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reviewed by Einav Rosenblit

Arms entwined, young Israeli dancers rushed past their solemn audience, the performers' hair flying in the wind as they moved toward one other, clapping with glee, jumping and then backing up to run sideways, their feet a ripple of crossings and uncrossings. For Jews languishing in displaced persons camps two years after the end of World War II, says Judith Brin Ingber, *Mayim, mayim* (Water, water) came to slake their thirst (*Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, p. 251).

Yasem midbar le'agam mayim (cf. Ps. 35:107) or *Mayim, mayim*, one of the earliest folk dances to have been created in the pre-state *yishuv*, was performed at the first Kibbutz Dalia festival in 1944 and has been danced since then at almost every Israeli folk-dance event. In the above description, author Brin Ingber reveals the main function of Israeli dance in the years surrounding the foundation of the State: to rebuild the Jewish community following its near-annihilation, while it was reconstructing itself as a nation.

Brin Ingber's edited volume *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance* offers a wide-ranging collection of studies of the encounter between Jewishness and dance. In the course of examining religious Jewish dances, Israeli folk dances and theatrical dances created in Israel, the contributors arrive at some surprising conclusions regarding the interdependence between Jewish and Israeli characteristics. The anthology also poses some essential questions regarding dance research, such as that of the boundaries between folk dance, social dance and theatrical dance.

Dancing in the Temple

In biblical times, recalls Brin Ingber, the Temple was the people's central place for ritual and for dance within ritual. Later, Jews influenced by Graeco-Roman thinking displayed ambivalence toward Eros and the body. Christendom, Brin Ingber emphasizes, espoused a division between body and soul, condemning the body for its carnal appetites. It pictured the soul as pure but the body as damned (p. 8–11).

Several of the authors deal with these themes. According to Shalom Staub in his article on Yemenite Jewish dance (Chap. 9), the Yemenite dancer must always bear in mind that he is dancing for the sake of religious obligation (p. 201). Zvi Friedhaber, who examines the Jewish religious custom of dancing with the bride at her wedding (Chap. 11), describes the custom of holding a handkerchief to separate the male from the female dancer, an ultra-Orthodox requirement (pp. 225–227). Jill Gellerman (Chap. 15) notes that according to the hasidic tradition, "redemption is related to the transformative power of *simcha*, or rejoicing, as expressed in music and dance" (p. 287). Yehuda Hyman, too, in sharing his personal relationship with the hasidic dances (Chap. 14), notes that Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was a legendary dancer who ascribed great importance to the spiritual power of dance. Rabbi Nachman's custom was to end each prayer session with dancing, a custom retained by Breslov adherents to this day (p. 283).

Orthodox Judaism, however, is ambivalent in its attitude to dance. Giora Manor (Chap. 10) emphasizes that it is misleading to relate to hasidic dance as typical of Jews in general. In the past, Jews did not live in independent communities and had neither sanction nor space in

which to hold their own dances, except for social dances at wedding, circumcision or bar mitzvah celebrations. According to Manor:

> Judaism tends to deny the importance of form as expressed in aesthetics. Spiritual beauty is important whereas concrete beauty, especially that of the body, is suspicious, dangerous, and inappropriate. This ambivalence is much in evidence when the phenomenon of dance, the most physical of art forms, is discussed. (p. 214)

A Nation Comes into Existence

In the 1920s and 1930s, the fledgling Jewish community in Palestine was establishing a framework for the emerging Israeli nation in all spheres of life, social, political, religious and cultural. In her essay "Shorashim" (Chap. 6), Brin Ingber relates to the roots of Israeli folk dance. She writes:

> The dance was purposefully guided by a few great seers and creators who directed their people to fulfill themselves in their new setting and with their new sense of peoplehood. Some of their inspiration came from the communities outside Israel, some from the traditions and rituals of Judaism, and others from the landscape flavoring their imaginations. (p. 102).

The author Nina S. Spiegel on Chap. 4 notes that: "Seeking to create an authentic Israeli dance was part of the process, resulting in a unique Israeli cultural character combining Western Europe with the Middle East" (p. 73).

The National Dance Competition held in 1937 was part of this atmosphere of creating a local cultural product. Yardena Cohen took first place in the competition, followed by Rina Nikova and the Ornstein sisters, Shoshanna and Yehudith. The 1944 folk-dance festival (*kenes ameḥolot ha'ivri*) at Kibbutz Dalia, organized by Gurit Kadman, the "mother" of Israeli folk dance (p. 316), marked the beginning of the Israeli folk-dance movement's development. In fact, it presented a mixture of many foreign folk dances and only a few Israeli dances (p. 107). Because of the Dalia festivals, however, what might otherwise have remained holiday dances in the kibbutzim spread throughout the country. According to Elke Kaschl (Chap. 17), "This new folk tradition was meant to unify culturally the emerging Israeli nation, and foster among its members a sense of national community through performing shared folk dances" (p. 329).

Dina Roginski (Chap. 16) examines how the development of the Israeli folk dance reflects shifts in the formation of Israeli society. Israelis moved from a sense of belonging to a collective (expressed in the circle dance), to an integrated connection (couple dancing), to sheer isolation (line dances). Roginsky suggests:

> The field of Israeli folk dancing emphasized "Israeli collectivism" as a supreme value, even though other forms have developed within it, allowing the dancer to separate from the potentially stressful collective to enhance other ways of expression. (pp. 323–325)

The book thus presents the Israeli folk dance as an integral part of the Zionist narrative, while also relating to the difference between these Israeli dances and the folklore products of other nations: Israeli dance is new and not based on an ancient cultural memory. It was created artificially in Eretz Israel as part of the national Zionist enterprise.

Contemporary Israeli Dance: Different Jewish Identities

The contributors in the book's third part engage with Jewish and Israeli theatrical dances created since the 1980s and consider how Jewishness is represented or conceived (nostalgically, lovingly or ironically). Naomi M. Jackson, for example, examines how some popular twentieth-century Jewish women artists, including Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow, Liz Lerman, Pearl Lang, Meredith Monk, Anna Halperin and many others, performed their Jewishness on stage (Chap. 18).

In modern-day Israel, however, "Jewishness" is not a uniting factor but a controversial concept. As Gabi Aldor notes in the book's final chapter, on the dialogue between Jewish choreographic themes and Israeli dance: "In Israel, the bitterest fights happen in relation to the definition of 'Jew,' and the most severe cases of discrimination are directed against people whose "Jewishness" is in doubt" (p. 384). Contemporary choreographers in Israel lament the breakdown of the Zionist dream in its more naïve version. According to Aldor, dance today is defining new, versatile and exciting variations on the themes of sophisticated political comment and personal withdrawal into "normality," dealing with artistic issues rather than either the national or the Jewish fate. The dance scene today is flourishing and can be seen as "Israeli" in its energy and sense of immediacy. It is imprinted with the watermarks of our existence in this fascinating but wounded piece of land (p. 388).

Women Dancing in Front

According to Jill Gellerman (Chap. 15): "Dance is at once a social practice and a socializing practice …, a site where the dancers learn to literally 'perform' culture and gender through aesthetic practice" (p. 289). Where Jewish religious dances are concerned, however, this socialization process mainly taught men and women to remain separate and required the Jewish girl to conceal her dancing, since: "It is not fitting for a daughter of Israel to cavort in public" (p. 291). Nonetheless, with the emergence of the Israeli folk dance in the 1940s, and even more so when artistic theatrical dance was being established in Israel, women entered the front stage.

The first chapter of *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance* is a personal testimony by Sara Levi Tanai, founder of the Inbal Dance Company. Levi Tanai relates to the dancing woman:

> To this day I am amazed by the strength of body and spirit of the kind of [feminine] work, required to maintain the life of a healthy home. The raising of children and satisfying a husband's needs require of the woman a down to earth thinking, spiritual balance, and without any doubt, the strength for quick, calculated movement. In all my dances I show this, … and it is always a symbol of Judaism for me. (p. 27)

Levi Tanai's unique, eclectic approach to choreography is shaped, on the one hand, by her interest in literature and ideas, from those expressed in the Bible and other ancient Jewish writings to the ideals of the Zionist pioneers; and, on the other, by her musicality and sensitivity to forms, rhythms and colors.[1] Levi Tanai's dream was to use traditional dances to create a modern dance theater based on these traditional "folkloric" elements.[2] Beyond that, however, Levi Tanai established a powerful feminine presence on stage. Since then, numerous women artists have taken part in establishing the fascinating aesthetic principles of

contemporary Israeli dance. The dancing body in both folk dance and theatrical Israeli dance reflects not only the Zionist revolution, but also a feminist movement.

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[1] Giora Manor, *The Choreography of Sara Levi Tanai* (Tel-Aviv: Inbal Dance Theater, 2001), p. 17.
[2] Dina Roginski, "Orientalism, The Body, and Cultural Politics in Israel: Sara Levi Tanai and the Inbal Dance Theater," *Nashim*, 11 (Spring 2006), p. 180.