

**Staging the Hyphen and Reframing Urban Reality
in Site-Specific Performances: Miriam Schickler's *Echoing
Yafa* and the Complex Palestinian Geopolitical Context**

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Abstract

The intersection of art, politics, and space has long been a subject of inquiry. In the charged socio-political landscape of Palestine, where the occupation of land, verisimilitudes of displacement, fragmentation of identity, and struggle for self-determination are deeply intertwined, Site-specific Performances emerge as critical spatial interventions, highlighting what it means to live and remember in Palestine. Effectively disrupting entrenched power dynamics at play and countering the sanitized narratives of hyphenated geopolitics super imposed by colonial paradigms, these embodied experiences of resistance not only aim to reclaim the physical space but to salvage the narrative space as well. For this purpose, the present study is mainly concerned with Miriam Schickler's site-specific performance *Echoing Yafa* (2014), with the aim of highlighting how this artistic endeavor - intertwining dramatic art with politics and space - not only reflects the socio-political context of Palestine, embodies its physical and metaphorical struggle against the constraints of imposed borders, and offers a dynamic method for participants to navigate, experience, and negotiate the complexities of Palestine's identity and history, but also does actively contribute to its redefinition. Underscoring the potential of *Echoing Yafa* to engage its participants directly with the physicality of space and the politics inscribed within, the study reaches the conclusion that site-specific performances are not merely artistic expressions, but canvases for political defiance, cultural survival, collective remembrance, spatial reclamation, and geopolitical commentary.

Keywords

Cultural Survival; Narrative Hyphenation; Palestine; Political Defiance; Site-specific Performances; Spatial Hyphenation; Urban Geopolitical Hyphenation

عرض الشقاق وإعادة صياغة الواقع الحضري في العروض الفنية محددة المكان:

"صدى يافا" لميريام شيكلر والسياق الجغرافي-السياسي الفلسطيني المعقد

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المستخلص

يُعتبر تداخل الفن والسياسة والمكان موضوعًا حيويًا تم استقصاؤه لفترات طويلة. و في خضم المشهد الاجتماعي والسياسي المشحون في فلسطين، حيث يتداخل احتلال الأرض وتهجير السكان وتفكيك الهوية الفلسطينية والنضال من أجل تحقيق الحكم الذاتي، تظهر العروض محددة المكان كوسيلة قوية للتعبير السياسي والبقاء الثقافي واستعادة المكان والسرد المضاد للتاريخ الاستعماري. من هذا المنطلق، تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى إثبات ان هذه العروض الغامرة والتشاركية والموجهة صوتيًا - المتجذرة في المناطق الفلسطينية الحضرية - تمثل تدخلًا مكانيًا حاسمًا وشكلًا ديناميكيًا فعالًا للمقاومة الاجتماعية والسياسية. كما تسعى الدراسة الى التأكيد على ان هذه التجارب المجسدة للمقاومة تسلط الضوء على معنى العيش والتذكر في فلسطين بل و تسعى - من خلال تحدي ومواجهة الديناميات والسرديات السلطوية المتجذرة التي فرضتها النماذج الاستعمارية التي هيمنت على المنطقة و تاريخها و هويتها لفترات طويلة - ليس فقط إلى استعادة المساحات الفعلية التي تم احتلالها، ولكن أيضًا إلى إنقاذ المساحة السردية. لذا ، تهتم الدراسة الحالية بتفحص العرض محدد المكان، "صدى يافا" (٢٠١٤) لميريام شيكلر، بهدف تسليط الضوء على قدرته التحويلية وعلاقته المعقدة بالنضال المستمر للفلسطينيين من أجل الحكم الذاتي واستعادة السرد والمكان. وتستكشف الدراسة من خلال عدسة هذا العمل- الذي يجمع بين الفن المسرحي والسياسة والمكان - انه لا يعكس فقط السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي في فلسطين، بل ويجسد أيضًا النضال الفعلي والمجازي ضد قيود الحدود المفروضة. كما يقدم طريقة ديناميكية للمشاركين للتنقل والتجربة والتفاوض حول تعقيدات هوية فلسطين وتاريخها. وبالتأكيد، يسهم "صدى يافا" في إعادة تعريف هذه الجوانب. وفي النهاية، تُظهر هذه التجارب المجسدة للمقاومة - بتمركزها في الاراضي التي تأثرت بالنزاع، وبإسهامها في الحوار الأوسع حول الجغرافيا الحضرية المشطوبة، وبتقديمها لرؤى بديلة للهويات الفلسطينية المتشظية والاراضي المتنازع عليها- أنها ليست مجرد عروض فنية بل نماذج للتحدي السياسي، و البقاء الثقافي، و الذكرى الجماعية، واداه لاستعادة المكان، والتعليق الجغرافي.

الكلمات المفتاحية

البقاء الثقافي- الانفصال السرد- فلسطين- النضال السياسي- العروض محددة المكان- الانفصال المكاني- الانفصال الجغرافي الحضري

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

The Intersection of Performance, Politics, and Space

The Palestinian experience is a poignant tapestry woven with threads of profound displacement, fragmentation, hyphenation, and an unwavering pursuit of self-determination. The Palestinians' ongoing hyphenated existence - a state of being perpetually linked to "otherness" without full recognition of their own independent identities - is a complex issue with historical, political, and social dimensions.

Spatial Hyphenation: A Fractured Landscape and a Legacy of Fragmentation

Historically, the Palestinian land-throughout millennia- has been a crossroad of empires, from the Romans to the Ottomans, each leaving its mark on the territory and its people. The concept of a unified Palestinian identity emerged, however, in the early 20th century, till the *Sykes-Picot Agreement* of 1916 effectively carved up the region, further fragmenting the Palestinian aspirations for self-governance. Severing the Palestinians' historical connections, hindering their economic development, and fostering their social in cohesion, the 1948 Nakba- meaning "catastrophe" in Arabic, the subsequent occupation of Israel, and the Israeli unjustifiable establishment of separation barriers, checkpoints, and settlements resulted in the displacement of a large portion of the Palestinian population who live today in three primary spaces: The West Bank - a collection of non-contiguous enclaves under Israeli control, Gaza Strip - facing severe restrictions on movement and resources , and the Palestinian diaspora - scattered across the globe. This spatial fragmentation – reflecting the fractured geography of Palestine – disrupted the natural flow of the Palestinians' movement, fostered their sense of dispossession and dislocation, and created a "hyphenated

geography" where movement and interaction are tightly controlled (Faulds1992).

Political Hyphenation: The Absence of Recognition

In this complex geopolitical context where the Palestinian territory is fragmented and its sovereignty is contested, the concept of hyphenation extends beyond the spatial realm to include the political realm: The lack of international recognition of Palestine as a fully sovereign state. Despite attaining observer status at the United Nations in 2012, Palestine's sovereignty remains under Israeli occupation, and its control over borders, resources, and security remains unrealized on the ground.

Palestine has stopped, but the problem is not the absence of a state or a failed state. Palestinians are governed. Seen from the ground up, Palestinians see a state in most aspects of their lives: they are counted, licensed, monitored, patrolled, educated, taxed, regulated—and sometimes even cared for and fed—by official bodies. Palestinians are not stateless, but Palestine is (Brown2024).

In other words, Israel's occupation and its powerful international alliances create a situation where recognition does not translate to full statehood. This political hyphenation hinders Palestine's ability to participate fully in international institutions and negotiate effectively on the world stage and leaves Palestinians caught between the promise of international recognition and the harsh realities of occupation.

Social Hyphenation: The Weight of Identity

The social consequences of this hyphenation are equally profound. Palestinian identity is often seen as incomplete, defined, and constantly referred to in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reinforcing the idea of "otherness" and hindering the Palestinian identity to be seen as an independent entity. Moreover, the Palestinians within the occupied territories face restrictions on movement and daily life, while the diaspora grapples with questions of belonging and longing for a homeland. This constant state of flux creates a sense of impermanence and dispossession, impacting the social fabric of Palestinian society. Lorenzo Veracini notes that the Palestinian existence was practically denied, the history of Palestinian prior to Zionist settlement and Israeli–Arab conflict overlooked, accounts of Palestinian dispossession systematically disregarded (2013, 26–42).

Narrative Hyphenation: A Challenge to Palestinian Self-Determination

Transcending mere geography, the story of Palestine - or its narrative - however, is often entangled with that of others. As mentioned earlier, Palestine's narrative has been overshadowed historically by the dominant narratives of the empires that ruled the region. Additionally, the **establishment of Israel in 1948** - a defining moment in the Palestinian story leading to displacement and dispossession - further intertwined the Palestinian narratives; with Palestinian history often viewed as a reaction to - or consequence of - Israeli existence. This creates a sense of incompleteness, where the Palestinian story struggles to stand on its own. Furthermore, the lack of international recognition as a sovereign state is another major factor intensifying the hyphenation of the Palestinian narrative. Frequently referred to in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinian narrative is framed as a counterpoint to Israel's, diminishing the Palestinians' ability to independently present their aspirations and grievances on the world stage. Mainstream media, also, reinforces this narrative hyphenation. Promoting the story of Palestine as a two-sided story, media coverage often portrays Palestine as a space of binary struggle, with little exploration of the richness of its historical context, culture, or experience. Downplaying the nuances of the Palestinian experience, the binary framing of the conflict as 'us vs. them' further complicates matters and weakens the Palestinian narrative, reducing it to one side of a larger struggle (Ra'ad 2019, 77–100).

Beyond the Hyphen: Site-specific Performances as Tools of Resistance

As this complex socio-political situation evolves, compelling artistic expressions –rooted in the urban geopolitical hyphenated Palestinian territories and known as Site-specific Performances (SSPs) – emerge. Situated within the very spaces affected by conflict and highlighting what it means to live and remember in Palestine, these promising embodied experiences – the study maintains – contribute to the broader discourse on urban geopolitical hyphenation, provide alternative visions of the Palestinian contested landscapes and fragmented identities, and serve as fertile grounds and powerful backdrops for political activism, cultural survival, and spatial reclamation.

While traditional dramas - that take place inside conventional venues - prioritize the traditional mold of scripted stage plays, these (SSPs) propose an expanded definition of drama. Transforming ordinary spaces

into stages for storytelling , integrating elements of audience engagement, narrative adaptability, and immersive experiences, and elevating the importance of the audience's experiential journey, these spatial interventions thereby infuse the drama genre with new vitality , render it resonate with audiences on a deeply personal level , and foster a more comprehensive and dynamic conception of dramatic art. This is a common trait in site-specific theatre, where the space is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the performance (Hamburger 2019)-.

1.2. Objectives

For this purpose, the present study is mainly concerned with the transformative power, critical role, multifaceted nature, profound impact of the site-specific performances, and their intricate relationship with the Palestinians' ongoing fight for autonomy, self-determination, and reclamation of narrative and space. As such, the study aims at attaining the following objectives: First, examining how Site-specific Performances - in the charged socio-political context of Palestine - serve as powerful means of expression and poignant examples of political activism, cultural survival, spatial and narrative reclamation. Second, understanding the ways through which Miriam Schickler's *Echoing Yafa* intersects with the intricate geopolitical landscape of Palestine, imbues it with new meanings, and contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between art, space, and geopolitics in the context of the ongoing geopolitical conflict. Or more precisely speaking, exploring the narrative and performative strategies employed by Schickler to engage the audience with the physical and metaphorical boundaries imposed by occupation, subvert the prevailing geopolitical discourse, and transform ordinary spaces into charged sites of remembrance, resistance, and re-narration. Finally, evaluating the ephemeral nature of *Echoing Yafa*, its impermanence, and the effectiveness of utilizing physical movement and auditory experience in conveying its message.

1.3. Research Questions

The present study addresses the following key questions: First, what is the relationship between Site-specific Performances and the Palestinian geopolitical landscape? I.e., can these critical spatial interventions reflect the socio-political context of Palestine, embodying its ongoing physical and metaphorical struggle against the constraints of imposed borders and the fragmentation of Palestinian identity? Second, what is the driving

force that motivates Mariam Schickler to choose this particular site, Manshiyya; and how her choice resonates with the Palestinian experience? Third, does this artistic endeavour effectively serve as a dynamic form of socio-political activism or a compelling act of political defiance? More precisely speaking, does Schickler's *Echoing Yafa* offer dynamic methods for participants to contest the entrenched power dynamics at play, challenge the hyphenated geopolitics, counter the sanitized narratives super imposed by colonial paradigms, and actively contribute to Palestine's redefinition? Fourth, what narrative and performative strategies does Schickler employ to push the boundaries of both space and narrative, while directly engaging the participants with the physicality of space and the politics inscribed within? Fifth, what role do these Site-specific Performances strategically play in amplifying marginalized voices, reclaiming agency and visibility, and producing a cathartic effect on both artists and audiences? Finally, how is the 'hyphenated space' utilized in *Echoing Yafa* to address the ongoing geopolitical conflict and counter hegemonic spatial politics?

1.4. Rationale

The underlying premises behind choosing this area of study are as follows: The researcher is instigated by the fact that these performances – where the space is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the performance – are situated within the very spaces affected by conflict, operate differently from the traditional performances taking place inside conventional venues, innovate in their use of the performance space, and utilize the urban landscape of Palestine to inform and shape the narrative.

While *Echoing Yafa* shares similarities with other regional works embodying the transformative potential of art in such settings, this artistic expression – the researcher maintains – is dramatic with a unique approach. It is not just a performance but a critical spatial intervention. It does stand out as a powerful contemporary site-specific performance, triggering critical events in Palestine through enacted stories, bringing to the forefront the suppressed stories of its people in its physical space, making strong political and social statements, reframing present and past into a site of critical consciousness and resistance, ultimately contributing to the ongoing discourse of resistance in Palestine, and leading to a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of what constitutes dramatic art.

Furthermore, enriching the genre of drama and infusing it with new vitality, *Echoing Yafa* is reflective of the broader role of art in conflict

transformation. Engaging with and transforming urban spaces laden with historical and political significance, *Echoing Yafa* illustrates how aesthetic experiences can offer a powerful critique of the Israeli occupation, transform attitudes and perceptions, and produce a cathartic effect on both artists and audiences.

Apart from the fact that *Echoing Yafa* resonates with broader discussions on art and activism in conflict zones, the researcher is impressed by the amount of creative freedom this type of art allows, particularly joining disciplines together. In a typical theatre piece, acting, writing, music and movement play their individual parts in telling the story. However, a (SSP) tends to steer from linear storytelling and create fun art that does not necessarily have to be understood or explained. This freedom of pieces not having to fit quite as neatly, means that there is a lot of room for experimentation.

1.5. Significance

The present study – hopefully – would contribute to a growing body of scholarship. Seeking to serve as a testament, the study underscores the unique value of (SSPs) in highlighting the complexities of Palestine, resilience of Palestinians, and human cost of the ongoing struggle. In other words, the study seeks to offer a unique lens through which to understand the interplay between art, politics, and space in this unique area of study.

It is also hoped that this paper would provide crucial insights into the subversive potential of these (SSPS) and would offer valuable perspectives on how they manage to forge new modes of resistance. This accurate and deep understanding – the researcher hopes – may inform more nuanced approaches to crisis resolution and advocacy efforts and may allow for the emergence of counter-narratives that challenge dominant power structures.

Moreover, it is hoped that this study would be transformative and empowering not only informative. By showcasing the power of these artistic expressions in the face of adversity, the study offers new insights into how art can transcend physical limitations, reclaim meaning, disrupt dominant narratives, and challenge complex geopolitical situations. Inspiring new avenues for artistic expression, the study can also promote responsible space exploration policies and cultivate a sense of global

responsibility towards the place of Palestine in the world. The findings of the study, as well, will be of interest to scholars of Performance studies, Middle Eastern studies, and critical geography.

2. Theoretical Approach

2.1. Critical Geopolitics: Unveiling the Politics of Place

The present study draws on an academic approach that goes beyond traditional geopolitical analyses, namely, critical geopolitics. Not a theory per se, critical geopolitics is an academic field of study providing valuable insights into the intricate interplay between geography, ideology, and global politics. While geopolitics focuses on the influence of the geographic space – including land territory, territorial waters, and other geographical factors – on political power and behavior, critical geopolitics investigates the geographical assumptions, claims and designations, constructed by the intellectuals of statecraft, that underlie the making of political behavior, foreign policy, and international relations (Kelly2006,24-53). Emphasizing that boundaries are not merely lines on a map, but carry deep symbolic and historical significance, critical geopolitics reminds us that the world is not just a map – it’s a stage where power plays out in intricate ways.:

Unlike traditional geopolitics, which often treats geography as neutral or objective, critical geopolitics (founded initially by political geographers Simon Dalby and Gearoid Ó Tuathail (writing together and separately) in the late 1980s) shifts the focus and disrupts the mainstream geopolitical discourse. Opening up new avenues for understanding global politics, it recognizes that geographical claims and assumptions are deeply politicized and carry ideological weight; i.e., they are products of hidden power dynamics and ideological positioning (Sharp2020, 45-49). Questioning not just the geography of politics within predefined places, but also the politics defining those places, critical geopolitics thus challenges deterministic views confining spatiality solely to territorial boundaries, and argues that spatial analysis should extend beyond physical borders and explore how power or discursive practices operate across diverse spaces. More precisely speaking, critical geopolitics aims to dismantle what John Agnew termed the “territorial trap” – the fixation on territoriality as the sole spatial dimension(Agnew1994,53-80). Challenging the rigid boundaries of nation-states by exploring transnational flows, networks, and hybrid spaces, Critical geopolitics

seeks to escape this trap (territorial trap) by considering alternative spatialities and power dynamics (Newman 2010, 320) .

The goal of critical geopolitics thus is to reveal the underlying power dynamics, ideological constructs, security concerns, and narratives of threat that shape our understanding of places and global relations. Rather than asking how geography influences politics, critical geopolitics seeks to explain how political actors – policymakers, strategists, diplomats, public intellectuals and scholars – perceive global spaces, construct geopolitical narratives, and define who the friends and foes are. It prompts us to ask: How do these narratives shape national identity, sovereignty claims, and territorial disputes? How does the spatialization of conflict impact civilians? Critical geopolitics sheds light on the ways those intellectuals of statecraft spatialize international politics, wield significant influence over a nation's foreign policy, strategic decisions, diplomatic negotiations, military strategies, and geopolitical narratives, and represent the world as a complex web of interconnected spaces, each imbued with meaning and power (Jason and Dodds 2008, 437 – 457).

Critical geopolitics – within this framework– plays a crucial role in unveiling the ideological constructs and power dynamics that define the Palestinian crisis – the crisis that goes beyond maps and borders. Transcending mere territoriality, the Palestinian struggle is not solely about physical boundaries and territorial claims shaping global perceptions of Gaza. It encompasses narratives of occupation, dispossession, exile, identity, resistance, and humanitarian suffering.

Defining the spaces within which political entities operate, critical geopolitics highlights how the Nakba (the 1948 Palestinian exodus) and ongoing displacement remain powerful symbols and contribute to the crisis. It emphasizes, also, that the struggle over Al Aqsa – which holds a religious, historical, and political significance – is not just about physical control but also about a symbolic space representing sacredness and sovereignty. The heavily fortified separation fence between Israel and Gaza – which has been a contentious issue for decades – is more than a territorial boundary as well. Escalating tensions and leading to military responses, breaches in this fence reflect politics of security. And, the daily hardships faced by Palestinians in Gaza — due to a 16-year-long blockade – highlight the intersection of territoriality, resource scarcity, and security concerns (Abdul Rahim 2023) .

2.2. Site-Specific Performances: Reclaiming Space and Narrative through Embodiment

While the traditional performance spaces, with their inherent limitations, often struggle to fully capture the complexities of the Palestinian experience, the (SSPs), on the other hand, offer – by their very essence – a unique platform for artistic exploration and political commentary. Carving a distinct niche, (SSPs) transcend the confines of conventional theaters, embrace the open Palestinian public spaces as their stage, and imbue these spaces with additional layers of meaning. Walls separating Israelis and Palestinians, bustling checkpoints, and densely populated refugee camps are transformed from symbols of division into canvases for depicting the hardships of separation and venues where the humiliation of daily life under occupation is brought to light.

Conceived in relation to the dynamics of a specific place or environment, (SSPs) are theatrical productions that are performed at unique, specially adapted physical locations other than traditional theater spaces. They aim to reach audiences who might not typically attend traditional theater venues (Kiyosaki2024). They are performances “conceived on the basis of place(s) in the real world” (Pavis1998, 337), which place “the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place and the purpose for being there” (ibid,338). They are the “articulate [exchange] between the work of art and the places in which (their) meanings are defined” (Kaye 2000,1). Unique works of art, (SSPs) interact with the locations they are performed in, often to create narratives or experiences that are inseparable from the places themselves. Revealing layers within sites, these practices “explore spatial and material histories and mediate the complex identities these histories remember and produce” (Hayes 2016,1194-1203).

The specific place where the (SSP) is held plays a crucial role. It’s not just a backdrop but an active component of the narrative, influencing the story and the audience’s experience.

The dynamics of site-specific performance are intimately involved with how place intersects with politics, cultural policy, community engagement, collective memory, and identity formation (Klaer 2018).

Not meant to take place in a conventional theatre or stage, (SSPs) frequently take place in structures originally built for non-theatrical reasons. They may take place in homes, museums, galleries, chapels, barns, railway stations, hillsides, parks, historical landmarks, and urban or rural spaces. They may also unfold in non-traditional performance settings like forests, abandoned factories, underground bunkers, tunnels, catacombs, or shipping containers (Kiyosaki2024). They seek to utilize and incorporate the unique features of their chosen sites to add depth to the theatrical production, enhance the storytelling, and engage the audience in a way that cannot be replicated in a traditional theatre setting. Operating differently from traditional theatre, they are designed to interact with the specific features of the performance site, which can include not only the physical space but also its history, culture, and politics .

In site-based performance, the site becomes the dominant signifier rather than simply being that which contains the performance, as the theatre building does in traditional theatre practice (McCauley2005,30).

While traditional drama typically prioritizes the text and the performance, participatory (SSPs) place equal importance on the experience of the audience, suggesting a broader definition of drama that includes the audience's experiential journey (Bowditch et al. 2018) . Not following fixed scripts, they are malleable, evolving based on the audience's active participation. This narrative fluidity contrasts sharply with the fixed narratives and more rigid structure of classical drama, where the storyline is usually predetermined and unchanging. The meaning in these participatory (SSPs) is thus co-created by the performers and the audience, resulting in a diverse and subjective interpretation of the work. This stands in contrast to traditional drama, where the playwright and director typically control the meaning and guide the interpretation.

Unlike traditional theatre settings where the audience typically assume passive roles as spectators, these (SSPs) blur the traditional boundaries between performers and observers. They recast the audience as dynamic contributors, transforming them into active participants.

Much of the appeal of immersive theatre is its promise of a more autonomous, more active

spectator: an audience member who, rather than sitting quietly and presumably passively in a theatre, might independently explore a fully designed space; in so doing, they might have a deeply personal and individualized experience in which they can be touch, hear, see, smell, and even taste the world they find themselves in (Blair 2021,75-93).

Offering enveloping experiences where the emotional and cognitive involvement of the audience are heightened, (SSPs) create a different level of immersive dramatic engagement which is distinct from the more observational experience of traditional drama.

3. Content Analysis

Miriam Schickler's *Echoing Yafa* (2014)

Within this framework, the present study cites *Echoing Yafa* (Jaffa's name in Arabic) – an independent, political and ethnographic joint project created in 2014 in English, Arabic and Hebrew by Miriam Schickler, the German-Jewish sound artist and anthropologist, with local Palestinian artists, researchers and activists. As part of her unresolved ethical, political and artistic positioning, Schickler – by means of this fifty-minute, movement-based, enacted narrative that demands the investment of one's time and physical presence and that can be listened to using earphones – expresses a critical consciousness regarding the colonial paradigm of hyphenation. Through collective and subjective enacted stories, she communicates Jaffa's politically charged history, brings to life the tension between voluntary movement and its control, and raises questions associated with agency, detachment and appropriation. I.e., her self-guided audio-walk tour serves as a powerful case study of a site-specific performance spanning time and experience, triggering critical events in Manshiyya, giving voice to testimony, bridging generational divides, highlighting intergenerational experiences, and creating an affective geography that satisfies a participant's desire to connect with the city rather than just walk through it. Schickler reflects:

Audio is a very useful and powerful tool. It's different from vision. You have to immerse yourself in the listening event. It's a more immediate and affective experience. I think we're totally overloaded with visuals, and generally people don't listen

enough. I'd like to make them shut up for a second (Pine2020, 22-36).

Inhabited since the 1870s, Manshiyyah is a former lively Palestinian residential neighborhood between freshly divided Tel Aviv and Jaffa, brimming with intellectuals, politicians, activists, and artists. Acting as a powerful reminder of the recent past and the present, Manshiyya works as “a potent mnemonic trigger, helping to evoke specific past times related to the place and time of performance and facilitating a negotiation between the meaning of those times (Pearson2010,9).” But, like many once vibrant centres of Palestinian urban life, it was depopulated and almost entirely bombed out of physical existence by the Israeli Zionist terror militia, the Irgun (Etzel), during the Nakba (‘the disaster’, in Palestinian terminology) (Harvey1989, 105–106). Though becoming nowadays a central site of the Tel Aviv metropolis and a multicultural contact zone, Manshiyyah – except for the remnants of two buildings – is no longer conceivable visually. It becomes an undistinguishable slice of Tel Aviv embodying acts of connection, separation and erasure – a place stripped of its former community life, emptied of memory, and buried under the streets of Tel-Aviv.

Now, Manshiyyah is nothing more than fragmented recollections in the ageing minds of the few remaining Palestinians who once walked its streets, clinging to the increasingly frail life support machines of refugee memories ... Its past life smothered beneath new parks and pavements, the feet of citizens and tourists trampling daily over its buried tragedy, further entrenching it in the ground (Chamas2014).

Along with the critical events that took place in Manshiyya, the belief that Manshiyyah is not necessarily doomed to complete evaporation and not fated to decompose with the dead inspire Schickler – together with other Palestinian activists and sound artists – to respond creatively to the traces of the past. Schickler posits:

There are other ways, for such forgotten spaces to live on without corporeal form, without material traces of what was, without living witnesses to confirm their now extinguished existence. Witnesses

will inevitably die, but their narratives have the potential for immortality, their words the ability to speak life back into that which has been seemingly annihilated (ibid.).

In other words, in correlation with the geopolitical hyphenation implemented in Jaffa, Schickler attempts to document the history of Manshiyyah – once a buzzer zone full of life and movement, present its silenced voices, and rewrite the area as a traumatic and stratified site.

The hyphenated performance, which embodies the colonial paradigm of hyphenation through annexation and erasure, rewrites the space as a traumatic post-memory site by activating additional movements – primarily between present and past – as a sound-based enacted narrative in *Echoing Yafa*, created by Miriam Schickler (Barak 2023, 408–428).

With slow fundraising and intentional refraining from financial support by Israeli official institutions, Schickler – together with Lubna Masarwa, a journalist and human rights activist – conducted research, located families of Manshiyya refugees, interviewed them, and recorded the interviews. Based on these interviews, *Echoing Yafa* is a mosaic of stitched memories and non-fictional experiences, delicately scooped out of the minds of a few remaining former Palestinian residents of Manshiyyah, who were deported in 1948 on ships and who today live scattered across Gaza, Jordan, the West Bank, Israel and beyond. Threaded in between these bits of remembrance are pieces of aural art: Testimonies intermingling with facts, personal experiences penetrating official statements, moments derived from British and Israeli archives and intelligence records, and subjective convictions undermining historical truths – all embedded within soundscapes (designed by Binya Reches) (Chamas 2014). These pieces of aural art encourage the audience to “imagine and then reimagine the bygone soundtrack of forgotten days... to experience and not just observe this retelling of the past (ibid.).”

As a part of *Echoing Yafa* 's artistic composition, a number of local actors and actresses – in a recorded faint voice – orate and enact the spoken characters using first-person voices, reviving in the participants' imagination of all those voices that once existed in this region and whose echoes are still echoing in the place of their original origin, Al-Manshiyya. One participant once commented: “Imagination fastened to

ears, we can follow narrated memories on an audio walk through this disappeared space (ibid.).” This serves to highlight – and other times obscure – the distinction between the present and the characters' exploration of their past. This enables the participants, as well, to reconstruct what has been destroyed, irreversibly changed and lost forever.

Regarding the Participants – and based upon their willing submission to be led – they have the option to take off their earphones, pause the soundtrack, and thereby interrupt the performance, disregarding its implicit guidelines. Moreover, the participants' freedom of movement is not intended to be restricted. Besides, the voices that guide the path, addressing each participant individually and directing one's imagination to the past, do not serve as physical constraints but rather function as tools or tethers binding the participants to the performance and enhancing their mobility.

Embarking on the first part of their aural boat tour through Manshiyyah, the participants are invited by the narrator – a primary female guide providing spatial directions for the walk, including both walking instructions and references to historical locations – to gaze at what is no longer there:

There, see the junction in front of us, this is where they decided to draw the borderline, the borderline between Jaffa and Tel Aviv. It runs alongside the street beneath us. Things got heated up lately, chaos and clashes erupted, more and more people got killed ... all this time we were going through the same shit. Then, all of a sudden, those people come along and divide the space with barbed wire, and decide that some of us belong to this side of it and the others on the other. Well, we are right in the middle of all of it. The place that I'm going to show you is the border line itself (Schickler2014).

Playing a significant role in linking the audience to spatial recollections, the narrator — in the voice and accent of a Palestinian woman — establishes the in-between nature of the hyphenated space by framing the border as a dual symbol of both division and unity. Generating moments where current street signs and verbal expressions

converge, the narrator explores the period when Manshiyya functioned as a border area, experiencing a tense daily existence - seemingly after the British authorities designated Tel Aviv as a distinct municipal area and, in May 1921, when it was physically separated from Jaffa.

This is the borderland. It is a threatening place for those who think they know exactly who they are and where they belong. It is here where their firm identity gets shaken, and it is thus here where the battle will begin (Chamas2014).

The second part of the auditory exploration proceeds by the narrator taking the participants on a walking tour from the northern border of the erased quarter of the city of Tel Aviv, down to its southern border with Jaffa, between the Israeli present and the Palestinian past of Manshiyya. The narrator's deliberate choice to focus on Manshiyya allows readers to explore the microcosm before zooming out to Jaffa's broader canvas. Inviting the participants to follow her footsteps through Jaffa's Manshiyya neighborhood, she remarks: 'Try not to get the attention of the British soldiers that are guarding the border, we don't want them to decide on which side we belong, do we (Schickler2014).' Here, spatial memory becomes an immersive invitation.

Starting from this moment, the hyphenated bodily movement of the participants, symbolizing connections and separations, gradually becomes a subtle pattern. Amid the sound behind sound, oral narrative behind oral narrative, the participants' irregular paths intersect with memory snapshots and oscillate between conflicting ideologies. Their eyes attempt to reconcile the landscape described in these stories with the markedly different territory through which their bodies must move. Moreover, their ears try to keep up with the oscillation between the directions provided by the narrators in the 'real' and the invisible landmarks they point to.

At this point, the narrator emphasizes Jaffa's liminal status through its evocative nickname: the 'mother of the stranger (ibid.).' Here, the term 'stranger' carries dual connotations. First, Jaffa serves as a hub for culture and trade, attracting outsiders — travelers, traders, and seekers of knowledge — who contribute to its cosmopolitan character. Second, within Jaffa, everyone is both related and unrelated — a paradoxical blend of familiarity and otherness. For this purpose, the narrator portrays Manshiyya not merely as a vibrant neighborhood bustling with activity, but as a multifaceted neighborhood within the larger context of Jaffa,

transcending mere geographical boundaries and teeming with a multitude of identities, weaving their stories into the social fabric of Manshiyya. As the participants wander its streets, they glimpse the heartbeats of Jaffa — a city that embraces both the known and the unknown, the neighbor and the stranger. Within its boundaries, Muslims, Jews, Christians as well as ‘atheists, communists, rich people, poor people, people with morals and people without them’ coexist (ibid.) Epitomizing Jaffa’s essence, symbolizing the complexity of urban existence, and reflecting the intricate interplay of identities, relationships, and cultural dynamics, Manshiyya is portrayed — through vivid descriptions and character sketches — as a crossroad where narratives intersect, the past mingles with the present, neighbors may share no blood ties yet feel deeply connected through shared experiences, strangers become part of the collective memory, and the tension between rootedness and transience or tradition and modernity is embodied.

In this juxtaposition of diversity and liminality, the conflict between the auditory and visual experiences emerges. The voices from the past intrude upon the present space and the participants’ gaze, creating a continuous narrative. In this interplay between conflicting forces that have shaped the intricate social fabric of Manshiyya, the symbolic and physical significance of the hyphen is vividly demonstrated, not just by walking through the in-between area of Tel Aviv and Jaffa and exploring its transitional nature in the story, but also by navigating through the spaces of change within it: The large car parks near the Carmel Market, the bus station, and the park without ties to a specific neighborhood, the path leading west, the major intersection bordered by the mosque of the demolished Manshiyya quarter, the line of hotels extending to the beach; and finally, the Charles Clore Park, with its grassy mounds concealing the remnants of what was once Manshiyya (ibid.). These spaces highlight the transitional energy that applies to all the stops along the walk, promote an open and seamless present, and enable the shift to another reality. Amidst this transition between various realities, the participants depend on the narrator’s voice as a guiding force.

Moving westward toward the sea and then south to Jaffa, the sound-based enacted narrative unfolds with vivid memory scenes. The participants witness the mayor sitting at a café — a snapshot of authority and everyday life intersecting. A Jewish child sneaks into a dream wedding involving three brothers and three sisters — an enchanting moment of forbidden curiosity. The evocation of a once-rich Palestinian

home, now replaced by the Dan Panorama Hotel, speaks to the passage of time and cultural shifts. These intertwined memory scenes reveal instances of humanity amid conflict.

However, a pivotal moment occurs when the participants stand on the Jaffa-Tel Aviv border. Inhabiting the ‘third space,’ a sex worker states that it is “the third space, where the roles of both cultures are suspended and my movements cannot be controlled by either side (ibid.)” Amid thick smoke, she adds: “you will be nothing but a stranger, like all of us here in Jaffa (ibid.)” At this point, the participants — united only by their shared existence in Jaffa — momentarily become strangers. Yet, despite the sex worker’s multifaceted otherness, her literary testimony ends with a haunting truth: “You will write me out of your history as if I had never existed (ibid.)” The erasure of her presence echoes the broader spatial erasure faced by marginalized voices.

Another prominent moment in the tour is the participants’ lingering around the market where the public memorial garden, *Ha’Kovshim Park* (Hebrew for ‘The Conquerors’), lies. Here, the soundscape intertwines with history, evoking both triumph and loss: *HaKovshim Park* memorializes the Zionist paramilitary underground organization Etzel (Irgun) and the Haganah fighters hailed as the ‘liberators of Jaffa’ during the War of Independence. Through a memorial adorned with symbols of Israel, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, the Haganah, and the Irgun, an inscription carved in stone quotes from David's lament for Jonathan: "They were swifter than eagles and mightier than lions" (2 Samuel 1982, 25-26). Initially, the glorification of war heroes prevails. Yet, as the participants linger, a shift occurs. *HaKovshim Park* becomes a space where memory confronts the complexities of human conflict, critical suppressed emotions emerge, and the weight of bereavement, guilt, and the deliberate act of forgetting win over.

At the junction overlooking the sea, the narrator directs the participants’ gaze toward the white limestone mosque, *Hassan Bek Mosque*, which was built between 1914 and 1916. Standing on the border of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, the mosque has had a profound symbolic significance for Jaffa’s Arab population. Jaffa’s Ottoman governor, Hassan Bek strategically placed the mosque at Jaffa’s northern boundary for two purposes — to ensure Jaffa’s expansion northward and halt Tel Aviv’s encroachment toward the sea. Contrasting with the contemporary modern high-rises surrounding it, the mosque — with its Ottoman-style

architecture — remains the sole visible intact structure within Manshiyya, embodying continuity — a link to explosive times and diverse community functions (Radai2015).

Remarkably, the narrator does not mention the violent events that occurred near the mosque. She only states that beyond the call to prayer (Azan), the minaret of *Hassan Bek* mosque has witnessed political speeches and even gunfire during tumultuous periods. After fighting subsides, neighborhood children emerge, collect unexploded grenades and ammunition from the ground, and support fighters facing ammunition shortages. The participants are informed as well that the Jaffa Palestinians, in 1981, rallied against a municipal plan to convert *Hassan Bek* mosque into a shopping center (Nimrod2008,1036-1052). Their protest prevailed, and the mosque reopened as a place of worship — a testament to resilience and memory. The *Hassan Bek Mosque* thus silently bridges past and present, embodying both history and hope.

To the west, on the promenade, the participants' movements echo the historical advances of military forces during the 1948 battles. Though the participants move freely, sheltered by the recreational landscape, the serene atmosphere of the park along the seashore clashes sharply with the harsh reality described. The air carries increasingly extreme sounds — military forces, destruction, and urgency. Suddenly, a signal pierces the tranquility: The voice of a young Palestinian woman, urgently reporting a massive fire in the Carmel Market (Schickler2014).

Afterwards, tales from everyday emergencies give way to a crisis: Menachem Begin, Israel's prime minister (1977–1983), is claimed as the commander of the Zionist armed organization of *Etzel* — ('Fighters for the Freedom of Israel') (ibid.). The narrator then skillfully shifts viewpoints, analyzing the fighting tactics used in Manshiyya—tactics later institutionalized by the Israeli army in the 2000s.

Walking along the seaside and listening to its present sounds, the participants confront the traumas: Lost family members, shattered homes, and personal belongings gone. They witness Manshiyya's Arab residents sailing from Jaffa's port to Gaza and neighboring Arab countries, while others are concentrated, crowded, and resettled in Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood, then known as the Ghetto (ibid.). The illusion that this turmoil will soon end hangs heavy. The *Hassan Bek Mosque* silently

witnesses these layers of history — conflict, resilience, and the human cost of displacement.

As the participants approach the southern side of *Etzel House* (also known as *Gidi's House* — a museum that commemorates the organization responsible for conquering Manshiyya), the soundscape itself becomes a performative hyphen bridging past and present. A prerecorded tour guide — speaking in English with an Israeli accent — explains the museum's identity, however, omits crucial layers of its history. Originally built in the early twentieth century by a Jewish owner, the house later came under Palestinian ownership until 1948. Eventually, a Jewish family inhabited it and became some of the last residents before eviction due to claims of impending demolition (Rotbard2015). The tour's ironic ending spot hints to Palestinian poetics of ruins scattered across Israel's landscape. Yet, *Etzel House* also stands as a mnemonic trigger—a place where history converges, fractures, and echoes.

The narrator, then, directs the participants' attention to the bronze sculpture *Woman against the Wind* situated on a nearby grassy hill. The narrator draws a parallel: The sculpture, created in 1977 by sculptor Ilana Goor, resembles Walter Benjamin's *The Angel of History* (*Angelus Novus*), which embodies a melancholic view of historical processes — perpetual cycles of destruction and loss. “I always thought she resembles the angel of history (Schickler2014)”, says the narrator, quoting Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, but transforming his quote into the female voice of a woman-angel, bridging Hebrew and Arabic. The participants' imaginative gazes expand outward, contemplating the iconic woman-angel's dialectic movement across all histories and wars. The sculpture becomes a mnemonic trigger — a place where past, present, and imagination converge.

Early on, utopian glimpses of shared existence defy imposed borders. Yet, finally, unbalanced power dynamics emerge, the participants return to the present, and the hyphenated movement pauses. Grounding the participants in the reality of Jaffa today, the narrator relates dispossession and demolitions. Ultimately, the story reaches a retrospective end: Manshiya's occupation in late April, shortly before Israel's founding on May 14, 1948.

Upon finishing the entire performance, the participants — enveloped by the sounds of the sea, everyday life, and initial introspection — take

off their earphones. Having been deeply involved in a dynamic that blends the interplay of vision and sound, the spatial stratification of the present experience, and the lost history of Manshiyya, the participants liberate themselves from consciously controlling their movements. The moment they return back to the present, they keenly feel the ability to silence the echoes, yet for a brief moment. The surface appears to them as if it conceals an entire life buried beneath the ground.

4. Findings and Discussion

Overall, in the context of Palestine, space is deeply political; and Schickler's *Echoing Yafa* — through its critical engagement with the physical, cultural, and political landscape of Jaffa — unquestionably presents an intriguing case study in this context. By utilizing the physical space of Jaffa that holds historical, cultural, and political significance as the backdrop for the performance, Schickler allows the participants to directly interact with the unique characteristics of the physical landscape in an intimate level, connect it to its surroundings and to the specific power structures at play, and reimagine its current - often restrictive - functions. By transforming Jaffa — its hills, cities, and coastlines — into a platform for artistic expression, cultural revival, and community engagement, Schickler is able to counter the hegemonic spatial politics and the entrenched dynamics of occupation, displacement, and marginalization that seek to define and control the spatial realities of Palestine. By staging her performance in Jaffa — where space is contested, politicized, and often restricted — Schickler is able to infuse this site with new symbolic meanings. She literally challenges the attempts to erase or dominate these spaces, physically asserts the enduring Palestinian presence in the region – their ownership and attachment to the land, and impressively reshapes it as a site of cultural, historical, and political significance that goes beyond its current representations which often perpetuate colonial perspectives.

Moreover, the act of movement, itself, from the northern border of the erased quarter of the city of Tel Aviv, down to its southern border with Jaffa, between the Israeli present and the Palestinian past of Manshiyya – the contested or historically significant landscape – is a form of spatial reclamation. Apart from asserting the Palestinians' physical presence, the participants' movements challenge the physical and conceptual boundaries imposed by geopolitical forces on movement and emphasize the Palestinians' right to freely inhabit and move through the Palestinian

territory. Their movement highlight the fragmentation of the Palestinian space due to Israeli settlements, Separation Wall, and other barriers, and make visible the everyday struggles Palestinians face in their land.

Crucial also for challenging dominant narratives of displacement and dispossession and asserting the complexity and humanity of the Palestinian experience is the act of reclaiming the narrative; and, *Echoing Yafa*, by its nature, is a powerful tool for narrative reclamation. Addressing the complex political history of Palestine, *Echoing Yafa* chronicles key events such as the Nakba (the 1948 displacement), Intifadas, ongoing settlement expansion, Gaza blockade, human rights violation, resistance, and aspirations for a future state. These historical references — apart from providing context for understanding current geopolitical dynamics within a historical framework — serve to counter dominant geopolitical narratives that seek to legitimize power structures and delegitimize Palestinian claims to land and rights.

Besides, by incorporating traditional elements of Palestinian culture into the performance, such as music, poetry, visual arts, storytelling, language, symbolic gestures, personal anecdotes, cultural/historical references, and folklore and weaving them all into its narrative, the performance thus preserves, celebrates, and reinforces the depth, richness, diversity, and vitality of the Palestinian cultural heritage. Moreover, by reinterpreting historical or cultural narratives linked to Jaffa and offering alternative perspectives that diverge from dominant — often colonial — narratives propagated by hegemonic forces, Schickler underlines the importance of truth-telling and memory preservation in the face of historical revisionism and erasure. In other words, by juxtaposing ancient narratives with contemporary challenges, *Echoing Yafa* contributes to reclaiming narratives that have been often marginalized, suppressed, co-opted, or distorted in mainstream discourse, showcasing forgotten aspects of a location, countering attempts at cultural homogenization, distortion, or erasure, reinforcing the connection between the Palestinians and their land, and emphasizing the presence, resilience, and evolution of the Palestinian identity despite occupation, displacement, and marginalization.

Centering lesser-known historical narratives, personal experiences, and individual stories of Palestinian resilience and resistance against occupation and adversity —from refugees to activists — within the performance offers a humanizing perspective. Apart from engaging its

participants with the personal and collective memories of the land and making the broader Palestinian narrative relatable and emotionally resonant for the audience, the nuanced depictions of these experiences, struggles, and aspirations challenge stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases that have shaped mainstream narratives about Palestine and its people, foster a sense of pride and solidarity among Palestinians and supporters globally, and illustrate the resilience and creativity of individuals amidst adversity. In other words, by incorporating diverse marginalized, silenced, or underrepresented voices from within the Palestinian society — women, youth, refugees, etc., and providing a platform for them to be heard and valued, *Echoing Yafa* thus disrupts monolithic representations, empowers the Palestinians to shape their own narratives, offers a more comprehensive understanding of Jaffa's complex history and contemporary realities, provides an inclusive and multifaceted view of Palestinian identity, and repositions the geopolitical discourse around Palestine.

Landscapes of memory can be arenas for challenging and potentially redefining the lines of belonging for marginalized groups and are but one avenue activists can take in the continuing struggle for social and economic justice. (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 195).

5. Conclusion

To sum up, struggling to move beyond the hyphen, the contemporary Palestinian artists address the spatial and narrative dimensions of hyphenation through their (SSPs), thus contributing to the ongoing discourse of resistance in Palestine. Seeking to counter dominant spatial constructions, victim-perpetrator narratives, and official sanitized histories, Miriam Schickler triggers critical collective events and subjective enacted stories to transcend imposed fragmentation and entrenched dichotomies that are often at the heart of conflicts. Her *Echoing Yafa* does offer a powerful example of how (SSPs) can serve as potent tools for reclaiming space, regaining narrative authority, contesting power dynamics, reconnecting fragmented identities, amplifying marginalized voices, reframing urban reality, re-examining spatial memory, and producing a cathartic effect on both artists and audiences.

Situating the artistic expression within Manshiyya – the hyphenated space that holds the marks of multiple, often conflicting, narratives,

Schickler thus transforms the very space affected by conflict into a platform for expression, reflection, and catharsis. She connects the audience with the cultural contexts of this space on a deep personal level, offers a testament to the lived experiences and enduring spirit of Palestinians, provides a powerful critique of the Israeli occupation, and forces the audience to reflect on the complex issues surrounding Palestine, question their own assumptions, and reevaluate the preexisting notions shaped by hegemonic influences. Moreover, apart from being committed only to factual chronicles, Schickler incorporates oral histories, personal narratives, and collective memories into the physical environment. She moves beyond a simplistic portrayal of victimhood or resistance to present an embodied experience that asserts the Palestinians' right to remember and tell their own stories. She creates a space for critical reflection on the hegemonic power dynamics, structural injustices, and socio-political struggles embedded in the region's geopolitics — land dispossession, settler colonialism, displacement of communities, or restrictions on movement that Palestinians endure daily. Besides, fusing interactive experiences, participatory storytelling techniques, immersive soundscapes, symbolic gestures, and provocative imagery, Schickler engages the audience emotionally and intellectually. Creating her own space of storytelling, she offers alternative perspectives for connection and sovereignty within the fragmented Palestinian landscape.

Overall, far from being merely a passive reflection of space, Schickler's *Echoing Yafa* is a critical performance that connects with the hyphenated space where those events took place and links individual experiences to broader geopolitical dynamics. It is a potent mnemonic trigger, raising questions about the legitimacy and impact of restricted movements, political borders, walls, or checkpoints on Palestinian lives. It is a peaceful protest, advocating for the Palestinian rights for self-determination, freedom of movement, and access to resources. It is also a living archive, preserving memories and experiences that might otherwise be lost. Responding to spatial fragmentation and narrative hyphenation, *Echoing Yafa* — through its thematic depth, strategic artistic approach, and advocacy efforts — pushes the boundaries of both space and narrative to redefine a space that has been historically marginalized or misrepresented and reclaim a narrative that has been substantially hyphenated or contested. In short, it forges a path towards a potential future where Palestine sheds the hyphen and stands as a recognized and respected nation.

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