Cultural Diplomacy and Dance:

Israel's Batsheva Dance Company

by

Allison Badar

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Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Jessica Zeller, M.F.A., Ph.D.

School for Classical & Contemporary Dance

James M. Scott, Ph.D.

Department of Political Science

Susan Douglas Roberts, M.F.A.

School for Classical & Contemporary Dance

ABSTRACT

Since Israel became an independent state in 1948, the country needed to foster a cultural

identity and establish a greater scope of allies with countries outside of the Middle East.

Using the United States as a model for dance as cultural diplomacy, the Israeli government

has sponsored dance companies to travel abroad to foster more positive international

relations. Dance provides an abstract but powerful force in disseminating cultural ideals to

the rest of the world, so Israel identified and supported the Batsheva Dance Company on

many international tours. However, the Batsheva dance company denies that any of its

work carries political attributes. Using an embodied, multi-modal research approach, I

explore whether or not the Batsheva Dance Company's dancing, Gaga Movement Language,

can carry cultural and political influence. Dance is a cultural phenomenon, and thus the

findings of this research point to the inherent politics and culture of movement within a

dance style. Because of this Batsheva and Gaga Movement Language is not immune to the

politics of the country, and is therefore a powerful force in both creating relationships

abroad and disseminating true Israeli culture.

Dance, created by individuals and passed as oral tradition, carries attributes that are unique to people or cultures in different areas of the world. Any dance form or piece of choreography holds contextual cultural significance because it is a product of the person or people within a certain culture who created or performed it. The significance of these cultural products is heightened as the art reaches other cultures and becomes a vehicle for all parties to share and exchange ideas through nonverbal means. Given the possibilities for dialogue that emerge from this sharing of cultural products, any dance form, with its specific attributes, can be useful for countries as they try to assert influence in subtle, but powerful ways on a global scale.

Dance, as well as other art forms, can be abstract in a way that allows this cultural export to reach more people because of its ability to appear universal to some degree. This concept of abstraction is defined by the idea of dance modernism. The modernist art movement, which reached its peak after World War I, focused on the intrinsic quality of art itself, rather than representation. From this movement, dance modernism came to be a way that dance artists, like dance choreographers such as Martha Graham and George Balanchine and later artists Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor, picked dance apart to make it more about the essence of the form instead of narrative. This mid-century aesthetic gave rise to the concept of dance modernism and allowed for the use of dance as diplomacy for the first time. In Clare Croft's book *Dancers as Diplomats*, dance and politics scholar Mark Franko notes that dance modernism allows the possibility that "a set of aesthetic choices can allow the fashioning of a universal subject that references nothing outside of itself" (70). Thus, a dance form or a piece of choreography might be viewed literally as body movement in time and space. Viewers can relate to abstracted movement by virtue of

their own possession of a body. This quality of dance makes it universally legible in a way that appeals to people of different cultures; therefore, dance is an attractive mechanism for cultural diplomacy between countries.

Although dance can appear universal in some respects, it still remains a product of the person or people who created it, which makes it specific to a particular person or group, and their opinions, experiences, or preferences. As mentioned, dance, as a cultural phenomenon, can be harnessed to serve diplomatic purposes for a state. Just like art, sports, and pop culture can represent some similarly held interests of a given state, these cultural products can be promoted through state funding of travel, media, and tours to aid in foreign relations with other countries. Dance is largely disseminated from person to person through classes and live performance, and therefore can be an extremely useful tool as a country's cultural export. Because of its apparent universality, it is an ideal vehicle for spreading community and positive sentiment toward a certain culture or country. Thus, dance has been used many times to serve this purpose for many influential countries.

Historically, the United States has harnessed dance as a means for diplomacy on multiple occasions during the twentieth century. Using the concept of dance as a modern, abstracted representation of American values to their advantage allowed an American culture of dance and the ideals of American culture more broadly to travel to many countries where American dancers and companies performed and taught. Using America's successful model of exporting culture, Israel developed a culturally diplomatic presence and used the arts to promote creative contribution and society building within the country, as well as to share with other countries in the hopes of more favorable foreign relations. This presence is complicated by the simple fact of Israel's existence. Israel's precarious

position within the Middle East, as well as international criticism of Israel's actions in the disputed territories of Gaza and the West Bank and the internal issues within the state create a tricky situation for artists traveling abroad with money from Israel's Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These issues exist alongside the emergence of an extremely popular dance form created by Ohad Naharin, the Artistic Director of Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, one of Israel's premier dance companies. The form, called the Gaga Movement Language, or Gaga, has gained popularity worldwide with professional dancers and untrained dancers alike. It, too, is abstract in a way that makes it appeal to a wide range of people from different cultures and backgrounds. The Batsheva Dance Company's international touring presence serves a diplomatic purpose for Israel as well. Batsheva and Gaga, together, create the cultural product that the company receives money from the government to export, serving the dual purpose of funding the company and promoting Gaga throughout the world.

The history of Israel's existence, as a country, as well as the lengthy disputes about claims to the land and the country's existence, makes it a ripe target for criticism and tense foreign relations with many countries, especially its most immediate neighbors. The Batsheva Dance Company and Gaga make an impact in dance communities and with the general public internationally—sometimes, too, not in the way that the Israeli government wishes. Several news sources describe protests of the company outside of performance venues while on tour outside of Israel, Batsheva's connection to Israeli politics incenses factions of the public in many countries. In response to this opposition, Naharin has claimed that the monetary support from the Israeli government merely provided means for allowing the company to make major international tours, and has not indicated the

company's support for national policies (Horwitz 88). Clinging to the notion of universality

of dance as an art form, Naharin states his work to be apolitical. However, given the

discrepancy between Naharin's perception that the form itself is apolitical while his

company receives government funding, this research examines the political nature of Gaga

and whether the government's support of the company influences the way their work

reaches others. The goal of this project is to illuminate the ways that Gaga and Batsheva

Dance Company interact internationally to politically influence others in favor of Israeli

culture and art, and thus allowing the creation of public support in a larger sense for the

country.

In this study, I examine the Gaga Movement Language and the ways the Batsheva

Dance Company and its artistic director Ohad Naharin are part of Israel's cultural

diplomacy efforts. In order to draw conclusions about the culture and politics of this dance

itself, part of this research comes from my own embodied experience of Gaga, as I

participated in Gaga classes both in and outside of Israel. To conduct initial research, I

found literature and news regarding Public Diplomacy as it has succeeded for other

countries, I researched the emerging literature on the Gaga Movement Language and the

Batsheva Dance Company. Then, I took Gaga classes and interviewed class participants in

both San Francisco, California, and Tel Aviv, Israel, to research my own experiences and

perceptions of Gaga Movement Language, as well as to draw on the experiences of those in

class with me.

Dance as Diplomacy

Person-to-person interaction can build a mutual understanding of culture that leads

to friendships and manpower that bring forward the goodness of the country. The ultimate

goal of cultural diplomacy is to increase the soft power of a country by promoting cultural understanding. Soft power, the theory developed by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. in the late twentieth century, can be defined as the ways a country uses non-military or –legislative means to attract other people and cultures to one's own country (Nye 14). In order to effectively use soft power, a country must cultivate its cultural products in a way that renders them relevant and interesting to other countries as a means of attraction. A country's success with cultivating cultural understanding and soft power are dependent on the cultural products themselves, the country's political values, and its foreign policy positions. Dance is a likely candidate for a cultural product since it can reflect many aspects of a country's makeup, like demographics and values, through exportation of relatively small groups of people. Likewise, it can make an effective cultural product because of its political ambiguity. As Alexandra Kolb argues in her book *Dance and Politics*, "[Dance artists] are capable of double coding, as both innocent of politics and heavily implicated in it" (Kolb 26). By this, Kolb means to explain the way that dances can be a vehicle for politics without being overtly political. The attractiveness of a dance is based on aesthetic preferences, human responses to body movement in space and time. Thus, dance can be abstract while still promoting an implied culture and set of ideals, while promoting cultural interaction, all without the dance having a literal meaning.

One example of the United States' policy on cultural diplomacy took place during the Cold War. The US used cultural diplomacy—particularly with dance—as a means of promoting positive sentiments about the United States throughout the rest of the world. Because they sent artists from major arts organizations to other countries, the US's influence was not solely spread through news headlines and word of mouth. Before

cultural diplomacy efforts, the image of the United States abroad in the latter half of the twentieth century was not necessarily favorable because of the US bombings in Japan, involvement in the Cold War, domestic civil rights issues, and the Korean war, among other issues. In 1954, President Eisenhower created a fund for US cultural diplomacy, which allowed the State Department to send artists abroad to increase visibility and American presence in other countries' popular arts cultures (Prevots 11). In 1960, American Ballet Theatre made its first tour to the Soviet Union to perform. Shortly thereafter, New York City Ballet followed, and both companies' performances spoke to both the significance of classical ballet in Soviet culture and the technicality and musicality that embodied uniquely American attributes in ballet (Prevots 82). The exchange of ballet companies with the Soviet Union established the United States as a unique voice in arts culture and it increased the appeal of the United States' style of ballet as new and exciting for Soviet audiences. These ideals promoted good feelings among audiences, however subtly, about American culture. Owing to the success of the American-Soviet ballet exchanges, the State Department began to utilize dance companies more readily to serve diplomatic functions for the country. Companies such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, and the Martha Graham Dance Company were all granted funding from the State Department to travel and present their art worldwide in specific strategic projects. Thus, diplomatic policy had been successfully implemented for the United States to ease tension during the Cold War and the years following. However, once tensions subsided, diplomatic efforts were lessened, which allowed cultural misunderstandings to re-emerge.

Since then, diplomacy in the US has fallen so low that funding for dance

organizations and tours from the government was lessened to almost none in some areas

of the world. Opinions of the United States fell from the outside, because the media became

the sole source of information about the United States for many other countries. Eventually,

as Croft hypothesizes in her book *Dancers as Diplomats*, this distrust and lack of manpower

in support of the US led to skepticism and dislike, leading to an Anti-American attitude in

places, especially in the Middle East. She writes, "Cultural diplomacy was not just a way to

address the current geopolitical situation; its absence post-Cold War had actually

contributed to the world's current issues with the United States" (Croft 151).

Ultimately, the diplomacy that Croft discusses is an issue of government values and

funding. Arts organizations need means to travel, and dancers especially are able to build

understanding by sharing performances, classes, and style at an extremely personal level

with their audiences. Since September 11, 2001, funding for cultural diplomacy has risen in

the United States. Negative reactions to actions the US government took in the early

twenty-first century spawned greater distrust of US ideals, as the United States' actions did

not match the purported values of the government (Croft 152). Moreover, culture is a tool

that generates cultural understanding in times of conflict, as the Cold War example proves.

Thus in times of less conflict, cultural promotion may, to a country, appear less important

in terms of the country's international agenda.

As the United States example demonstrates, cultural diplomacy can greatly assist

efforts to gain support and enhance foreign policy negotiations during times of potential

distrust. Many studies of dancers contributing in diplomatic ways to international relations

took place during the United States' efforts during the post-World War II and Cold War

periods. Croft discusses the complexities of cultural exchange between dancers during difficult political moments with the US and many dance companies in Asia. Often laced with complexity and some negative response of interest groups due to government funding, these diplomatic missions bring people who may be ideologically different into community with one another (Prevots 69). These feats fostered understanding among different cultures, as explored by both Croft (2015) and Prevots (1998) who use the United States as a case for dance as cultural diplomacy. For this reason, the country of Israel began using the arts, especially dance, as a means of diplomacy to spread the culture of the state and increase mutual understanding through cultural exports.

Israel and Cultural Diplomacy

In 1948, Israel became an independent state. As a result of a history of Jewish Diaspora and the harrowing effects of World War II, many Israelis lived elsewhere in the world. After World War II, England dedicated the land of Israel as an officially Jewish State, and a mass migration of European and Middle Eastern Jews occurred in the years following. Israel defeated Palestinian Arabs for territory in Gaza and the West Bank following their acquisition of the land for their country, and Israel has occupied these Palestinian-ruled territories since 1967. Tensions between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs flared violently several times throughout the late twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century. Tensions between the groups exist consistently and challenge Israel's prospects for peace with the rest of the Middle East. Only in 1993 did Israel and Palestine agree to an interim period of a "two-state solution," during which time Palestinians could quasi-independently govern their territory, while remaining under ultimate Israeli control. Violence and conflict have arisen in the disputed Palestinian territories through the entire twenty-first century

thus far, and both groups have been challenged to maintain peace. The hostility between both groups has spawned tensions between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel supporters internationally, as well as within the country. In Israel, Arabs face major discrimination as a result of the conflicts between the Israelis and Palestinian Arabs that have been taking place for centuries, most recently through the state of Israel and the disputed territories. Viewed as a militant and apartheid-supporting state by pro-Palestinian groups, Israel's foreign affairs in the Middle East and elsewhere have been riddled with threats of worse violence and lack of acknowledgement of statehood due to their situation with the disputed territories of Palestine.

Israel's international interactions developed in tandem with a strong friendship with the United States. The United States was the first country to officially recognize Israel's statehood in 1948. Since then, Israel's closest ally has been the United States, and much of their foreign policy is a reflection of US support and direction in foreign affairs. The United States government, according to Department of State reports, recognizes that Israel is the most dependable ally the US has in the Middle East, and therefore offers substantial monetary support to the country. The support of the US, however, does not appear to make much difference for Israel's position in the rest of the world.

Israeli citizens in the past half-century have moved to Israel from elsewhere in the world after having acquired another culture's attributes. To define itself culturally, the Israeli government therefore encouraged production of art and culture in order to strengthen nationalism within the country. Since the state of Israel was established shortly after World War II, the United States played a role in the development of an arts culture in Israel to create a new sense of nationalism for those immigrating to the newly established

country (Rottenberg 38). Among those artists traveling to Israel to promote culture was

Martha Graham, the American choreographer and creator of a major American modern

dance technique in her own name. Shortly after her American style became popular in

Israel, several Israeli modern dance companies were created. The first of these was the

Batsheva Dance Company.

Batsheva Dance Company was founded in 1963, funded by Baroness Batsheva de

Rothschild. Due to her popularity with Israeli audiences, Martha Graham became the

artistic advisor of the company, and, from America, brought her own distinctive style and

famous name to the company (Rottenburg 49).   The company, under Martha Graham's

artistic instruction, became a fusion of an American and Israeli national style. The company

survived on private funding from the Baroness until 1975 when the Israeli government and

other private donors, foundations, and corporations began to fund it. Slowly, Batsheva

became a repertory company, with dancers trained mainly in ballet, performing works

from many emerging international choreographers (Galili 2012, 46).

Ohad Naharin became the artistic director of Batsheva in 1990, when a series of

artistic directors left the company in need of a new voice (Galili 2012, 45). Naharin had

danced for the company previously, immediately after completing his mandatory service in

the Israel Defense Force. Having danced for Martha Graham in Batsheva, he moved to New

York to continue dancing and training for most of the 1980s. Naharin began to choreograph

in the US and abroad, and continued to do so over the next ten years. When Naharin moved

back to Israel to direct Batsheva, the company began to change from a strictly ballet-

trained repertory company to a more organic movement style. This distinct style drew

from a developing movement language, created by Naharin and the dancers in the

company. For the sake of establishing an identity around this new approach, this style

became known as Gaga Movement Language, or Gaga. Naharin began to develop his

choreography by breaking through the dancer's ballet technique and Graham-influenced

movement into more stylized ways of moving. The use of Gaga signaled an important shift

in Batsheva's aesthetic, and it increased the popularity of the company for Israeli

audiences. The challenging repertory and movement the dancers developed was new, to

both Naharin and the dancers (Naharin, Conversation with Dancers). The dancers

developed a way of training their bodies, different from a typical dance technique class,

that became known as a language because of its ability to be layered on top of dance

techniques. Eventually, the tools became somewhat codified, and Naharin named it the

Gaga Movement Language. By the early 2000s, Gaga was taking off as a tool that set

Batsheva dancers apart from other concert dancers. Audiences picked up on the dancers'

newfound sensitivity to movement that Gaga brought to performances of Naharin's

choreography. Gaga, in this way, became the language through which Naharin and the

dancers presented cutting-edge choreography.

Although Naharin and the organization of Gaga International claim that Gaga and

Naharin's choreography are 'apolitical,' dance and art have not been immune to political

atmosphere or influence. The work itself, in this light, must contain some embodiment of

politics in a way that marks it as a product of its place. Art, therefore, takes on the

experiences, decisions, and aesthetics of different cultures, based on the artist's own life

and experiences and preferences. Because aesthetics and preferences of many kinds arise

from a variety of experiences, art becomes original because of the originality of the creator.

Cultivating their own voice, artists make decisions based on those preferences that have

been informed by experience. Thus, dance and other art cannot be immune to cultural and political influence, even if that influence is not stated. Kolb again refines how dance can be political when she writes, "The 'political' aspect of the work is located in the work's radical form–as a new way of producing, disrupting, or interrogating the definition of the meaning—rather than its thematisation of a political concern external to the work itself" (Kolb 17). In this way, Gaga and Naharin's choreography can be immensely political, even when it is not thematically so. Just as Kolb notes, the work does not have to be themed politically in order to carry political meaning, preference, or agenda. Likewise, the Israeli government appears to believe that that the work Batsheva creates has the makings of a uniquely Israeli form, culturally and politically reflective—in favor of the Israeli government and their policies. Because of these contexts, this research has led me to discover how these cultural exports, Gaga and Batsheva, may be inherently Israeli, and thus work in terms of the Israeli government's goals as well.

In the foreign policy arena, Israel sought to improve cultural understanding and increase their peacemaking abilities with other countries through cultural exchange. Through their widespread support of artistic and cultural organizations, the Israeli government sought to emphasize culture, science, and economics as their contribution to building relations with the rest of the world (European Union, Country Report 8). As well, the Israeli government seeks to promote culture to help its citizens identify collectively and proudly as Israeli citizens. In the late twentieth century, the Israeli Government's Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a campaign in cultural diplomacy, in which they recognized Batsheva as a major emerging artistic force in Tel Aviv. Pouring more money and effort into the company, the Israeli government helped Batsheva fund

major tours across Europe, America, and Asia beginning in the early 2000s. After Naharin

became artistic director in the early 1990s, the company's style had changed from classical

modern dance, as part of the Martha Graham lineage, into the product of Naharin's

movement and teaching style—what eventually became Gaga. The company's distinct and

sensitive style that came from training in daily training in the Gaga Movement Language

added new excitement to the dancing for audiences to watch, as Gaga translates into

universally understood and sensory-based performances. In a sense, the dancers appeared

human with emotion, sensation, and an unapologetic realness of stage presence. However,

the company's acceptance of funds from the government has also been met with major

resistance from Palestinian supporters who see the government's support of the dance

company as false advertising in cultural diplomacy. Protests outside of performances has

drawn crowds and media attention, even shutting down several of Batsheva's scheduled

performances. Through all this, the company, along with Ohad Naharin, has consistently

claimed not to take any political stance on Israel's situation with Palestine. As well, Naharin

denies that any of his work is inherently political in nature.

The government's efforts have been met with difficulty and backlash from people in

other countries because of the tensions and continued violence in the occupied territories.

By those opposed to the public diplomacy efforts made by the Israeli government, these

efforts have been lumped into a single name, the "Brand Israel" campaign. As more arts

communities received funding and assistance, the efforts of the government to use cultural

products to promote positive sentiment in regards to Israel were criticized by those in

protest, who claimed arts culture was there to cover up the human rights violations and

territorial violence between Israel and Palestine.. The "Brand Israel" campaign had

negative connotations in international communities, as more and more the arts, science, and economics supported by Israel were used internationally as cultural diplomacy efforts by the government. The protesters claim that the cultural and scientific products of the nation were merely supposed to distract other countries from the discrimination and violence that Israel was engaged in within the occupied territories.

On July 9, 2005, the Palestinian civil society published a call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel and asked international organizations and "people of conscience" to boycott Israel. Similarly to those protest and sanctions applied in apartheid South Africa, these sanctions worked to show lack of support for the movement and hopefully encourage the end of the South African apartheid. Likewise for Israel, the movement's goals, according to the call are to end occupation of all Arab lands, recognize fundamental rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and to allow Palestinian refugees elsewhere to return to their homes (BDS Movement). The BDS movement has several branches of boycott, one being major cultural boycott. The cultural boycott seeks to find cultural organizations that serve Israel's international goals and encourage others to boycott them as well.

Since the BDS movement began calling for boycotts of cultural organizations that receive Israeli government support, especially internationally, Batsheva and other arts organizations have been met with protests when touring outside of Israel on several occasions. Protests were heavily publicized in both New York and Edinburgh; protests even closed down performances in 2012. The dance company, while receiving funding from the Israeli government, seeks to disconnect itself from the issues posed by both the BDS

movement and the Israeli government: creating a cultural 'brand' for Israel, and politicization of dance from the protesters.

Naharin states that the work he and the dancers in Batsheva bring forward is not political in nature. As mentioned previously, the company denies the label of cultural ambassadors of Israel. With the hopes of distancing themselves from the company and the politics of the situation, Batsheva leans on the nature of dance as abstraction to promote a general human identity, rather than identifying as an innately Israeli style of dance. In order to better understand the movement language and its potential to be inherently Israeli, I employed an embodied research approach to experience the Gaga Movement Language and Naharin's choreography within my own body. As well, I interviewed participants in Gaga classes throughout California, the United States and in Tel Aviv, Israel to understand the cultural significance in the form to the place it was created, and with the creator himself.

Gaga Movement Language Research

The Gaga Movement Language, created by Ohad Naharin, focuses on the sensation of a movement executed while dancing. The language, as it is called rather than a technique, is a way that dancers can discover diverse sensations and depths of movement, challenging their bodies to new and different discoveries every day or in any performance. The first experience I had with Gaga Movement Language was in 2013 at a master class at the Texas Christian University School for Classical and Contemporary Dance. Having experienced a Gaga class only once, I was intrigued by the specificity of the improvisation-based movement language. The official description of a Gaga class reads, "[t]he layering of familiar movements with Gaga tasks presents dancers with fresh challenges, and

throughout the class, teachers prompt the dancers to visit more unfamiliar places and ways of moving as well" (Gagapeople.com). Using "Gaga tasks," teachers of Gaga invite students to try on different sensations such as floating through space or experiencing gravity on a horizontal plane rather than a vertical plane in movement. The class can range from high to low intensity, and participants may range from highly trained professional dancers to those with little to no movement training. Depending on the distinction of the class, Gaga-Dancers or Gaga-People, the Gaga teacher will introduce ideas based on the movement experience of the participants. In a Gaga-people class, language will be anatomical or structural, whereas in Gaga-dancers, teachers may engage with concert dance vocabulary and layer Gaga tasks on top (Galili 2015, 377). Because the Gaga tasks deal with effort and sensation rather than a dance step, the ability to layer Gaga over other dance techniques and ways of moving makes it approachable for all people. These structures are based in improvisational movement and exploration, cultivating movement ideas in dynamic ways throughout the class. Because of the focus on sensation of movement and awareness of the body, Gaga as a method of improvisation is a highly structured improvisational dance. While dance phrases or movements are not set in a Gaga class, the motional goals and movement ideas that the class is working on are constructed specifically to bring out the raw energy of the body in different ways of moving. Based on my study, this improvisational aspect of Gaga is more appropriately regarded as movement research rather than improvisational dance.

Gaga has gained immense popularity from both the general public and dancers in Israel, as well as throughout Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Gaga classes are highly sought after in the United States by advanced dancers especially, since the movement language is regarded as a way to further any dance technique. Gaga is offered in two forms generally,

and a third is added as part of a Gaga intensive. First, Gaga-people is a class structured for any human to explore movement and sensation in their body. The Gaga people.dancers. website describes it as a "creative framework" through which anyone can access their ways of moving and explore breaking body patterns. In a similar vein, Gaga-dancers works to break pre-professional and professional dancers' habitual ways of moving by using familiar dance movements and taking them further with Gaga terminology and ideas. For example, a dancer might learn a *tendu,* a fundamental step in ballet and modern dance technique, which requires the dancer to move the foot along the floor with a straight leg, far enough that they point their foot and only the tips of their toes remain in contact with the floor. In a Gaga class, the teacher may ask students to work with a *tendu*, lengthening their leg with the foot on the floor, and add layers to the framework of the original step, such as exploring pulling the bones of the leg into the *tendu*, or seeing how far the toes can stretch away from the central axis of the body without causing the dancer to fall over.

In Tel Aviv during the intensive, we took classes in both Gaga and Gaga Methodics. During intensives, teachers may want more time to work on individual concepts that Gaga teaches, that they may not have enough time to in a typical Gaga class that moves quickly through several goals of movement in one hour and fifteen minutes. In a Methodics class, dancers are called to work on one or several movement principles in a deeper way. In a Gaga class, teachers and students move the entire time without stopping or watching. The idea is to create an atmosphere in which the entire room is collectively participating in research in their own bodies while connecting to the energy of the room. A Methodics class exemplifies this idea in Gaga because the Gaga teacher is able to even more fully participate

in their own internal research with the students, drawing out certain ideas and even introducing brand new material.

While I was in the intensive in Tel Aviv, the most experienced teachers, and Naharin himself, often led Methodics classes, and they focused on a single idea from a Gaga class. A Gaga class contains many layered technical moments, such as working with different intensities of movement and sensations of texture, but in Methodics, the class allowed for even more in depth or emotional explorations of movement. One day in Methodics, we were asked to find a partner and dance in their space, treating them as someone we love more than ourselves. This not only brought intense awareness of the physicality between bodies, but also brought tenderness and texture to the way that we interacted as dancers and entities; ultimately, we were working towards the same goal (Naharin, Gaga Class). Throughout the course of the intensive, I learned more about the way that Gaga instructed dancers to use their senses as part of the motion of the dancing body. One dancer mentioned a specific memory from Methodics, when Naharin wanted to explore the idea of strength and weakness. The dancer observed, "I remember watching this person, and for five minutes he stood there crying, looking at his hands. It made me think about how limitless our capacities are in terms of what we can bring to dance. Our mindset can affect those limitations and we can recognize what strength we have" (Personal Interview 3). Because of these freedoms in movement and interpretation, and the fusion of ideas across the medium of dance, Gaga opens doors for expressivity, allowing the participants to experience each other as well as their own individual interpretations. The experience was enriching on a interpersonal basis because the movement language explores a wide variety of emotions, sensations, and intensities, inviting people to tap into their unique humanities

and learn about others by dancing with them. The communal aspect of the class keeps this intention alive, as often classes are so crowded that the intensity of the group mentality forces each dancer to invest more fully in the movement as a common goal. The international focus of the Gaga Intensive made for a fascinating look at many approaches to Gaga—vastly different than my experiences with the Movement Language in the United States.

To begin embodying this research, I took several classes in Gaga movement language in San Francisco, California. I chose to experience Gaga in my own body as well as to interview others who are doing the same. In these classes, it was clear that the movement language came across to the dancers as a way to augment training in their form and even heal their bodies. Every class I took in California was a Gaga people class; the style tailored to all people, regardless of dance experience. In the classes, however, most students were experienced dancers, and several danced professionally in the area. Because Gaga is widely popular in large modern dance communities in the United States, I was able to participate in classes while in the US, and then travel to Israel to take classes in the form in its place of origin with the creators of Gaga, Naharin and the dancers in Batsheva.

While studying Gaga in the United States, I took classes in the San Francisco Bay area, mostly in San Francisco and Berkeley, California. During that experience, I interviewed several dancers with whom I took Gaga classes, and learned about their experiences as well. The teachers in San Francisco had all attended the International Teacher Training held in Tel Aviv. Most Gaga teachers have not actually been trained in the teacher training—they have worked with Gaga's creator Ohad Naharin in the Israeli dance company, Batsheva, enough that they begin to teach simply with his permission. The

teacher training allowed for international expansion of the Gaga Movement Language, increasing its popularity in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. I found this introduction to Gaga Movement Language refreshing in comparison with the codified and familiar styles of ballet and modern dance that I was used to performing.

While in California, I noticed a detachment between myself and the other dancers from the movement language. I was unfamiliar with Gaga enough that I did not know the terminology or class structures yet, but the connection the dancers in class with me in California to the language emphasized the supplemental attitude the dancers held about the somatic practice of the work. Enamored with Gaga, one US interviewee noted, "It's an amazing challenge—the style is very different than what I am trained in, and so it refreshes my body and helps me heal in new ways" (Personal Interview 1). The dancers whom I interviewed in San Francisco noted that the connection to Ohad Naharin and to Israel was less clear, but it was nevertheless mentioned several times in each class. While all Gaga teachers are trained by Ohad Naharin, the have not all danced in Batsheva and therefore, do not move in the same style as if they had a close connection to the company and director. In a Gaga class, the instructor stands in the center of the room with the students circling around. In Gaga, because mirrors are not allowed in the classroom, Naharin devised a concept, known by students as Kagami, which means that students can look at and take cues from the teacher about how to explore the concepts they are working on. Kagami is important to a student's understanding of Gaga because the student cannot see him or herself. However, I found that even though the verbal messages were similar from teachers trained by Naharin and those working elsewhere, the content I gathered from Kagami was different. I found that the teachers who had worked more closely or

intensively with Naharin were able to show in their bodies the concepts we discussed even more clearly than those teachers with whom I worked in the United States.

While practicing Gaga in the small rooftop studio in Berkeley, California, I experienced a community created by the dancers and teacher that was different from other dance classes I had taken. Because none of us to my knowledge or experience—except for the teacher—had experienced Gaga in Tel Aviv, the movements that people challenged themselves with were largely therapeutic and silly; more about breaking away from traditional dance class style than adhering to any perceived notion of what Gaga is. As one interviewee commented to me, "I don't need to over-think, to trick myself into being a dancer [in a Gaga class]" (Personal Interview 2). Many interviewees mentioned experiencing this concept in a Gaga class, where movement is treated as humanity rather than dance performance. Often, a teacher will remind students to not allow for dead flesh, that is: no part of the body should collapse into gravity or be too stagnant. By keeping the body alive with sensation and visibly connected, awareness of even the most minute shifts in the dancer's body are possible. "Dead flesh" as Naharin calls it, is uninteresting and lazy, not to mention referring to it in this way gives a morbid connotation to the effects of gravity. Because of this, dancing, in any Gaga class, may not even be the goal, but moving and feeling sensation through movement appears to create, as the interviewee noted, an effortless transition connection body, brain, ego, and personality.

In August 2015, I spend two weeks in Tel Aviv, Israel at the Suzanne Dellal Center for Performing Arts, studying Gaga Movement Language from Naharin and the dancers in

the Batsheva Dance Company[1]. While in Israel, I took classes in Gaga and Naharin's

repertory every day. In the classes I took in Tel Aviv, the Gaga teachers we had were all

clearly closely connected with Naharin and his sense of the movement language. They

invited us to employ his imagery in our own way and to do further research in our own

bodies. Bringing each Gaga teacher's own perspectives and approaches in to the room, the

form felt less concrete in Tel Aviv, as if it were still developing in each class, every day. The

form itself felt raw—proximity to Naharin made the teachers seem more in tune with him,

and also more willing to try new things in class. The journey of a class changed from many

single moments where dancers had lots of ambition to a continuous stream of trying and

retrying different ideas or sensations. One dancer commented on this class atmosphere

saying, "[Naharin]'s philosophy is not about the end result—what do I have to work with

and where can I take it? It's research" (Personal Interview 5). I, too noted that American

society has had an influence on my experience of any dance class, and the classroom

atmosphere of a Gaga class in the United States toed the line of demanding an end product,

whereas a Gaga class in Israel somehow less focused on finding the end result. Many

dancers, especially those I interviewed in San Francisco, noted their awareness of

Batsheva's work, and their desires to dance just like them. While dancers in Tel Aviv felt

similarly, the sense in the Tel Aviv classes was individualistic and exploratory, as opposed

to the goal-oriented emphasis that I experienced in the United States.

My experience in Israel was characterized as well by the short time I spent in Tel

Aviv. Tel Aviv especially feels like an oasis where one truly can "embrace the sensation of

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[1] During this time, I lived in Israel, in a hostel that housed many 18- to 23-year-olds experiencing Israel on their Birthright trips (one way that Israel encourages interaction with the country and Pro-Israeli spirit in children who grew up in the Jewish tradition elsewhere in the world).

plenty of time" (Naharin). I could relate this idea to my own sense of culture and atmosphere during the short time I was there. As one of the interview participants observed, "They celebrate life in a different way. [Naharin] doesn't just only speak to the Israeli people, but it kind of reflects their spirit" (Personal Interview 4). Classes were always held for an hour and fifteen minutes, but sometimes, Gaga class would not begin until fifteen, or even thirty minutes after the scheduled start time. As well, no late entry is allowed in a Gaga class; instead, dancers are encouraged to go do something else pleasant instead, and try to make it on time tomorrow. This relaxed sense of time, as well as the encouragement from the teachers for dancers to enjoy their experiences in class and out of class created an environment very reflective of Tel Aviv's beach-town oasis.

As well, the universality of the concepts presented in both a Gaga-dancers and a Gaga-people class creates a sense of modernism about the form. Its ability to abstract concepts of movement for every body speaks to the apolitical argument for the work. However, the specifically controlled movement research aims at a very specific aesthetic. The sensitivity of the dancers and the choice-making they are empowered by in a Gaga class generates intense sensory experiences for an audience. This is the aesthetic Naharin values. One interviewee in Tel Aviv noted how, "Batsheva has culture and meaning for Israel, as it put them on the map in the dance world...It's sort of American as he's from the lineage of Martha Graham but I guess that's sort of what Israel is, that mix of many different things" (Personal Interview 3). The style of movement and the language itself are appealing to the Israeli government in terms of the artistic prowess and advancement, therefore making Batsheva and Gaga the perfect tools for exemplifying what it means to be Israeli.

Conclusions

Israel harnessed the artistic spirit of Batsheva and Gaga as they developed a uniquely Israeli style. Through cultural diplomatic efforts, Israel is working to promote culture inside their country and spread it to others, hoping for a similar pacifying effect as the diplomatic efforts launched by the Eisenhower fund in the latter half of the twentieth century for the United States. The difference between Israel's campaign and the United States' efforts in cultural diplomacy is the nature of Israel's existence and interactions it has with its neighbors, and how news of those interactions reaches the rest of the world. As Batsheva travels outside of Israel, Naharin's goals to disseminate Gaga and show the dances he creates serve a purpose for the Israeli government in that they promote arts culture created in Israel by Israelis, both making the country of Israel proud and showing their talents and strengths to the rest of the world. The spread of Gaga Movement Language allows for connections to other cultures, as Naharin staunchly denies its political nature, and promoting ideas about human nature and the forces any human can tap in to. The communal, everyman feeling of Gaga Movement Language makes it accessible as a tool for many people, trained and untrained dancers alike. As Gaga has continued to spread, the international community meets it more openly than Batsheva performances. Thus, many teachers who either did not live in Israel or who had left Israel were able to transmit Gaga internationally.

The intersection of how Israel harnesses the power of Gaga and Batsheva to promote national ideals and Naharin's denial of the political nature of his works is significant, because of the obscurities of dance and the importance of cultural diplomacy internationally. I have cited previously that dance is not immune to any cultural or political preferences and opinions, and therefore takes on those of the creators and dancers.

Naharin, an Israeli man, and his company, made up of mostly Jewish Israeli dancers, tap in to their preferences, to sensation, opinion, and pleasure in Gaga Movement Language, which allows them to deliver the rich performances that they do, and thus I assert that the work itself is colored with opinion and politics. These politics appeal to the Israeli government, which chooses to support the company, and in so doing, to support the pro-Israeli spirit. The fact that Batsheva tours internationally and is supported by government funds points to the government's belief that Batsheva is an important and vibrant arts organization, whom they trust, at least, to share cultural values with other people in other countries. In so doing, supporting Batsheva is a strategic move by the government because of it's popularity abroad. Protests and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement show how the sponsorship by the government place Batsheva in a difficult artistic and political situation: wanting to retain audiences while trying to remain neutral and declining to comment on Israeli's fiery and uncertain political situation.

While Naharin cites an apolitical motivation to his work, the dancing cannot be removed from political conversation. The country of Israel, in its support of Batsheva, allows for the company to function within and outside of the country, promoting both their own agenda and that of Batsheva—to spread Gaga and their dancing internationally. Batsheva dancers and Naharin become cultural ambassadors whether or not they agree to the title. As Gaga Movement Language spreads, whether or not its connection to the man and the place where it was created will remain intact is questionable. The human pursuit of Gaga is approachable in a universal way; however, as one of my interviewees noted, it could not have arisen from a different culture without being an entirely different form.

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1. Personal Interview. 14 July 2015.

2. Personal Interview. 21 July 3015.

3. Personal Interview. 2 August 2015.

4. Personal Interview. 4 August 2015.

5. Personal Interview. 4 August 2015.