summer months of 2023, I went to Palestine to explore dance and art practices within this landscape. Yet for this piece, I will focus on my personal experiences and reflect upon how my body and this community responded to emotional moments, and what this reveals about embodied emotions within dance research, community care, and political engagement.

Within a short frame of under 24 hours while I was in Palestine, I encountered two life-changing events. Firstly, a member of the community was arrested by Israeli forces without charge. Almost immediately afterwards, my grandad died in the UK. The sudden intersection of a suspension of life and the unexpected loss of a beloved grandparent delves into the profound depths of human emotion within the realms of dance studies. These emotionally charged challenges not only disrupt conventional approaches to fieldwork ethics and safety but also shape the unique contours of my research experience. Furthermore, this was framed by the context whereby the occupation loomed over, casting a shadow of uncertainty in response to daily news reports or passing through checkpoints.

Through detailed accounts of moments during my fieldwork, I investigate the presence of my emotions, namely grief, fear, and admiration, to suggest how as researchers we are shaped by, as well as shape, the field we are in. This personifies the gap of acknowledging feelings as part of our positionality in research while highlighting the individuality of each ethnographic experience. We encounter the field

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6. <https://pij.org/articles/427/the-environmental-impact-of-jewish-settlements-in-the-west-bank#:~:text=The%20Jewish%20settlements%20are%20built,leading%20to%20increasing%20soil%20erosion>.

7. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/telling-wrong-story-palestine-western-media>.

through the lens of our emotions as if it were a theoretical framework. Our perception is shaped by our emotions, influencing the focus of our fieldwork, and determining what we consider significant. Theoretical frameworks then emerge and evolve from this interplay.

Many dance researchers have a background in movement practices that heightens one's "sense of the sensations and states of being of bodies, and how the body engages with the world" (Martin, 2020:5). This heightened bodily awareness nurtured in the studio persists in various situations, expressing itself through different emotions. This has equipped me with the capacity for embodied interpretation, whether in the immediate experience or reflective contemplation of past moments. This exploration reveals that even when exploring dance practices through the medium of words, the body and movement still play fundamental roles.

Inspired by Martin (2020), I use the concept of *performance* while reflecting on times when I saw myself as "acting" or portraying a "staged" version of myself, mostly while attempting to conceal my internal state from the outside world. Due to the support I received, I focus my reflection on my decision to forgo this "method" during engagement with the Palestinian community, particularly when I was grappling with grief. This discussion illuminates insights about how our emotions shape how we act in the field and how the interpersonal nature of ethnography defines such research. Moreover, this demonstrates the caring nature of the Palestinian society that welcomed me in.

Skills gained from my dance background in contemporary and tap dance did not only prove valuable during this fieldwork. Their presence remains with me everywhere as a constant reminder to engage my core values, to stretch my ability to absorb constantly updating information, and to listen to my body and feel how it responds to the world. At the time of writing, while Palestine is facing unprecedented violence in 2023,<sup>8</sup> these attributes are more important than ever and support my continuous activism and perseverance.

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8. <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/operation-al-aqsa-flood-day-83-israel-attacks-10-palestinian-cities-in-largest-west-bank-invasion-since-october-7/>.

## The Fateful Day

Days after we had all been at a wedding and hours after we had joked around after rehearsal, the news came of his arrest.

They've taken him. They don't need a reason, it could be days or months.

Everything within me sunk. My internal weight flooded downwards, leaving emptiness in my chest. A void that amplified the sudden and strong beating of my heart. Moisture sunk to my armpits, hands, feet and radiated from my scalp causing my baby hair to stick to my head. Cold chills encapsulated my body despite the hot and stuffy room. Facial muscles sunk: lower eyelids, cheeks, corners of mouth. The only thing that lifted was the upper muscles of my shoulders, raised with tension.

Later I called my mum. My uncle picked up, very strange. I did not realize they were all together, let alone at the hospital. My grandad was in critical condition (Figure 2).

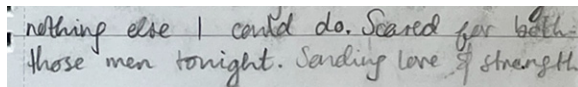


Figure 2: Excerpt from diary, written on the day that a friend was arrested and my grandad went into hospital.

My grandad died the following day.

I was barely a week into my fieldwork when these life-altering events unfolded, casting a shadow over the familiarizing space I had just begun to ease into. Despite the emotional turmoil, I went ahead with my schedule the next day. The internal struggle between being personally distraught and the desire to continue my research journey led to my attempt to downplay my emotions and hold in my tears on my journey that morning. I convinced myself that this performance of internal composure was necessary for the external world. My first audience was myself. It was a rehearsal, a practice for the enactment I was about to embark on—not on stage, but in navigating the delicate balance between personal grief and academic commitment.

I pause here to reflect on my position as a researcher and question why I wanted to hide this side of me. Considering Anthropology's colonial evolution and potential, the discipline has seen a reflexive shift that focuses on the impact of researchers' presence and positionality on their research. Researchers are embodied selves within ethnography's introspective change of lens and understanding how embodiment influences research is crucial (Coffey, 1999, in Martin, 2020). My presence embodies Whiteness. Initially, it was white privilege that allowed me to enter this space, territory, and to embark on this research. Furthermore, as a British researcher in Palestine, I am aware of the socio-historical power dynamics of bodies such as mine in "the Orient as a European or an American first, as an individual second" (Said, 1978:19). That is to say, I am not any foreigner in this space, but one rooted in a cultural history with an infamous legacy in the region, namely through Britain's fundamental role in the founding of the State of Israel and thus the realities of Palestinian lives today.

In light of such history, I strive to work in a manner that challenges and deconstructs the ways in which traditional anthropological perspectives have been shaped by colonial power dynamics. This introduces internal negotiations of understanding the impact of my presence, without wanting it, or in this case my emotions, to dominate this space or research. The role of a researcher requires responsibility, thus I was constantly reevaluating how to present myself and my inner emotions in relation to the context I was situated in. Paired with the vulnerability of displaying strong feelings such as teary sadness, I used this concept of performance when I was balancing the colonial legacy of the discipline, consciousness of the heritage of my persona, and how I handled my raw emotions.

Lived somatic experiences as a dancer transcends beyond dance specific contexts to accompany us and sharpen our perspectives of how our bodies interact with different situations, including those during fieldwork (Martin, 2020). Despite being unrelated to a stage, this outlines my concept of performance within research, whereby the versions of ourselves that we present in the field are an amalgamation

of our personal backgrounds, cultural histories, and desires to conduct considered research.

I tried to reassure myself, rationalizing the loss of my elderly relative as a natural conclusion to a life well-lived. Incomparable to the shock of a young life being taken away by authorities. A shock which manifested differently to when friends had been arrested back home. Knowing about the Israeli occupation's practices, about administrative detention<sup>9</sup> and the conditions<sup>10</sup> Palestinians face in these jails heightened the fear of their fate. Also, it felt as if any unsuspecting companion could be next.

Whilst sharing the news about my grandpa, my downplaying performance was in full swing. Those around me empathized, which allowed space for my internally silenced voice to surface. I was repeatedly asked,

Are you going to go home? The uncertainty of whether to return home lingered in my mind—torn between the irreplaceable moment of familial grief and the commitment to my research in a place I had grown to love. Moreover, this illuminated the selfless nature of the Palestinian society around me, empathizing with my emotions despite having a collective identity rooted in complex and often painful relationships with the concept of 'home' – a result of decades of displacement.

Throughout a busy day filled with performances, both internal and external, the question of returning to my family reverberated in conversations. Although each inquiry stoked my internal longing for home, which heightened my indecisiveness, these discussions evolved into reflections of cross-cultural end-of-life rituals. I grew up in a British society where conversations about death are shied away from, where the inevitable end of life imposes some sort of uncomfortable

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9. <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/administrative-detention>.

10. <https://101.visualizingpalestine.org/resources/glossary/nakba#:~:text=The%20Nakba%E2%80%94meaning%20%E2%80%9Ccatastrophe%E2%80%9D,State%20of%20Israel%20in%201948>.



awkwardness, and when someone dies it can be weeks if not months before we have a funeral. Sharing this helped to deconstruct my discomfort, question practices I had always been accustomed to, and position my personal circumstances within the broader context of global traditions, which provided a momentary respite from the internal turmoil.

Only in hindsight did the interconnection of these situations become clear. The timing of my attempt to confide in my mum that triggered a second wave of shock. Perhaps that contributed to my conscious effort to downplay my pain. Weeks later at a memorial for my grandad, I read a letter I had written to him the night he died. Before my speech, I saw my diary entry from this fateful day on the back of the paper. Whether onsite or at home, these two events will never be disconnected. Not for anyone else in the world, but for me, highlighting the individuality of each person's experience which roots the uniqueness of ethnography.

Starting the day as a performer, I concluded with gratitude for my familiarity with being in the spotlight as a dancer. Despite the inner voice urging me to recognize larger issues and more unjust losses, I gradually became more compelled to share my experiences with everyone I encountered. Perhaps it was a way to excuse my low mood, but it led to a means of connecting with the community in a foreign place.

In contrast to approaches to death in my culture, each sharing experience felt natural, open, welcomed, and encouraged my next act of confiding. In echoing Lorde's (1988) reflections on mutual support throughout her battle with cancer, I realized that sharing my grief fostered a sense of connection within the community. It did not feel like oversharing or imposing awkwardness; instead, it created a space for normal, human conversations that helped counteract the suppressor and soothe the catastrophizer within me.

Perhaps it was an indication of what later crystallized as the essence of my experiences in Palestine. Ultimately, I discovered a profound sense of safety and love within this community, which became an invaluable source of support during this challenging time.

## **The Inseparable Nature of Fieldwork and Life**

My proceeding time in Palestine was intricately connected to the scenario outlined above. While I did not again encounter such an intimately knotted series of events, the security gained from the day's developments and the enduring support from the community left a lasting impact. However, an underlying fear persisted, creating a confusing dynamic. This emotional turmoil, experienced throughout that fateful 24 hour period, echoed in the bewilderment of feeling secure within the community while precarious within the political landscape.

Without wanting to reinforce the misconceptions that Palestine is purely defined by violence, which both the artists I met and my personal drive are trying to debunk, no amount of prior reading, watching, or researching could have prepared me for the sheer brutality of the occupation. Beyond legal enforcements, the constant interference with daily lives, the tragedy of frequent killings, and anguish of every encounter with a military officer cannot be overlooked. All the while, I was aware that whatever I experienced, with my foreign passport and white skin, was incomparable to the realities of Palestinians in their own country.

Fear was a constant companion throughout my journey, even before I left for the field. Prior to my departure, I had to swallow my fear every time a concerned family member or classmate shared theirs. My fear of the occupation; the military who enforce violence, detainment, and break international law in the name of "security." Who's security? Not that of my friends, so how could I believe that my safety was in their interest? But I had to appear confident, letting on this fear would only cause more worry to my loved ones. Once again, performance skills played a fundamental role. There was no space for my fear while I tried to convince my peers against theirs. Pretending to be brave, continuing the pretense until it transformed into courage.

I knew my fear lay with the oppressor while so many Western narratives stereotype the oppressed as the threat, due to continuous

media misinformation<sup>11</sup> that portrays certain narratives of Palestine to the outside world. I could never be sure what point of view guided the concerns of people at home, so I had to amplify my trust in the few people that I knew at that time to downplay these worries. I let my faith in our introductory encounters and what I had learned about Palestinian culture from abroad guide my persuasive speech aimed at abating the risks and reducing my companions' fears.

Fast forward to when I was grappling with personal and communal loss during my early weeks in Palestine, it took immense effort not to let the trauma overshadow my ability to box away these emotions and engage at times. I was cautious not to be the sensitive outsider, not to redirect the attention to myself, and thus not to focus the research on the researcher (Martin, 2020). Nor to dwell at moments when life was moving forward. I was aware of my position, the privileges of my background, and how these determined my reactions to this environment. Most of all, I was mindful not to let my sorrow dominate this landscape, nor let my struggle in doing so dominate either.

Sometimes I found it hard to compartmentalize emotions. Hard to absorb news of killings when handling my own raw grief. Hard to appreciate traditions surrounding death—so public, so together—while I was so far from my family and perhaps months away from our mourning ritual. Each news bulletin fortified a deep pain, each name became a hole in a family tree, an empty space that I felt reverberate through my body and weigh everything down. I could not disconnect from this anguish. Not due to the political landscape, not due to my fresh feelings of loss, and not due to my research topic. Nor due to my experience of my painful emotions being welcomed, listened to and held when I initially tried to detach from them. With slight distance, I now realize that no aspect of my time in the field was separated.

Just as nothing I encountered in Palestine was isolated from the political landscape, everything I experienced was lived through the

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11. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests/>.

lens of my emotions. When I set off on that unforgettable day of grief, I tried to force my body into a position where my personal experience of my grandad's death was removed from the context of a member of the community being arrested by the occupation. It soon became apparent that this was not only impossible, but if I had continued with this attempt it would have obstructed me from sharing my grief and thus engaging with the community who hosted my presence and listened to my emotions. It was my instinctive learning not to distance myself from people around when things got tough, yet through all this I also learned about the inseparable nature of fieldwork and life. This was undeniably difficult, especially as the events and emotions were such painful ones. This research truly highlighted the intrinsically interconnected and personal realities of ethnography.

### **Allowing Emotions Into Traditional Research Methods**

I do not want to shy away from delving into this pain, recognizing it as an opportunity for strength. In the words of Lorde, neglecting strong emotions, or fearing their weight, only allows them to fester and go to waste (1984). Transporting myself back to that fateful day when the lives of two men close to me were taken, re-experiencing the emotions, observing, holding, and hearing how my body reacted is a crucial step towards comprehending my personal experience. This process has significantly contributed to my own grieving, deepened my understanding of this community, and prompted reflections on my real-time, spontaneous navigation of physical responses to pain and their relationship with my research.

Martin emphasizes the unpredictable nature of research, stating, "Regardless of the amount of planning and forward thinking that takes place, the research unfolds in real time, and requires a significant amount of thinking on one's feet" (2020:5). No amount of pre-planning can prepare for the timing of life-altering events in relation to a proposed research schedule. In the field, we strategically plan our time, considering the best moments for certain methods, factoring in events, commitments,

and the community's availability. Navigating the field requires flexibility, akin to shape-shifting entities moving around structures, much like a dancer maneuvering around stationary objects. We must readjust to last-minute alterations, channel the skills of movement practitioners, utilizing available space while being accustomed to spontaneous changes, readjustments, and the immediate call to take the stage.

In the realm of interviews, we are not only trained in what questions to ask, but more importantly, how to ask them. We learn to receive information without exploiting emotions, to delve deep while recognizing signs and avoiding triggers. We suggest a path while following the lead of the interviewee, acknowledging tension, and handling it with caution.

A reflective question arises: What if I were to interview the version of myself from that challenging day? Would I treat her with the same caution? This is not to discount the empathy I felt from my surroundings, but rather a contemplation of how I, as a researcher, treat myself and my emotions. It prompts a reflection on where we position our vulnerability and safety in relation to those in the locale. It is a delicate balance within ethnography's reflexive shift, and I am still not sure where I place or how I treat myself within my own (field)world.

At the time I did not acknowledge the constant imposition of my emotions and therefore was not prepared to be sensitive towards them. My initial reflection on that fateful day saw myself as prioritizing my research responsibility over caring for myself. I saw going on as pushing through, without treating myself with the compassion I would give to an interviewee who wanted to reschedule. However, as this reflection has revealed, the surrounding community really did get me through that day. I am now grateful that I gave myself the opportunity to open up to the people around me and to share and process my immediate grief.

This deeply personal reflection undoubtedly resonates with Audre Lorde's works and is an invaluable life lesson in collective care. As Palestine, especially Gaza, is under brutal attack in 2023, the strength of numbers protesting globally and the support of connecting with people through such actions is proving invaluable to millions of us worldwide.

## Community Care

### On-site

Being with these dance groups and their social networks for an extended amount of time illuminated the lingering imposition of the Israeli occupation but, more significantly, the remarkable warmth and resilience of this Palestinian society. Despite the challenges, celebrations continue (although paused out of respect when someone is martyred), dancers create innovative artwork and communities cultivate welcoming spaces. The more time I spent with this network the less alien I felt. The more spaces were shared with me, the more my admiration grew. The more movement practices I encountered, the more aware I became of how bodies engage with the world. The

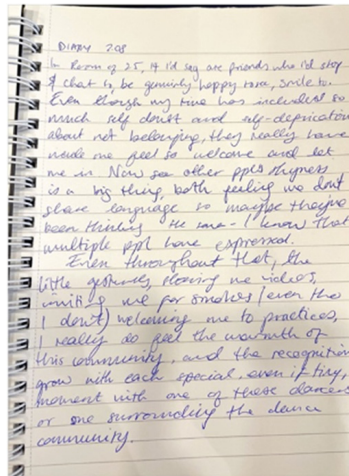


Figure 3: Diary entry expressing admiration for the community. Text reads: "Diary 02.08.

In a room of 25, 14 I'd say are friends who I'd stay & chat to, be genuinely happy to see, smile to. Even though my time here has included so much self-doubt and self-deprecation about not belonging, they really have made me feel so welcome and let me in. Now see other people's shyness is a big thing, both feeling we don't share language so maybe they've been thinking the same. I know that multiple people have expressed. Even throughout that, the little gestures, showing me videos, inviting me for smokes (even though I don't) welcoming me to practices, I really do feel the warmth of this community, and the recognition grow with each special, even if tiny, moment with one of these dancers, or one surrounding the dance community."

more bureaucracy I was exposed to, the less sense I could make of the occupation. The more moments passed, the less I wanted to leave.

This sentiment is reflected in my journal entries from that period and my memories now, both of which are permeated by an all-encompassing love for this place and its people (Figure 3).

This uncensored stream-of-consciousness portrayal of how I felt while I was with this group illuminates the sense of inclusion that I felt while in Palestine. I do not speak Arabic, which undeniably impacted my level of engagement which, as depicted here, did make me feel uneasy at times and frequently an outsider. Yet despite this, I was made to feel part of something. Not only part of the spaces I was welcomed into, but also part of the sense of security that being surrounded by this intergenerational network provided. This goes to show how each experience is so reliant on the context in which it takes place, and the Palestinian warmth that I felt was fundamental to how I coped with the challenges throughout this period.

### ***With distance***

Since leaving Palestine, time and space have allowed the trauma to resurface and reshape, presenting itself in different lights, with various connotations, and often in unexpected spaces. I refer to this as “processing” rather than “healing.” The latter implies mending, perhaps by patching up, which is the last thing I want to do—I do not want to forget any moment, any emotion, any sensation.

Naturally our minds linger on some areas and sprint past others. Although this all occurred so recently, I have not always been able to transport back to that painful period of fresh grief. Despite my efforts, I cannot be sure of what moments my subconscious mind is ignoring, so this process of uncovering continues, remembering extra details and learning all the time. Yet another interference of emotions with ethnographic, or any, experiences is their ability to attract some memories and enforce distance from others. The reflexive shift of anthropology has debunked the idea that ethnographic research is “objective,” as it is always dependent on what and how the individual researcher sees in

the field. I add that our emotional state allows us to notice certain things at the time and realize other things later—perhaps when our emotions have begun to be processed or moved through the body.

Although distance has helped me acknowledge things I might not have been able to previously, I do not want to forget that pain, that reality. I do not want to move forward; I want to stay right there. As Sara Ahmed suggests, “We need to stay as sore as our [sore] points” (2009:51). These painful realities are the strongest driving force that informs and energizes our anger and its transformation into action.

Less than a week after returning to Europe, I joined a workshop run by a Palestinian cultural activist. This started with group discussions and while the themes covered were not unrelated to my experiences in Palestine, there was not the verbal engagement for where my sensations wanted to go. Tired from traveling and overwhelmed by numerous changes of location, I do not think I had begun to digest what my mind and body had so recently experienced.

The workshop evolved into physical movement and, as if from nowhere, my body had so much to tell me. It led me around the room, reawakening sensations of specific moments in Palestine, bringing back memories that had been stuck in the stillness of my limbs, copying Palestinian dancers’ movements that transported me back to their land. Once again, I noticed the connection between my particular sensational awareness of being a dancer and embodied encounters during my research (Martin, 2020). Similar to being transported to a particular moment by hearing a familiar song, this movement awoke feelings that transported me back to a specific time and place and, moreover, how that instant felt. Although I have the words to describe all this now, back then, I did not.

Even while physically far away from this land now, I do not feel disconnected from Palestine. Palestinian advocacy groups that previously offered information and a sense of taking action, now compound this with support, strength, and keeping my memories from this time alive and present. When directed into our visions and future, anger reinforces and clarifies our actions, equipping us with



information and energy (Lorde, 1981) that fuels sustained engagement. Likewise, the intense emotions I felt during, and since, this time inform my activism and compel me to continue.

Every person's experience is individual only to them and dependent on their surroundings, which ethnographic research provides space for exploration. Yet, ethnography would be nothing if isolated from anthropology's broader engagement with the world. For me, anthropological engagement drives, informs, and motivates my activism. This ethnographic endeavor is ever-increasing the bond between my personal experience, anthropological awareness, and fighting for justice, particularly for Palestine.

### **Conclusion: Inspiration from Ethnography to Continued Activism**

In conclusion, I return to Audre Lorde's powerful statement,

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence; it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare (1988:95).

Much like a researcher in the field, emotions cannot be brushed aside as invisible or inconsequential entities. Rather, they demand acknowledgment as potent and influential factors that mold our perceptions and guide us toward meaningful actions. In reflecting on my personal experience, I have gained insights into how I internalize strong reactions to the world around me, and particularly how this manifested during and after my time in Palestine. Simultaneously, slight distance has allowed me to recognize recurring patterns that emphasize the distinct role of an ethnographer. Within the span of a fateful 24-hour period, I found myself in a unique position as the sole individual connected to both the passing of an old man and the incarceration of a young adult. This examination highlights the nuanced perspective of an ethnographer and therefore the personal and subjective nature of ethnographic work.

Just as research is inseparable from the researcher, ethnography is inseparable from the locale. Although it was very difficult being away

from my family when my grandad died, I am so grateful that as I was not at home, I was in Palestine. Ethnographic work is learning about a place through experiences. The people I was with shared a lot about their community beliefs with me, but it was when I needed support that they truly taught me what these values are. It was through collective actions of care that I was able to further comprehend this society's morals, to pursue my research, and continue to engage in my plans, responsibilities, and engagement with Palestinian culture. Similar to Lorde's statement, care was crucial for my continuation in engagement which, since the initiation of this project, has been political.

Throughout this processing journey, the significance and knowledge of movement practices has been profoundly apparent and I am grateful to the work of Martin (2020) for highlighting this within her own research and thus inspiring me to recognize the connections in mine. Guiding me through various situations, the skills acquired from dance training have proven invaluable to craft performances as to how I presented myself in different situations. In addition, bodily awareness has led to a means of unlocking the ability to access sensations and memories before I could articulate them verbally.

This has progressed into an embodied practice of keeping the sensations of pain, fear, and deep affection alive within my body which is allowing me to stay present with my past experiences and emotions. For my ethnography, I can safely draw upon these feelings to write accurate accounts of my engagements in Palestine from that specific time, right before the world was shaken by Israel's most recent aggression onto Gaza, The West Bank, and neighboring countries. As discussed here, in some instances time has allowed for reflection upon moments that were difficult to handle and process back then. This has shown that even in text-based dance studies, movement is still of fundamental importance.

Furthermore, keeping these senses alive allows me to always have them with me as a tool to clarify my reactions to the world. This doubly connects with the teachings of Audre Lorde, both as self-preservation (1988), by enabling me to reawaken past versions of myself that lived through experiences I never want to forget. Hence loading,

and reloading, my anger, amongst other emotions, with clarifying information and energy (1981) to fuel my political engagement and activism with passion. This is particularly crucial as violence against Palestinians is escalating as I type.

## Author Biography

Annie Wren is a dynamic anthropologist, movement practitioner and activist, who bridges these fields to advocate for social change. With a background in Social Anthropology and Linguistics from SOAS University, her academic journey has centred around exploring the intricate connections between language, music, dance, and identity formation, particularly within London's diasporic communities. Currently, Annie's focus lies in integrating creative practices with activism, harnessing movement and visual art as potent tools for raising awareness and fighting for justice. Her extensive experience includes employing a multidisciplinary approach to deliver engaging educational experiences to diverse audiences, ranging from facilitating dance and drawing workshops to promoting language learning for social integration. Annie embodies a holistic approach to advocacy, blending artistic creativity, activism, and scholarly pursuits. Through collaboration and engagement, her mission is to amplify the voices and experiences of marginalised communities globally, working across disciplines to foster understanding, promote social justice and establish meaningful connections.

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