

Jerusalem In Exile  
Hadar Cohen  
Thesis Paper

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may our healing be tenfold our pain

## Introduction

On November 1, 2019 I was walking down the streets of Jaffa, the beloved Palestinian city known as Arous Al Bahr. The night before, I'd shared with the world a new project that I titled "Jerusalem In Exile". As I walked, I passed by a narrow alley where a man was cutting a tree with an ax. Right as I walked under, he gave the final blow to the tree and it fell on my head along with the handle of the ax. I was startled and shocked, yet it took a couple of days to realize that I had a concussion that would leave me bedridden for a couple of months.

At that point, it was a few months since my grandmother died. My grandmother's name was Malka Cohen - Malka meaning Queen in Hebrew and associated with the Kabbalistic Sefirah (Divine Aspect) of Malchut, and Cohen referring to the Biblical priestly lineage originating from Aaron, Moses's brother. She was the strong matriarchal presence in my family, embodying a sense of feminine power I admired. I was very close with her throughout my life. She identified as a Palestinian Jew and grew up in the Old City of Jerusalem. Her parents, her grandparents, her great-grandparents and so on were all born in Jerusalem. I was the 10th generation Jerusalemite to be born there. Even though she and my grandfather shared a beautiful love story, Jerusalem was the love of her life. Everything was about Jerusalem to her.

I loved my grandmother for the warmth and love she held for me and also for the stories of Jerusalem she would tell me. Born in 1938, she knew a world in Jerusalem pre-1948. When she died, my world collapsed. She was like my mother and losing her was unbearable. It was not just the personal loss but also the ancestral loss. Losing her also meant losing a world.

My grief was overwhelming. I did not know how to relate to emotions that felt all consuming. Depression hit and tears would come but somehow they didn't feel enough. My body needed to speak in a new way. My grandmother's death led me to develop a relationship with my body. I wanted to understand myself and what lived in me, not just from a personal way but in the ways my body relates to the ancestral and collective too. My grief didn't feel just about me and her. It was about Jerusalem Herself and the grief of losing the city of God to colonialism.

I did not understand what was moving through my body but I desired to be seen. Grief can often be a self-isolating process so I did not trust others around me to hold me through that time. Rather, I started documenting my own movements and later observing them. I would take my phone camera, position it to point towards myself and allow my body to move as it wanted to. Often, I would feel quite terrible inside as

I would do this. I felt a resistance towards moving in an aesthetic way and sometimes towards moving at all. I would record for some time and then leave the film for a few days to rest on my phone memory. Yet when I would revisit the video, I would always feel moved. All of a sudden I saw myself and my body in a way that was different from my internal experience at the time of filming. When I was filming it, I felt pain, heartbreak and depression. But when I was viewing myself, I felt beauty and inspiration from witnessing my human body process raw emotions.

This experience of feeling from the inside and then viewing from the outside became a part of my ritual practice. What is felt sometimes can't be viewed and what is viewed sometimes can't be felt. Perspective can be from within as an internal experience or from without as an outsider view. But when the two frames come together to meet each other, a more complete frame of perspective is understood.

This process of inner unfolding with external observation became a way for me to witness the political reality on the land. As someone who was born in Jerusalem but moved to the US at the age of 10, I was constantly traveling back and forth between the experience on the land and the diasporic view in the West. This movement left me disorienting at times but ultimately led me to practice multiple views. It led me to reflect on how the felt experience and the observer view shape each other, both personally and politically.

Many have their eyes turned to Jerusalem and observe the viciousness of violence occurring on her soil. Yet often there can be a gap between what is being viewed and the experience of being on the land. Additionally, the political discourse often felt that it was ruled by intellectual and historical analysis while ignoring the somatic experiences of the collective. Particularly, the political discourse often left out what is happening inside the body, the ways trauma is stored and how the ancestral lineages communicate with us. What if there was a way to bridge perspective from the outside to the inside?

This is where the project "Jerusalem In Exile" originated from. I desired to open a new possibility in understanding and speaking of Palestine and Israel. One that is multidimensional - integrating the spiritual and psychological alongside the political and the personal. One that centers the body as the vessel for felt experience and observation of movement.

"Jerusalem In Exile" is about rupture and the possibility of return. It was inspired by my grandmother, for when she died I felt the ancestral rupture of losing the Palestinian Jewish lineage. It was my experience that when I lost her, I lost Jerusalem too. Jerusalem was not Herself and I longed for Her to be seen in Her grief and transformation too.

For years, I longed to be an artist but I did not think that was possible given where I came from. Growing up in Jerusalem, there is a morbid cloud that chases away all of our dreams. Possibilities narrow as the cycle of violence worsens year by year. I always dreamt of an MFA but it was a dream that I never thought could be fulfilled. Perhaps in another life I thought.

Then one day, I decided to call an artist friend and ask her if she by any chance knows about low-residency MFA programs. I knew the traditional MFA was beyond my untraditional lifestyle but perhaps there was another option for me. I did not intend to apply to an MFA, I just wanted to know what was out there. She recommended Transart Institute as the perfect place for me - a program that was creative research centered and process oriented. The application deadline was the following week and I decided to apply. After my concussion, I had to put my project aside to focus on my healing. I thought it was a project relegated to the past but when I was accepted to Transart Institute, it went through a re-birth process.

Since then, my MFA research has taken many turns along the way. Originally the project consisted of filming my own body moving in different landscapes of Jerusalem, playing with different motions of expression. It later on developed into studying how movement is a language of communication. One of my central questions has been what is changed when we shift the discourse from a mental one into a somatic one, or rather how does my understanding of someone shift when I observe their movement as opposed to listen to their words. This process was also influenced by spiritual techniques of meditation. Typically, meditation teaches to observe the thoughts as they come into the mind without attaching to them. My question through this research is how can we observe our movements without attaching to them and what does that reveal about our inner psychological processes.

Throughout this project, I was the subject of the research. I examined the ways my internal world and my movement practiced shaped each other. Additionally, how the process of documentation and inviting external observations impacted the work.

This work began as an ancestral reckoning and portal for connection and has advanced into deepening my personal relationship to myself and my body. With any work of art, the work continues beyond its completion and I hope that this research will continue guiding me and my work in the future.

## About

Jerusalem In Exile is an artistic project that researches the intricate dimensions of personal experience through ancestral lineage, and the impact of exile on the body, psyche, and spirit. The project plays with the artists' multifaceted layers of identity as a Jewish woman with roots in Jerusalem for 10 generations. It delves into the exploration of what unfolds when embodying the liminal, in-between space fraught with contradictions. This space is inherently a rejection of a singular narrative and is rooted in multiplicity of experience. Multiplicity is the merging of various channels of expression and how they relate to each other. This project in particular explores the spiritual, political, psychological, philosophical and personal channels. It asks what possibilities open up when we allow multidimensional exploration.

This exploration of multidimensional experience lives and moves through the body. The body serves as a vessel for various facets of the self. Considering the self from a multidimensional lens creates a different perspective to how we might relate to the expressions of the body. The body is not simply physical but is home to the emotional, mental, energetic and spiritual channels of the self.

Expanding the notions of self into multidimensional reality is a process of translating the unseen into the seen, to render the invisible—and the indivisible—visible. The artistic exploration is a play between aesthetics - non verbal movement and linguistics - articulation of experience.

### Witnessing the insides

The relationship between embodiment and disembodiment are one together.

Exile is frequently conceptualized as a rupture between the body and the land, a profound separation that deprives the body of its foundational support. However, to address this pain, is it adequate merely to reunite the body with the land? What if the profound experience of separation remains inadequately processed within the body? What unfolds upon the return in such circumstances?

Psychologists have extensively explored the concept of exile, framing it not merely as a detachment from the land but as a disconnection from the self, contending that our authentic home lies in connection with the Self. This psychological perspective elucidates how various aspects of our being undergo exile or become estranged from our self. It underscores that exile encompasses not only the physical but also the emotional, mental, energetic, and spiritual dimensions, reflecting the multifaceted nature of our experience. The process of psychological healing is centered on the retrieval of these fragmented elements into our consciousness, with the goal of reintegrating them and reinstating a sense of wholeness.

The project scrutinizes the unique case of Jerusalem, delving into how exile has shaped the political reality of this city. It particularly explores the critical issue of how Jewish exile has been transferred onto Palestinian exile. While the Israeli narrative often contends that Jewish exile ended with the return to the land, the project questions the authenticity of this return, considering the psychological challenges within Israeli society and the resulting exile and oppression imposed on Palestinians. This dynamic is seen as a transference of trauma, emphasizing that although in the Israeli narrative the physical exile may have concluded for Jewish people, the spiritual exile persists due to a lack of integration of these experiences, perpetuating the cycle of exile and oppression.

Liberation extends beyond the physical realm; its essence is by nature spiritual because we are not simply physical beings. Merely achieving physical liberation, as envisioned by Zionism, proves inadequate for ensuring Jewish safety. This model of safety depends on a violent militaristic regime that instills fear and requires Jewish fear to sustain itself. This relationship between Jewish fear and Palestinian oppression has cycled for some time because there hasn't been a direct reckoning with trauma from the somatic perspective. The unresolved trauma within the Jewish community has, in turn, been collectively imposed on the Palestinian population.

How do we break this trauma cycle of transference? This project researches how a personal exploration of what lives in the body might open up a portal of possibilities for healing and transformation politically and socially.

The project also contends with the question of what happens to land when its people are in exile. This question is rooted in Kabbalistic understanding that there are two Jerusalems: the spiritual and the physical. This notion of the World Above and the World Below highlights the existence of parallel worlds. The Jerusalem of Above is the spiritual manifestation of Jerusalem while the Jerusalem of Below is the physical reality of Jerusalem.

The project explores the tensions between these two worlds and how they interact with one another. Kabbalah further teaches that the task of human beings is *tikkun*, the healing of the world. This is done by harmonizing the Above with the Below. It is the revelation of God's light through the transformation of the material world by the spiritual world. According to Kabbalah, our task is to unite these two Jerusalems - to manifest the potentiality of Jerusalem on Earth.

Spiritually, Jerusalem is a City of God. It is Beloved by God and has been the birthplace of numerous prophets in many traditions across time. Yet physically, Jerusalem is a racially segregated city divided between east and west under a Jewish

supremacy apartheid system. Jerusalem is exiled of herself and desires too to return to her state of the city of God, a city of liberation and prayer for all people.

To bridge the gap between physical and spiritual realities, we delve into spiritual teachings and examine psychological patterns shaping our human paradigms. This project involves researching core spiritual teachings and exploring their relevance within our context. For instance, we'll investigate concepts like the interconnectedness of events, emphasizing the cause-and-effect dynamics at play in our world. Simultaneously, the research will examine psychological teachings, shedding light on what occurs when we experience trauma and how our own wounds contribute to perpetuating cycles of suffering. This inquiry seeks to articulate these psychological patterns, revealing how they may keep us entangled in the same oppressive systems we aim to liberate.

The purpose of this project is to expand the political discourse to include a spiritual, psychological and somatic understanding of human reality. With a focus on Jerusalem, this project hopes to serve as a global case study for trauma, oppression and liberation.

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The premises of this project stem from a fundamental belief in interconnectedness and spiritual principles. It acknowledges the concept that nothing arises independently and that every occurrence has roots. Reality, in its entirety, extends beyond the physical realm to encompass multiple dimensions—emotional, mental, energetic, and spiritual—each contributing to the fabric of existence. Central to this understanding is the mystical notion that divinity permeates all aspects of life. Embracing a worldview that celebrates mystery and the miraculous, the project acknowledges the existence of unknown possibilities. Time is perceived not as a linear phenomenon but as a multidimensional construct. Jerusalem serves as a symbolic reflection of global realities, offering insights into broader human experiences. At its core, the project views art as a continuous process intertwined with life itself.

This project serves as a documentation of the embodied knowledge and somatic understanding derived from personal experiences, relationships with land, lineage, ancestors, and communities. It seeks to encapsulate the interconnectedness shared with people worldwide, fostering a sense of global connection and shared humanity.

# Guiding Questions

Some of the questions guiding this project include:

1. How is Jewish Exile transferred onto Palestinian Exile?
2. What shifts when we engage with politics through the body?
3. What is the relationship between aesthetics and linguistics?
4. What is the meaning of exile from a spiritual and psychological perspective?
5. How is Jerusalem a case study for a global understanding of spirituality and exile?
6. What does it mean for land to be in exile?
7. What is the role of trauma in cycles of oppression?

# Influences

## Scholars & Thinkers

Throughout my research, the work of various scholars and thinkers has significantly shaped my understanding of exile and its psychological implications. Their insights have provided invaluable perspectives on displacement, identity, and the human psyche, enriching my exploration of these themes within the context of my thesis.

Edward Said's seminal work, "Reflections on Exile," offers profound reflections on the multifaceted experiences of displacement and the complexities of identity. His examination of the psychological and existential dimensions of exile has deeply influenced my understanding of this theme, illuminating the intricate interplay between individual and collective narratives of belonging and alienation.

In "The Necessity of Exile," Shaul Magid explores the cultural, religious, and existential significance of exile, providing valuable insights into the transformative potential inherent in experiences of displacement and alienation. Magid's reflections have expanded my understanding of exile beyond its immediate sociopolitical contexts, encouraging a deeper exploration of its psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue and relational ethics has profoundly impacted my approach to understanding the dynamics of connection and disconnection in the context of exile. His emphasis on authentic human encounters and ethical engagement has informed my exploration of how relationships shape our experiences of exile and belonging.

Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness and compassion offer practical tools for navigating the psychological challenges of exile and fostering inner resilience and healing. His emphasis on present-moment awareness and compassionate action has inspired me to integrate mindfulness practices into my exploration of exile and its psychological implications.

Resmaa Menakem's work on racialized trauma and embodied healing has provided crucial insights into the intersection of psychology, social justice, and personal transformation. His exploration of how experiences of exile can be embodied and transcended has deepened my understanding of the somatic dimensions of exile and the role of healing in reclaiming a sense of wholeness.

The writings of James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks have offered profound reflections on race, identity, and social justice, enriching my understanding of the psychological dimensions of exile. Their insights into the complexities of belonging in

a world marked by systemic inequalities have provided critical perspectives on the intersectionality of exile and identity formation.

In addition to these scholars, the contributions of psychologists and psychoanalysts such as Carl Jung and Erich Fromm have been invaluable in illuminating the psychological aspects of exile. Their insights into the human psyche and the process of individuation have provided a deeper understanding of the inner journey of exile and the quest for wholeness.

Overall, the work of these scholars and thinkers has served as a guiding framework for my exploration of exile and its psychological dimensions within my thesis. Their insights have enriched my understanding of this complex phenomenon, providing valuable perspectives on the interplay between individual experiences of displacement and broader sociopolitical contexts.

## Artists

Simone Forti's "Handbook in Motion" has profoundly influenced my artistic and scholarly endeavors, serving as a seminal exploration of movement as a form of expression and embodied knowledge. Through her work, Forti offers a framework for movement improvisation and choreographic composition, encouraging the cultivation of embodied awareness and the exploration of individual movement vocabularies. Her holistic approach to movement resonates with my broader interests in interdisciplinary inquiry, inspiring me to explore the intersections of movement, psychology, and social justice. Forti's emphasis on the body as a site of creative inquiry has informed my own practice, shaping the way I engage with movement as both an artist and a researcher, and deepening my understanding of movement as a tool for personal and collective transformation.

Alexa Eisner's artistic influence has been deeply transformative for my creative journey, infusing my practice with a sense of curiosity, experimentation, and boundary-pushing exploration. As a contemporary dancer and choreographer, Eisner's innovative approach to movement and performance has expanded my understanding of the possibilities inherent in movement expression. Her ability to seamlessly blend different movement modalities, from contemporary dance to somatic practices, has inspired me to embrace a more interdisciplinary approach to my own artistic work. Additionally, Eisner's commitment to authenticity and vulnerability in her performances has encouraged me to delve deeper into my own creative process, exploring themes of identity, embodiment, and personal narrative in my choreographic endeavors. Overall, Alexa Eisner's artistic influence has been instrumental in shaping my artistic voice and pushing me to continuously explore new avenues of expression and experimentation in my work as a dancer and choreographer. Her [artistic work on hands](#) particularly inspired me.

Saed Mansour

# Movement Modalities

Through this research, I was inspired by numerous movement modalities that study the body. Over the years, I have learned and practiced these, and their philosophies have profoundly influenced my research. I believe that 20th-century dance practices often imposed specific forms or techniques on the body—such as ballet, contemporary, and modern dance. These practices applied external forms onto the body. However, in the last couple of decades, the dance world has shifted, beginning to explore movement originating from within the body rather than being externally imposed. This shift prompts questions like: What is movement when it starts from an internal process rather than an external form? Furthermore, the dance world has increasingly converged with the field of somatic healing. The interplay between movement and therapeutic practices has been growing.

Here are some of the modalities that have shaped my perspective on somatic work:

## **Axis Syllabus**

The Axis Syllabus is a movement system and pedagogical tool developed by Frey Faust in the late 1990s, combining principles from anatomy, biomechanics, physics, and various dance and movement practices. It aims to enhance human movement efficiency and safety by emphasizing detailed anatomical understanding and biomechanical functions of the body, applying principles of physics to optimize movement, and promoting safe, energy-efficient practices. Studying the Axis Syllabus method over the years taught me to create movement patterns rooted in a deep understanding of body structure. This approach inspired the exploration of geometric shapes and further research into the internal mechanics of body movement.

## **Gaga**

Gaga is a movement language and pedagogical method developed by choreographer Ohad Naharin. It emphasizes the exploration of physical sensations and internal imagery to enhance movement quality and expressiveness. Rather than focusing on specific dance techniques or external forms, Gaga encourages dancers to listen to their bodies and discover new ways of moving through guided improvisation. This approach fosters greater body awareness, flexibility, and strength while allowing for personal and artistic expression. Classes often involve a series of prompts that challenge participants to explore different textures, rhythms, and dynamics, creating a deeply intuitive and organic movement experience. Studying Gaga over the years has helped me attune to a sense of imagery in relation to movement and has enabled me to move with greater fluidity.

## **Body Mind Centering**

Body-Mind Centering (BMC) is a comprehensive movement and somatic education approach developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. It integrates principles from anatomy, physiology, and developmental movement patterns to deepen the understanding and experience of the body in motion. BMC emphasizes the connection between body and mind, encouraging individuals to explore movement through the lens of internal body systems such as the skeletal, muscular, fluid, and nervous systems. This method promotes embodied awareness and holistic self-discovery, allowing movers to access a greater range of movement possibilities and cultivate a nuanced sense of presence. By focusing on the experiential and perceptual aspects of movement, BMC fosters a more integrated and dynamic relationship between body and mind. This integrated view of the body-mind relationship has influenced both my connection with my body and my understanding of movement. Recognizing the body's connection to mental patterns has illuminated the psychological aspects of how movement reveals underlying psychological patterns.

# Concepts: Exile, Longing, and Return

## **Exile: A Multifaceted Experience**

Exile, in its most immediate sense, is the forced separation from one's homeland, a physical dislocation that reverberates through the body, psyche, and spirit. However, exile is more than geographical displacement; it encompasses a profound disconnection from the self. This rupture is felt deeply within the body, manifesting as a sense of being unmoored and fragmented. The experience of exile carries with it a disintegration of identity, as the familiar landmarks of home and community are lost, leaving individuals to navigate an alien landscape both externally and internally.

In *Jerusalem In Exile*, exile is not only a historical or political condition but a personal and collective psychological state. It reflects the Jewish people's historical dislocation and the subsequent transference of this trauma onto Palestinians, perpetuating cycles of separation and oppression. Exile thus becomes a shared condition, binding different peoples through the common experience of dislocation and longing for return.

## **Longing: The Desire for Wholeness**

Longing emerges from the heart of exile. It is a yearning for connection, for a return to a state of wholeness that existed before the rupture. This longing is a dynamic force, propelling individuals and communities to seek reconnection with their roots, land, and, most importantly, their sense of self. Longing is not merely nostalgic; it is a profound desire for healing and integration.

In the context of this project, longing is explored through the artist's personal lineage and connection to Jerusalem. It is an exploration of the heart's pull towards a home that is both physical and metaphysical. Longing drives the inquiry into how the body retains memories of exile and how these memories influence current experiences and movements. It asks what it means to long for a place that is fraught with historical and contemporary conflicts, and how this longing can be transformed into a source of creative and spiritual renewal.

## **Return: The Path to Integration**

Return is the movement towards reclaiming what has been lost or fragmented. However, it is not simply about physically returning to a homeland; it is about reintegrating the self and healing the divisions caused by exile. True return involves a deep psychological and spiritual process, where the fragmented parts of the self are brought back into harmony.

Jerusalem In Exile challenges the notion of return by questioning the authenticity of physical return without psychological and spiritual reconciliation. For Jewish people, the physical return to Jerusalem does not necessarily equate to the end of exile if the underlying trauma remains unprocessed. This incomplete return perpetuates a cycle of fear and oppression, particularly towards Palestinians, whose own exile mirrors the Jewish historical experience.

In this project, return is reimagined as a holistic process that involves healing the body, mind, and spirit. It involves acknowledging and processing the traumas of exile, both personal and collective, and seeking ways to create a sense of home within oneself. This integrated approach to return emphasizes the need for reconciliation and justice, recognizing that liberation and safety cannot be achieved through physical return alone but through a profound internal transformation.

### **The Interplay of Exile, Longing, and Return**

The concepts of exile, longing, and return are deeply intertwined. Exile creates the space for longing, and longing fuels the desire for return. Yet, return is not a simple reversal of exile but a complex process of integrating the experiences and lessons learned in dislocation. It involves a reimagining of home, not as a fixed place, but as a dynamic state of being that encompasses the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of the self.

In exploring these themes, Jerusalem In Exile delves into the personal and collective histories that shape our understanding of identity, belonging, and liberation. It offers a nuanced perspective on how these concepts play out in the context of Jerusalem, a city that embodies the tensions between physical and spiritual realities, and between different narratives of exile and return. Through this exploration, the project seeks to open up new possibilities for healing and transformation, both personally and politically.

## Movement Patterns: From Trauma to Healing Vortex

In various religions and rituals, repetition plays a central role in the practice. Whether it's the repetition of the names of God to invoke spiritual momentum or the weekly repetition of rituals in observance of Shabbat, the act of repetition serves to organize and unify the spiritual field.

Similarly, in the realm of political narratives and personal stories, repetition often occurs. These repetitive narratives shape our understanding of the world and influence our beliefs and behaviors.

There's a profound energetic resonance inherent in repetition. On one hand, it can generate a trauma vortex, where our collective traumas reverberate and amplify each other's pain. Conversely, repetition can also cultivate a healing vortex, where the repetitive engagement with healing practices or affirmations fosters resilience and restoration.

In this project, I explored the repetition of hand gestures and delved into what insights can be gleaned from observing the movements of the hands. Movement serves as a potent channel for repetition, offering a pathway to healing in several ways.

How can we discern between a healing vortex and a trauma vortex? What distinguishes the two, and how can we intentionally harness the power of repetition to promote healing and transformation?

## Politics & Aesthetics

The interplay between politics and aesthetics is central to my project's exploration of identity, exile, and the search for wholeness. This relationship is not merely a juxtaposition of political themes and artistic expression; it is an intricate weaving where each dimension informs and transforms the other.

In my project, I use aesthetics as a powerful medium to express political realities and question dominant narratives. My artistic choices—ranging from movement, imagery, and performative gestures to the use of space and silence—are deliberate acts that reveal the underlying political tensions and historical traumas associated with Jerusalem. Through non-verbal movement, I aim to embody the physical and emotional landscapes of exile, capturing the fragmented nature of identity and the persistent longing for return.

These aesthetic expressions critique the simplistic narrative of physical return as the end of exile. I challenge the political rhetoric that equates territorial reclamation with liberation, highlighting instead the ongoing psychological and spiritual exile experienced by individuals and communities. My aesthetic choices make visible the invisible wounds of trauma and displacement, inviting the audience to engage with these issues on a visceral level.

Focusing on my multifaceted identity as a Jewish woman with deep roots in Jerusalem, I underscore the political nature of personal identity. By embodying the tensions and contradictions inherent in my lineage, I navigate the complex intersection of personal history and collective memory. This navigation becomes a political act, challenging monolithic representations of Jewish identity and opening up a space for multiplicity and hybridity.

Through the use of movement, imagery, and spatial dynamics, I invite audiences to engage with these issues in an embodied and experiential way. My project moves beyond intellectual analysis to create an immersive experience that resonates on an emotional and sensory level.

## Personal and Collective

Throughout this process, I desired to protect this project as a private and personal one. There were some fears about sharing it with others because it felt vulnerable and emotional. There was also a part of me that felt that I wanted to study my own self on my terms as opposed to having many voices and opinions that can sometimes feel distracting into a study of depth. Yet of course, any personal investigation into the self is in some ways a collective mirror. What is found inside one person can resonate with others because there is a thread of interconnection and collective consciousness that unites us all. This dialogue between the personal and collective has been an ongoing thread throughout this project.

This project fuses my personal study and weaves it with a communal one. As I was developing my own movement vocabulary, I was in relationship with others from my community, sharing and processing my practice. I was at a communal gathering for Passover and a few of us artists decided to lead a ritual for the ongoing genocide happening in Gaza and the emotional impacts of it. We each shared an artistic practice and I did some of my dance as a friend sang a song she wrote titled "Open The Gates". As an emergent collective process, we decided to take some time and each write on a piece of paper what is on our hearts that we are too scared to share around Palestine/Israel and anything we need to express around it. People were instructed to write with the knowledge that it will be ripped up and destroyed instead of shared communally. After we finished writing, I emergently suggested that we witness each other ripping our own papers. This became a beautiful collective ritual where we sat in a circle and as each person was called, they picked up the bowl from the middle and started ripping their papers into it. We all sat and watched as each person did this. It was quite interesting to see how each person ripped papers differently and what the experience of ripping and witnessing was. There was an emotional aspect of feeling the ripping with each tear and as people ripped their papers, there was an internal experience of being broken open as well. Many people cried through it and it was a profoundly moving experience.

This inspired me to recreate this setting and film it for my project. Part of the inquiry in this process was to witness how each person's hand movements differ as well as experience what is stirred inside through witnessing someone else's hand movements. Additionally, the core question was what is transformed collectively when instead of sharing our expressions in words we share how we tear our own words in front of each other.

# Ancestral Memory

The genesis of the project stemmed from a profound desire to honor my grandmother and preserve her legacy. Central to the project is an exploration of how the echoes of ancestral memory resonate within our bodies, shaping not only our physicality but also our identities and narratives.

In the communal act of tearing papers, a rich tapestry of communication unfolds, transcending the confines of spoken language. Our movements, subtle yet profound, become vessels through which our stories, emotions, and connections are expressed. It is through these gestures, often instinctual and subconscious, that we convey truths that words alone cannot articulate.

This ritual, with its emphasis on embodied expression, offers a poignant reflection on the distinction between oral and written traditions. While written language holds its own significance, oral tradition—passed down through generations via movement, ritual, and practice—carries a unique potency. It is a living, breathing entity, intimately intertwined with the rhythms of life and the cadence of the human experience.

In considering a revival of oral tradition within the framework of this ritual, we envision a reclaiming of our ancestral methods of understanding and existence. It represents a journey to the core of human communication, where words serve merely as one strand in the elaborate fabric of expression. Through movement, we re-establish a connection with the wisdom of our ancestors, tapping into the reservoir of collective memory that resides within us.

## From The Body To The Hands

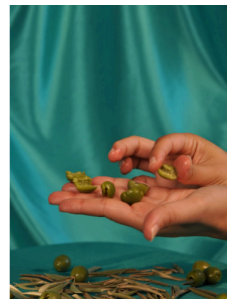
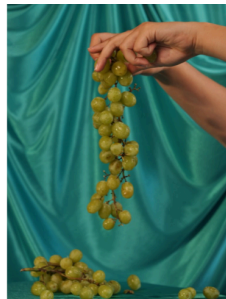
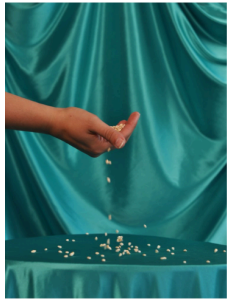
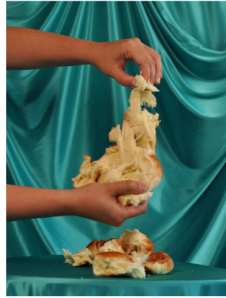
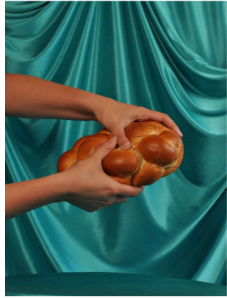
I teach and speak frequently and one of my students pointed out to me the way I teach with my hands often. From then, I started observing my hand movements as I teach and realized how essential that movement is to my speech. I started becoming fascinated with the hands and the power of them in communicating. What started as a project that looked at the body as a whole and movement work began to shift into an exploration of hand movements. This limitation to the hands expanded the possibility in deepening the practice. Studying the whole body and its movement was often quite overwhelming even as there is a magnetic pull to discovering the body system and its movements. Yet working with the hands opened up a more concrete investigation into the somatic, spiritual and psychological inquiry I was invested in.

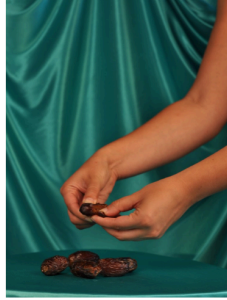
Through working with the hands, a dynamic interplay between embodiment and disembodiment emerged. I developed a photo series featuring hands in relation to each of the seven species named in the Bible. These species symbolize the connection to the land, while the hands represent parts of the body. This photo series, therefore, illustrates the relationship between the land and the body, and the concept of embodiment. Conversely, presenting the hand in isolation from the body suggests a form of disembodiment, as the hand appears severed from the body, and the species seem disconnected from the land. This tension between disembodiment and embodiment drives these pieces. Can we experience both disembodiment and embodiment simultaneously?

# Hand Rituals

Tearing open the fruits to reveal their insides.

<https://vimeo.com/950928683/9c97e147cb>





# The Seven Species

אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וְשֵׁעֶרָה וְגֶפֶן וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ-זֵית וְדִבְשׁ:

“A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey;”

## **Deuteronomy 8:8**

The Bible enumerates seven species that are connected to the Holy Land: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive, and dates (referred to as 'honey' in the Bible, indicating date honey). These species are often incorporated into ritual as they symbolize the land's fertility and blessings. I utilize these symbolic species in my work because they represent our connection to and relationship with the land. They are products of the land itself, serving as a tangible link that nourishes us with the abundance of the Divine.



### **Wheat**

Wheat symbolizes the most fundamental grain of life, representing sustenance and abundance. In Jewish rituals, wheat is used to make traditional challah, a braided bread symbolizing the interconnection of all life, served on Shabbat and holidays. It was also used for offerings in the Temple, particularly during the holiday of Shavuot, which celebrates the wheat harvest.



### **Barley**

Barley is often considered the food of the poor and livestock, representing humility and resilience as it demonstrates the capacity to grow in harsh conditions. In the Jewish ritual of Counting the Omer, barley marks the beginning of the harvest season, emphasizing reliance on Divine provision and the cyclical nature of agricultural life.



### **Grapes**

Grapes, as the fruit of the vine, symbolize joy and celebration. They can be transformed into wine, a central element in rituals marking sacred occasions, highlighting the power of transformation inherent in their journey from vine to beverage. Wine serves as a conduit for connecting with the Divine, emphasizing its spiritual significance within Jewish practices and observances.



### **Figs**

Figs symbolize the prosperity and spiritual richness of life, esteemed as the delicacies of the land. They encapsulate the sweetness of Divine blessings, reflecting the fertility and abundance inherent in the land.



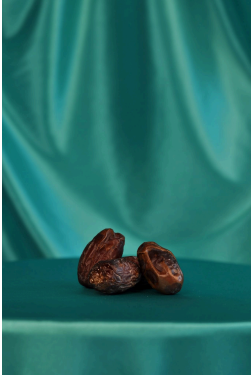
### **Pomegranates**

Pomegranates are emblematic of knowledge and wisdom. In Judaism, it is said that pomegranates have 613 seeds for the 613 commandments in the Torah known as Mitzvot. Through their abundance of seeds, pomegranates symbolize the multifaceted nature of spiritual depth and richness of tradition.



### **Olives**

Olives represent peace, purity and endurance. Olive oil, extracted from olives, is used in anointing rituals and ceremonies. For Palestinians, olives symbolize cultural heritage and resilience, serving as a testament to their enduring connection to the land. The olive harvest season is a time of communal gathering and celebration, representing economic livelihoods and the collective spirit of endurance in the face of adversity. Olive groves, passed down through generations, are cherished as symbols of identity and land ownership, embodying the ongoing struggle for self-determination and sovereignty.



## **Dates**

Dates symbolize sweetness, abundance, and Divine blessings. Dates are valued for their nutritional richness and cultural significance, often being offered as a gesture of hospitality and generosity. For Palestinians, dates represent cultural heritage, economic sustenance, and resilience. In Islam, dates are revered for their religious importance as they are traditionally eaten to break the fast during Ramadan.

## Spiritual Powers of the Hands



The hands hold profound significance in the Cohen priestly blessing, a sacred ritual in Jewish tradition. During this blessing, the Cohanim (Jewish priests) extend their hands and form a specific gesture, traditionally with their fingers spread to create a shape resembling the Hebrew letter "Shin," which symbolizes the name of God. This act of raising and positioning the hands is not merely a physical gesture but a conduit for divine energy and blessing. It is believed that through this unique hand formation, the Cohanim channel spiritual power and convey God's blessings of protection, grace, and peace to the congregation. The hands, therefore, are essential in transforming the blessing into a tangible and powerful spiritual experience, linking the physical and the divine.

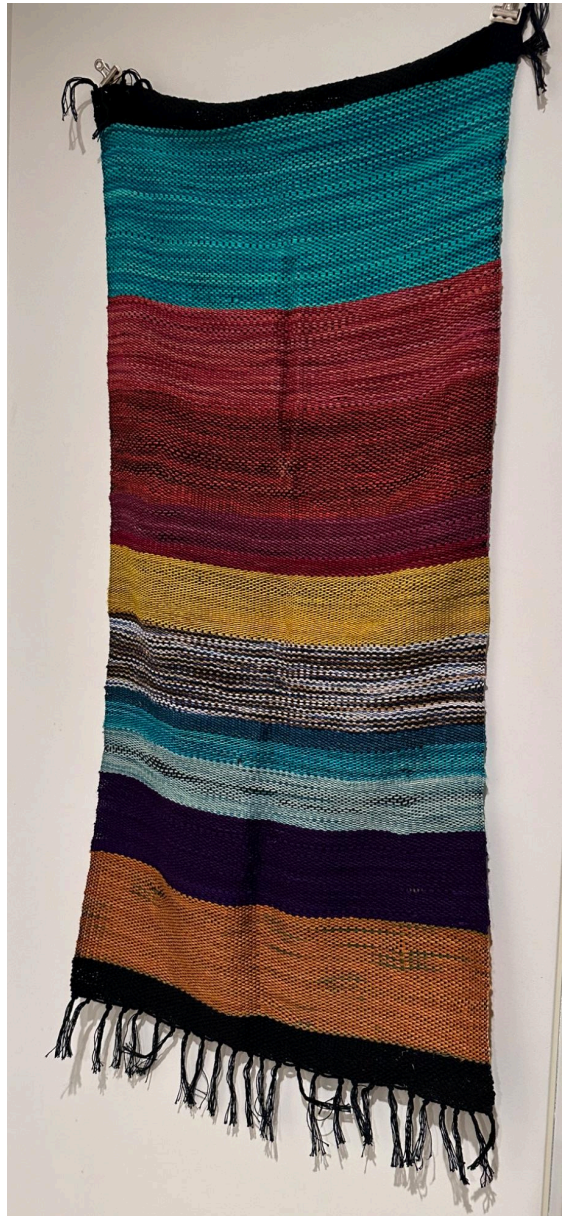
In Sufism and Islamic mysticism, it is believed that the 99 names of Allah (Asma ul-Husna) can be observed in the human hands. This belief is rooted in the idea that the Arabic letters corresponding to these divine names can be visually represented on the hands.

Each hand is said to bear marks or lines that resemble Arabic numerals and letters. For instance, some believe that the lines on the palms of the right hand form the Arabic numeral "18" (١٨) and those on the left hand form the numeral "81" (٨١). When these numbers are added together (18 + 81), they sum to 99, symbolizing the 99 names of Allah.

This interpretation suggests that the hands are not only tools for prayer and work but also bear intrinsic signs of the divine. The presence of these numbers is considered a

reminder of Allah's attributes and a manifestation of His presence in the everyday human experience. This mystical interpretation reinforces the idea that the divine can be found within the human body and that the hands, as extensions of the self, are sacred instruments reflecting the divine nature.

## Weaving



I am a weaver, dedicated to the art of creation. Part of my research in this work is exploring the destruction and creation potentialities of our hands.

With each prayer rug I weave, I find remnants of yarn left behind, too small to serve their original purpose. Rather than discard them, I've chosen to honor their potential by incorporating them into a new creation—a prayer rug woven from the tapestry of these leftovers. Inspired by the vivid colors of Joseph's technicolor coat, this rug embodies the essence of multicolored unity. In a world often torn asunder, this

process symbolizes the power of bringing disparate elements together, transforming fragments into a cohesive whole.

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2024/event/unravel-the-power-and-politics-of-textiles-in-art>

# Interviews

As part of this research, I conducted interviews with five Palestinian and Jewish dancers to delve into the themes I've been exploring in my practice: movement, healing, psychology, and politics. Hearing their perspectives was invaluable, as it provided insight into how these themes intersect and resonate across different individuals who have been researching and exploring similar topics. For those interested, all the interviews can be accessed here.

Dancers interviewed:

1. [Saed Mansour](#)
2. [Natalie Cohen](#)
3. [Ayelet Yekutiel](#)
4. [Nur Garabli](#)
5. [Misan Miso Samara](#)

Questions Asked:

1. Can you describe your personal journey in understanding and connecting with your body as a dancer? How has this relationship evolved over time?
2. How do you perceive the role of emotions in your dance practice and performances? How do different emotions influence your movement and expression?
3. Do you believe there is a relationship between dance and healing? Have you experienced or witnessed instances where dance has been therapeutic for yourself or others?
4. Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in expressing certain emotions through dance? Have emotions blocked you from creating work? How have you navigated these challenges?
5. In what ways do you believe your dance work intersects with political or social issues? How do you incorporate these elements into your performances?
6. How do you feel your movement work connects to political activism?
7. How do you personally define embodiment in the context of dance? What does it mean for you to feel fully embodied in your movement?
8. On the flip side, how do you understand disembodiment within dance?
9. Can you describe a moment or experience where you felt particularly connected to your body during a performance? What factors contributed to this sense of connection?
10. How do you feel that this moment with the ongoing genocide in Gaza is affecting your dance work and relationship to movement and the body?

11. How does the frame of exile impact your work? How does the relationship with exile relate to connection to land and movement?

## The Nature of Exile

Exile is often understood as the separation between the body and the land. It is a rupture from belonging that creates existential disorientation. When a people are displaced from their ancestral homeland, they grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and cultural continuity. Exile can also be understood through other dimensions of existence: just as the body is separated from the land, the spirit or the self may experience a separation from the body. In this context, exile encompasses not only the physical separation from land but also the psychological disconnection from the self and the spiritual disconnection from the soul. These dimensions of exile, both psychological and spiritual, are intricately linked, shaping the individual's experience and sense of displacement.

The physical, psychological and spiritual forms of exile all parallel one another. In the physical relation, the body and the land are intimately connected. When the body loses its tether to the land, it also loses its source of power. The land grounds the body in its orientation towards itself. It supports the body in its knowledge of itself through positioning it within its own lineage and its relationship to the material of Earth. When the connection between body and land breaks, a parallel shift occurs between the self and the body and the spirit and the self.

These layers of disconnection produce a multi-layered pain of separation. From within that experience of separation, a longing to return emerges. As long as the pain remains an open wound, the longing deepens. The space between the original home and the foreign one holds this energetic longing. The desire to return is coupled with the knowledge that return is not possible. It is no longer possible to return to what was; return becomes a transformation of what was through the experience of exile.

The nature of exile operates on multiple levels, and the process of return unfolds across various dimensions as well. Return is not simply about the body re-meeting the land after separation. It is also about the self meeting the body anew and the spirit coming together with the self again. Exile is woven in with the desire to return and the process of finding the way back home.

## Dimensions of the Self

The Self is multilayered, extending beyond the physical realm into the emotional, mental, energetic, and spiritual dimensions of existence. Similarly, reality transcends mere physicality; it encompasses multiple dimensions, including the emotional, mental, energetic, and spiritual realms.

Returning from exile entails more than a physical journey; it is inherently multidimensional. Multidimensionality implies the existence of multiple layers of being, each with its own range and depth. To truly understand the self, one must embrace the myriad lenses through which the self can be understood: the physical, emotional, mental, energetic, and spiritual dimensions.

The physical dimension constitutes the material body, encompassing bones, muscles, organs, and skin. It represents the tangible, visible world perceivable by the physical eye, characterized by its density and weight.

Moving beyond the physical, the emotional dimension adds another layer of complexity. While possessing physical density, it is subtler in perception compared to the physical dimension. The emotional body is dynamic and responsive, flowing with the currents of change.

The mental dimension introduces the realm of thought. With practice, one can refine their perception to discern thought patterns and the workings of the mind.

The energetic dimension exists as a subtle layer beyond the mental, encompassing the flow and exchange of energy within and around the individual.

Lastly, the spiritual dimension transcends all others, representing the deepest essence of the self and connection to a higher consciousness.

While these dimensions offer a framework for understanding the layers of existence, they may not be exhaustive. Like Jacob's ladder, they flow in an interconnected continuum, inviting exploration and expansion of perception.

וַיַּחְלֹם וַהֲנֶה סֹלֶם מַצֵּב אֶרְצָה וְרֵאשׁוֹ מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִמָּה וַהֲנֶה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ:

He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and messengers of God were going up and down on it.

Genesis 28:12

One can view these dimensions as steps of creation. At the pinnacle lies the soul level, representing the essence of our being and our connection to the Divine.- God originated with the soul level which is a particular delineation of the Light. From there, the energetic, the material, the emotional and finally the physical emanate.

To understand the self, we must delve into each of these dimensional levels. It entails studying the intricacies of the material body, the ebb and flow of emotions, the workings of the mind, the dynamics of energy, and the profound essence of the soul. Importantly, these dimensions are not isolated but intricately interconnected, each influencing and shaping the others in a complex dance of existence.

## Jerusalem As A Mirror

Jerusalem is not just a physical city; it holds profound spiritual significance. Its tales and legends permeate cultural narratives, occupying a revered place in the collective psyche.

Events unfolding in Jerusalem have far-reaching implications, resonating globally. As a microcosm of human experience, Jerusalem mirrors broader global realities, illustrating the interconnectedness between humanity and the divine. In this reciprocal relationship, our actions influence Jerusalem, and in turn, Jerusalem's fate reverberates throughout the world.

## Two Jerusalems

### Taanit 5a

וְאָמַר לִיהוֹנָן רַב נַחְמָן לְרַבִּי יִצְחָק, מֵאֵי דְכִתְיִב: "בְּקִרְבְּךָ קְדוּשָׁה וְלֹא אָבֹא בְעִיר", מִשּׁוֹם דְּבִקְרִבְךָ קְדוּשָׁה לֹא אָבֹא בְעִיר? אָמַר לִיהוֹנָן: הֲכִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, אָמַר הַקְּדוּשָׁה בְרוּךְ הוּא: לֹא אָבֹא בִירוּשָׁלַיִם שָׁל מַעְלָה עַד שֶׁאָבֹא לִירוּשָׁלַיִם שָׁל מַטָּה! וּמֵי אֵיכָא יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לְמַעְלָה? אֵין, דְּכִתְיִב: "יְרוּשָׁלַיִם הַבְּנוּיָה כְּעִיר שְׁחֻבְרָה לָהּ יְחַדּוּ".

“And Rav Naḥman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: What is the meaning of that which is written: “It is sacred in your midst, and I will not enter the city” (Hosea 11:9)? This verse is puzzling: Because it is sacred in your midst, will God not enter the city? Rabbi Yitzḥak said to Rav Naḥman that Rabbi Yoḥanan said the verse should be understood as follows: The Holy One, Blessed be God, said: I shall not enter Jerusalem above, until I enter Jerusalem below.

And is there such a place as Jerusalem above? Yes, as it is written: “Jerusalem built up, a city unified together” (Psalms 122:3). The term unified indicates that there are two cities of Jerusalem, the above one and the below one, which are bound together.”

In Judaism, there is a notion of two Jerusalems: One Above, and One Below. This is rooted in the Kabbalistic notion of parallel worlds - there are multiple existing realms that simultaneously influence one another. The spiritual and the material are parallel worlds, each functioning with their own set of laws. These two are interconnected; an action in one world directly impacts the other world. As the principles of quantum mechanics teach, there is no time delay between cause and effect. Rather these realms exist in simultaneous existence with each other, as one changes, the other changes with it.

The Jerusalem of Above is the spiritual Jerusalem. In her pure essence, Jerusalem God's Beloved city, representing the highest manifestation of spiritual reality. She is the land of prophets, the one by which God desires to reveal God's Light onto the world through centuries and even millennia. She is One but not of a singular tradition; rather her Light shines through fractal multiplication. The potentiality of the spiritual Jerusalem is ripe with fertility and richness. Her truth is to be the City of God, a prophetic hub open to all who seek Divine connection.

The Jerusalem of Below is the physical Jerusalem here on Earth. She is the material embodiment in the present moment, reflecting the collective consciousness of humanity. In the contemporary context, Jerusalem is under the Israeli apartheid system. She exists as a racially segregated city divided between East and West.

The spiritual reality is meant to be mirrored through the physical world. Yet the city of Jerusalem is fragmented between the realm Above and the realm Below. Jerusalem of Above and Jerusalem of Below are in direct contradiction of each other. One is hospitable and open to all, the other is a walled city under violent oppression.

The inconsistency between Jerusalem's spiritual essence and her material reality represents a displacement. Jerusalem exists in a state of exile, disconnected from her true essence. Jerusalem is a portal of communication between humanity and God, a role traditionally mediated by prophets. Consequently, global consciousness is channeled through Jerusalem, and events occurring on her soil have far-reaching effects on the entire world.

As articulated in the passage from the Talmud above, God refuses to enter the Jerusalem of Above as long as Jerusalem of Below rejects the Divine Presence. The healing of this rupture of exile requires a shift in spiritual consciousness within the material world. It is humanity's task to mend this rupture by elevating ourselves spiritually, allowing Jerusalem to reclaim its identity as the City of God. The spiritual reality of Jerusalem can then be manifested in the material world, facilitating the union between the Upper and Lower worlds.

## Duality of Perspective

Perspective can be approached from two distinct angles: from within or from without. Is the seeing from the personal self or from a higher, objective viewpoint? One view is seeing directly through personal eyes, experiencing the world through the body. The other entails understanding through objective truth—philosophy, legality, and other structures of systemic thinking that may not include personal experience. One approach to perspective involves an external viewpoint detached from personal subjectivity. Conversely, the other approach is grounded in firsthand experience, viewing perspective through the lens of personal encounters and introspection.

An illustrative analogy is traffic patterns: While driving amidst traffic, one's perspective is particular to what can be seen and experienced from that positionality. However, observing traffic from a helicopter above provides a more detached and comprehensive view. The helicopter view offers a wider lens but sacrifices the personal experience.

The contrast between the outside and inside perspectives is significant. Both are valuable, and to attain a whole view, we must integrate the relationship between the two. In the outsider observer perspective, the wisdom of felt embodied experience is lost. Yet, being solely within personal experience can also be confining. This integration allows us to navigate between the external and internal realms, mitigating the limitations of each. In doing so, we strive towards a more comprehensive understanding that transcends the confines of limited viewpoints.

This analogy aligns the notion of perspective with theological discourse. Theologians have conceptualized two understandings of God: the immanent and the transcendent.

The immanent God is one that is intimately present within the created world, immanent in the sense of being within or indwelling the universe. In theological terms, this perspective emphasizes that God is actively involved in the world and its affairs, that God's presence can be experienced within the natural order, human experience, and history. In this view, the divine is immanent in nature, in human beings, and in the events of the world. This concept is often associated with pantheism, panentheism, or certain interpretations of monotheistic religions where God is seen as intimately connected to creation.

The transcendent God, on the other hand, is one that exists beyond or outside the physical universe and is not limited by it. This perspective emphasizes God's

separation from the created world, transcendent in the sense of being beyond or above it. In theological terms, this view holds that God is wholly distinct from creation, existing outside of time and space, and beyond human comprehension. The transcendent God is often seen as the ultimate source of all existence, the ground of being, and the ultimate reality. This concept is prevalent in many monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, where God is portrayed as separate from and sovereign over the universe.

The unity of these understandings of God parallels the need to unify perspectives.

## Mirroring: Macro & Micro

Mirroring offers a revealing perspective on the interconnectedness between the macrocosm and microcosm of existence. At its core lies a fundamental question: If we struggle to confront individual wounds, how can we navigate the collective wound that encompasses all of humanity? The essence of this inquiry lies in recognizing the interconnectedness between our personal experiences and the broader tapestry of human existence. Just as each individual reflects the collective consciousness, so too do our internal struggles mirror the collective challenges we face as a society. By acknowledging and addressing our individual wounds with courage and compassion, we begin to unravel the threads of the universal wound, fostering healing and transformation on both personal and collective levels.

# The Psychology of Politics

The Psychology of Politics delves into the complex interplay between personal tendencies, emotional trauma, and societal dynamics. It reveals that political opinions often stem from a desire to please others and navigate internal emotional turmoil rather than from principled values of justice. Many individuals fear speaking out and challenging their own communities, recognizing that true change starts from within. The notion of an external enemy is debunked, as the real struggle lies in confronting our own inner conflicts. This perspective rejects coercive tactics and emphasizes the importance of intellectual discourse over shaming and blaming. It warns against radicalism fueled by ego-driven perceptions of justice, which ultimately lead to ineffectiveness and contribute to the rise of global fascism. In this context, accountability is not to individual egos but to a deeper understanding of justice rooted in humility and empathy.

Blaming, projection, and victim consciousness play significant roles within political discourse, shaping the narratives and dynamics of public debate. In the realm of politics, blaming becomes a common strategy to deflect responsibility and garner support, with individuals and groups often pointing fingers at opponents or marginalized communities rather than addressing systemic issues. Projection intertwines with this, as politicians and constituents project their own fears, biases, and insecurities onto others, distorting the discourse and fueling polarization. Meanwhile, victim consciousness can manifest as a narrative of oppression or disenfranchisement, fostering a sense of powerlessness and justifying avoidance of accountability. These psychological mechanisms not only impede meaningful dialogue but also perpetuate cycles of division and disempowerment within political spheres. Recognizing and addressing these patterns is crucial for cultivating a more constructive and inclusive political discourse that fosters empathy, accountability, and genuine progress.

## The Collective Unconscious

The concept of the Collective Unconscious presents a dual exploration, blending psychological and spiritual insights. It underscores the inevitability of repressed aspects emerging, despite efforts to suppress them. This phenomenon serves as a spiritual summons, beckoning us to confront what we evade. Denial merely strengthens the hold of our hidden truths, perpetuating a cycle of internal power struggles. In this intricate interplay, we oscillate between roles of victimhood and domination, only to find no true victory in either. Genuine liberation arises from relinquishing control and embracing vulnerability, aligning with the boundless potential of creation itself.

# Transference of Trauma

*“Trauma is not what happened to you, but what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you”*

*Gabor Maté*

Trauma can be understood as the external reality that created the trauma and the internal experience that activated as a result. This relationship between the external and the internal can confuse us in understanding our own power, agency and choice. Is trauma outside of my control and I am simply at the whims of the external world and its treatment of me? Or is there something within me that impacts my experience of trauma that I can shift in the here now?

The answer is somewhere in the combination of the two. Examining the impacts of oppression on the body is complex precisely because it can be unclear sometimes what is the system of oppression that is acting and where is the personal psychology reinforcing or even creating the wounding.

The outside conditions penetrate our psychology such that even when the external force that causes our trauma ceases, we continue to impose those conditions on ourselves. The psyche becomes organized in a way that perpetuates its own suffering. Often the psyche is under illusion of its own power in upholding the oppression towards itself and becomes trapped in a loop of blame and projection onto the external world. This is the reality when oppression becomes internalized and the oppressor is not necessarily the one enacting the oppression but rather the oppressed have embedded it onto themselves.

When an experience is not processed consciously, it lives on in the unconscious. The unconscious is incredibly more powerful than the conscious. It is mysterious in nature and directs our lived reality to create the circumstances the conscious mind avoids.

Trauma that is not processed is projected onto the other. This happens through the internalization of the trauma and the collaboration of the unconscious in directing reality. The physical conditions of trauma become psychological ones that repeat until examined more thoroughly. These psychological conditions develop into mental and emotional patterns that uphold the disorientation that the original trauma created.

In the case of exile, the mindset of exile is digested into the body such that exile becomes less of a physical reality and more of an orientation of the mind. The

experience of exile becomes imprinted and embedded in consciousness and an attachment to that narrative of exile is created.

The Zionist narrative concludes that Jewish exile ended with the establishment of the State of Israel. Yet its conclusion is derived from merely looking at exile as a physical reality. A return to the homeland without processing the trauma of exile is not a full return. Rather, the spiritual and psychological aspects of exile remain activated in the body. To heal the ruptures of exile, one must delve into the whole self, not just the physical body.

The consequences of not examining the spiritual and psychological conditions of exile create a reality where the trauma is transferred onto others. Particularly in the case of the creation of the State of Israel, a return for the Jews meant the displacement of the Palestinian people.

The mind that is attached to its identification with exile cannot see the replication of exile. It victimizes itself and holds on fiercely to the narrative to validate its victimization. The displacement of the Other is unrecognizable to that mind because of the attachment to its own victimhood. This mind can no longer recognize reality in the present moment that causes violence. It becomes imperceptive to the reality of colonization that it enacts and perpetuates the denial of that. As long as the mind is not examined and shifted, reality cannot change.

## History of This Project







<https://vimeo.com/432955418/895c738a68>

<https://vimeo.com/916259100/1b6af4ef8d>

## Credits

Photography by [Maya Mansour](#)

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Videographer [Daniel Miramontes](#)

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## Quotes (to integrate)

“Perhaps the turning point in one’s life is realizing that to be treated like a victim is not necessarily to become one.”

- James Baldwin

“The Zionists generally believed exile had ended with the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel”

- Shaul Magid, *The Necessity of Exile*

“Trauma in a person, decontextualized over time, looks like personality. Trauma in a family, decontextualized over time, looks like family traits. Trauma in a people, decontextualized over time, looks like culture.”

- Resmaa Menakem

“Palestinans feel that they have been turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews”

- Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*

-

“There’s a revolution that needs to happen and it starts from inside each one of us.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh

“If you use your mind to study reality, you won't understand either your mind or reality. If you study reality without using your mind, you'll understand both.”

— Bodhidharma

“Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition.”

- James Baldwin

“Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposites in forming and constituting each other”

“Because exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. The crucial thing is that a state of exile free from their triumphant ideology - designed to reassemble an exile’s broken history into a new whole - is virtually unbearable, and virtually impossible in today’s world. “

“Because nothing is secure. Exile is a jealous state.”

“Palestinans feel that they have been turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews”

“The exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong”

- Edward Said, Reflections on Exile

“A person can only be born in one place. However, he may die several times elsewhere: in the exiles and prisons, and in a homeland transformed by the occupation and oppression into a nightmare. Poetry is perhaps what teaches us to nurture the charming illusion: how to be reborn out of ourselves over and over again, and use words to construct a better world, a fictitious world that enables us to sign a pact for a permanent and comprehensive peace ... with life.”

Mahmoud Darwish



Another impactful work by Anna Sherbany is titled "Sifting Through the Memories," a short film where her mother delicately sifts rice in a plate, meticulously removing dirt while engaging in a dialogue about their lineage. This intimate portrayal not only captures the tactile and meditative act of sifting rice but also explores deeper themes of family heritage, identity, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. Through this simple yet poignant gesture, Sherbany invites viewers to reflect on the significance of everyday rituals in preserving and passing down cultural traditions. The film resonates with Sherbany's broader exploration of ritualistic practices and their role in shaping personal and collective narratives, further underscoring her skill in blending personal experience with universal themes in her artistic practice.

### **Psalms 137:4**

אֵיךְ נִשְׁיֵר אֶת־שִׁיר־יְהוָה עַל אֲדָמַת נֶכֶר:

How can we sing a song of God on foreign soil?

### **Taanit 30b**

”שִׂמְחוּ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְגִילוּ בָּהּ כָּל אֹהֲבֶיהָ שִׂישׂוּ אֶתְּהָ מְשׁוֹשׂ כָּל הַמְתַאבְּלִים עָלֶיהָ,” מִכָּאן אָמְרוּ: כָּל הַמְתַאבְּלֵי עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם — זֹכָה וְרוֹאֶה בְּשִׂמְחָתָהּ, וְשֹׂאֵינוֹ מְתַאבֵּל עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם — אֵינוֹ רוֹאֶה בְּשִׂמְחָתָהּ.

“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all who mourn for her” (Isaiah 66:10). From here it is stated: Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit and see her future joy, and whoever does not mourn for Jerusalem will not see her future joy.

Psalms 137:5-6

אִם־אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי:

תִּדְבַק־לְשׁוֹנִי לְחִכִּי אִם־לֹא אֶזְכְּרֶיךָ אִם־לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל רֹאשׁ שִׂמְחָתִי:

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither;  
let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you,  
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.”