SYRIA, DANCE, AND COMMUNITY: DANCE EDUCATION IN EXILE

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INTRODUCTION

The images of those fleeing Syria loaded on to boats, washed up on shores, or standing limply in camps, have permeated the media since the conflict of the Syrian Civil War became a mainstream discussion point. The journeys of those fleeing the horrors of war are indeed as difficult as the life they look to leave behind. Once in a new location these refugees face immense challenges (Ostrand 2015). Among the 5.1 million people (UNHCR 2018) who have escaped the Syrian conflict since it began in March 2011 and who have established new lives abroad are dancers. For dancers from Syria who are now in exile, how have they sustained dance education in such conditions?

This article reveals how dance communities benefit Syrian refugee dancers through offering a sense of place, support, hope, a chance to challenge assumptions and stereotypes, and to re-establish identities. The challenges of shifting between cultural contexts to engage in dance learning has been noted within scholarship (see for example: AUTHOR XX, AUTHOR XX), however there is limited discussion about how those coming from situations such as Syria are encountering dance education once in exile. Through unpacking refugee dancers experiences it is possible to extend understandings of dance education so refugee voices can be considered by

dance researchers, educators, and organizations working with dancers from such contexts. Key issues pertaining to concerns such as sense of place, support, hope, identity, and assumptions are explored in this article through critical reflection on the narratives of three dancers – Sara, Leila and Nadia – who are all from Damascus, and now live in exile in Germany.

From the outset there are several aspects of this research that are to be acknowledged and openly articulated. This is to create transparency of my position as the researcher, the viewing of the women's narratives, and the anticipated tensions that may emerge in the reading of this work. I am not a researcher from Syria, nor am I a researcher from the wider Middle Eastern region. Rather, I am a researcher from New Zealand, a location well removed from the hostilities and political frictions that have been plaguing in the region for years. However, over the past decade, I have lived and worked in Amman, Beirut, Ramallah, Cairo and Damascus, and this has allowed me insight to the contexts I research and write about. I have built professional and personal relationships with dancers and dance communities in these locations, and these connections continued as individuals moved around the world. The three women who I focus on in this article – Sarah, Leila and Nadia – were either past colleagues from my time in Damascus over 2009 and 2010, or people I met through dance acquaintances from Syria.

To understand the context of contemporary experiences of dance education of Syrian dancers in light of the Civil War, it can be helpful to briefly look at the past. Prior to the Civil War there was a rich and diverse artistic scene in Syria, and dance education in Syria has a long history (Adwan 2016; Silverstein 2012). Non-formal

dance learning has often taken place in homes and community settings, and more formal teaching of dance in Syria has been heavily influenced by practices from Europe and Russia. Such influences are illustrated through the established state-sponsored dance training institutes, such as the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art in Damascus, which have been modelled on European conservatories and the international education of young Syrian dance practitioners in Europe and North America (AUTHOR XX).

Arts practices have continued in Syria since the outbreak of the Civil War, however, a lack of resources and the volatile political condition have made it challenging for activities to continue. Many artists have left Syria due to the violence, instability, limited opportunities, harsh living conditions, and political oppression, leaving a dwindling community of practitioners in Syria who have limited ability to sustain or share their artistic work with others. Through personal anecdotes from Syrian dance practitioners it is clear that in 2018, seven years after the Civil War started, institutions such as the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art are still training dancers, albeit with a very small number of students, limited resources, and very few teachers. The Opera House, next to the Higher Institute compound in Damascus, came under mortar attack in 2014, and it is clear that the future for any dancer graduating from the Institute is precarious. Dance groups and companies across Syria also provided a location for receiving formal dance education, however many of these groups have been re-established in exile. For example, Enana Dance Theatre which was formally based in Damascus is now based in Dubai, with Enana Ballet Academy having established studios in Dubai, Qatar and Canada.

In recognizing my distance from the context that Sara, Leila and Nadia have encountered it can also be viewed that there is no intention to use the narratives shared as a way to create a representation of *all* Syrian dancers, or the feelings encountered by others who have been through similar experiences. Rather, through focusing on a small cohort there is an opportunity for deep discussions to emerge, paving the way for further investigations to develop.

This research is woven with ethical considerations, and care is required when dealing with sensitive encounters such as memories of war and displacement. Institutional ethical approval was gained in advance of the research processes and approaches to the participants. I decided that the dancers would be identified by pseudonyms, and identifiable details of individuals they mentioned in discussions would be removed. While such actions looked after how the participants would be identified and how the material they shared would be managed and disseminated, there were moments in the research process where traumatic experiences were discussed. These moments required care and sensitive negotiation. Through conversations, sharing and re-sharing of material between the participants and I, and by taking time in establishing that they were indeed comfortable to offer certain stories, reflections and ideas, the narratives in this article were shaped.

The experiences Sara, Leila and Nadia share, were built over time, as our relationships for this research evolved. I met with them in the German cities of Essen and Berlin in late 2017 and early 2018. Through a process of individual unstructured interviews over a period of three months, we had conversations that spanned a variety of topics. Often we talked in cafes, having cups of tea or coffee, which

created a conversational feeling to our dialogue. Other times I talked with them in a dance studio, between rehearsals or classes, or in their homes. Our conversations deviated in many directions, we frequently talked about nothing related to their experiences of displacement, dance, or dance education. However, in the moments of talking about a certain recipe, a new pair of shoes, or a movie that one of us had recently seen, space was created for thoughts and personal insights. This opening up took time. I was cautious not to push the conversation, but rather to allow the dancers to share what they felt comfortable with in that moment. Our conversations were recorded, usually on my phone that I placed as discreetly as possible at the side of a table or held in my hand.

As noted prior, Sara, Leila and Nadia are all from Damascus. They graduated from the Dance Department at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art in Damascus over the past decade, where they studied contemporary dance and / or ballet. Each then had professional dance careers prior to the Civil War commencing. Each had a different experience of the War and then also the journey to arrive in Europe. All now reside in Germany, and are enrolled in tertiary dance programmes with the intention of gaining a Bachelor's or Master's qualification in dance performance or dance education. It can be noted that they are at different stages of their tertiary dance education qualifications in Germany. Sara left Syria in early 2013, traveling alone and using a smuggler to assist her journey. She arrived in Germany several months later after periods of time in Greece and Austria. Sara now lives in Berlin and is studying for a Master's degree in dance pedagogy, with a focus on ballet education. Leila departed Damascus in mid-2014, firstly traveling north, crossing into Turkey, spending time in Istanbul before leaving for Germany in late 2016. She now also lives in Berlin,

studying for a Bachelor's degree in dance performance, majoring in choreography. Nadia left Syria most recently in early 2017. She went to Beirut and then on to Europe, arriving in Germany in mid-2017. She now lives in Essen and is engaged in studies for a Bachelor's in contemporary dance performance. All three left close family behind in Syria, and while they have friends, cousins, aunts, uncles, and in some cases siblings in Germany, they have generally had to navigate the exile experience alone. Often it was not possible for the dancers parents and siblings to join them on the journey to Europe due to the immense cost associated with the travel and the family responsibilities they had in Syria. It was also perceived that there was less risk involved (for example being caught by officials at border crossings or in conflict when moving between Syrian cities) when traveling alone or in a small group.

As Leila, Nadia and Sara have moved between locations they have had diverse experiences of sustaining their dance practices. In Germany they have found various ways to re-establish, develop and shift their dance education. Through a process of thematic analysis, the following sections delve into these shifts with a particular focus on how a dance community benefits Syrian refugee dancers such as Leila, Nadia and Sara. Their narratives reveal some of the challenges, distinctions and surprises of engaging in dance education in exile, highlighting how dance communities offer a sense of place, support, hope, an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and re-establish identities.

"I FOUND MY 'PLACE' TO DANCE": COMMUNITY, SUPPORT, SPACE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DANCE EDUCATION WHEN IN EXILE

From the three dancers experiences it is clear that dance communities benefit Syrian refugee dancers through offering a sense of place, support and opportunities. The notion that dance education fosters and extends the sense of community is not a new concept (see for example: Amans 2017; Houston 2005; Parrish 2009). However, the notion of community building is not often linked to formal tertiary dance learning experiences, nor has it been frequently acknowledged in relation to dancers experiencing exile as a result of conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War. However, what emerged from the narratives shared by Sara, Nadia and Leila were their interactions with dance communities and the opportunities communities offered them to continue to dance, even in the most turbulent times. For example, Sara shared that:

> I arrived in Germany and had no idea where I might find a dance class, let alone a good dance school or company. It was luck that I found a studio, and even though it was mainly teaching kids, I felt like I had found a 'home'. I turned up for class, the teacher was so nice to me, she let me join any class I wanted. I was welcomed, people were interested in me as a dancer, not as a refugee, and that I had people around me looking out for me.

While Sara's initial experience of dance education in Germany was at a local private dance school, it is clear within her narrative that this provided her with a starting point to then extend her understandings and networks of dance education in Germany. Those who find themselves in situations of exile have lost many of their former social and professional relationships, and they find themselves needing to form new ones (Kovacev and Shute 2004). The process of developing initial

networks, gaining social support and finding a location to take a dance class could be extremely challenging. Sara explains that she felt that it was 'luck' that enabled her to find a studio, rather than support from the resettlement process or organizations that were assisting with her adjustment to Germany. This notion of support could be viewed through Cohen and Wills's (1985) frame of social support where four categories are noted - emotional support (where a person is valued and accepted), informational support (help to define and understand problematic events), social companionship (time with others in activities) and finally, instrumental support (provision of financial and material resources). It could be that for many organizations that assist with resettlement processes, a dance class could be viewed outside the instrumental support they provide. Sara's experience illuminates that for those who look to sustain their dance practices, a dance class could be instrumental to their sense of belonging in their new home. Therefore, holistic approaches from organizations and individuals offering instrumental support can continued to be encouraged, and experiences such as those shared by Sara reiterate that dance educators and organizations could look towards ways to work with those offering instrumental support to refugee communities.

At the same time there is also a well-established association noted within the literature between the quality of people's relationships and their adjustment to their new home environment (Mels, Derluyn and Broekaert 2008). Sara mentions the dance teacher being nice and that she felt that those at the studio were interested in her as a dancer first and foremost, rather than as a refugee. These relationships and interactions with those in her new dance community have offered Sara a way to feel a sense of value and belonging, connecting to Cohen and Wills's (1985) frame of

emotional support. This reminds us as dance educators to continue to foster spaces that are welcoming and to be open and interested in the diverse backgrounds of individuals who attend classes. Like Sara, Leila also found a dance studio to attend once she settled in Germany. However, finding a sense of belonging in the dance community took a little longer. She shared that,

> I tried three different studios. I found them all so different to the training I had in Syria. I had finished my education in dance, I was a professional dancer, and there I was taking kids class. I was embarrassed and felt like everything I knew was ignored by the teachers here. They talked to me like I had never taken ballet class before. It was only when a few months later I found an adults studio that was at a professional level that I began to feel like, "ah, now I belong". I was around people more like me – in dance background and level – and they appreciated what I had done in Syria.

Leila reveals that she felt embarrassed joining a class with children and that her prior knowledge and experience was not initially appreciated in her new learning environment. Acknowledgement of the years of dance education a student may carry with them is something that can often been ignored when moving to a different context (McCarthy-Brown 2009; Melchior 2011). As Nyama McCarthy-Brown (2009) explains, "[o]ne cannot welcome students into the classroom and ask them (often in some subliminal way) to leave their culture outside" (125). Therefore, it could be asked: how might dance communities and educators work to not only accept the backgrounds and knowledges their students bring to the learning environments, but also incorporate and celebrate these differences? Like Leila's reflections on feeling that a sense of community was found when she was working alongside those who

she felt she was equal with, Nadia also spoke of this being a vital aspect of what enabled her to connect with her dance community while also reflecting on individuals that supported her to find a dance community in Germany. She explained that,

> I met two young women who were volunteers in the welcome center I was living in. They knew nothing about dance, they were not dancers, but they really helped me because they listened to me. They *really* listened. When I told them how upset I was about not finding a place to take [dance] class they asked around to help me find a place. Just having two people who were willing to listen to what I needed made all the difference.
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> Now I am in University I feel like have a group of people around me, dancing with me, people who get me. Even though I have already done university dance, that was in a different context, learning different things. Now, here in Germany I feel that I can teach the people I am learning alongside, and at the same time I am always learning from them. It took a while for our class to bond, but now I really feel like they are my family.

The emotional support that can come through feeling valued and accepted is something that resonates through Nadia's experience. Nadia mentioned that she had support from two women that she felt listened to her. It has been expressed that empathy, reassurance and advocacy are key qualities that assist newly arrived refugees feel support (Pottie, Greenaway, Hassan, Hui, and Kirmayer 2016). We cannot ignore how these qualities might exist within dance learning contexts. When discussing dance communities and individual's support and assistance, the three

dancers also noted the significance of having a physical dance space to attend. This physical space offered a location of community for the dancers. Leila explained,

> I went to Dock 11[1] and said to them, "I don't have permission to work for money, but I can work here voluntarily and maybe I can attend classes for free – like an exchange." They told me, "oh yeah, of course, you can do that." I started, and this was when I really started to get back into my body and into my muscles. The months of traveling, living in camps and moving all the time took a toll on my training. At Dock 11 I could see performances, I could train, I could meet new people. It was amazing, and this is where I felt my spirit was coming back. To have a place to go every day, to have people to talk to about dance, this really helped me feel like, "yes, even after all I have been through, I am still a dancer."

Leila's reflections on having a location in Berlin to attend on a regular basis connects to discussions of how a 'sense of place' might offer feelings of community and belongng. Hazel Easthope (2004) explains that "notions of place are important in all aspects of life" (128) with ideas of what place might be intertweaving with "ideas of community, collective memory, group (and individual) identity, political organization and capital flows" (128). While there is debate over what constitutes space and place (Cresswell 1996, 2004; Easthope 2004, 2009; Malpas 1999), it appears that there seems to be an understanding that different people have different bonds to places. A sense of place develops from one's own experiences (Arefi 1999; Cresswell 1996), with the concept of place being entwined with self and collective identity and

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[1] Dock 11 is a dance venue in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, where dance training and performance is a focus. The organization and venue hosts numerous performances, workshops, and events for the contemporary dance community in Berlin. See: http://www.dock11-berlin.de/

community. Studies have also noted how familiar architectural / built environments might create and sustain a sense of place, foster community identity, and structure social relations (Mazumdar, Mazumdar, Docuyanan and McLaughlin 2000). The dance studio could be viewed as a space that offers familiarity for dancers such as Leila. Thus far the three dancers narratives reveal how finding dance communities was of value for them in their new locations in Germany, and assisted them to feel a sense of place, build relationships, gain support and have opportunitites as refugee dancers.

"YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE A SYRIAN DANCER": ASSUMPTIONS, STEREOTYPES AND EXPECTATIONS IN THE DANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Leila, Sara and Nadia's narratives all highlight how in their new dance education environments in Germany they were offered a chance to challenge stereotypes and assumptions and shift expectations. Moving between different cultural, social and geographical locations can bring challenges in relation to the assumptions, stereotypes and expectations that individuals might face. Discussions in the literature have explored these assumptions at length regarding the experiences of those coming from contexts such as Syria (El-Enany 2016; Lokot 2018), women dancing from this part of the world (AUTHOR XX, XX, XX), and those who find themselves as refugees or displaced persons in exile (Zetter 1991). All three dancers shared moments where they encountered racism in their dance learning environments, specifically this racism they faced could be viewed as what has been described in literature as everyday racism (Essed 1991). Everyday racism tends to be subtle, can

go unnoticed (except for the person feeling the impact of the racism on them), and therefore is frequently not addressed. This form of racism can include speech and behaviours that treat cultural differences (such as dress, cultural practices, physical features or accents) as problematic, manifesting in disapproving glances, exclusionary body language, and positioning individual experiences and backgrounds as invalid (Dolan 2012). Nadia expressed one example of everyday racism in her dance class in Essen. She said,

> Others in my dance class at university here in Essen joke around, and sometimes they put their scarf on their head and they say “oh, Nadia, look I’m Arab now.” It might seem like a small thing, a joke, but it hurts me. But I just can’t keep fighting back to this.

It has been noted that unlike overt acts of racism, everyday racism is not often purposefully intended to cause major offence or harm. However, as observed in the narratives shared by the three dancers, offence and harm does occur, and this in turn may influence how the dancers might choose to engage in and feel about the dance learning environment, and their relationships with those around them. The concerning strength of everyday racism is in its cumulative effect, where it continues to marginalise individuals or groups over time. The discussion of racism in dance education has been highlighted in past literature (see for example: Kerry-Berry 2010, 2012), nevertheless issues still seem to permeate the dance studio. Encounters of everyday racism may make dancers such as Nadia feel isolated and out of place, creating further challenges of her finding a sense of belonging and community in her new home environment. As dance educators and researchers there is a responsibility for us to be aware of the power various acts of racism may have in

dance learning environments, and look for ways to mitigate these from dance education practices.

While Sara did not encounter explicit moments of racism within the dance studio, she did speak about experiences where she faced stereotypes, mentioning how she had confronted assumptions from peers and teachers about what they thought she 'should' look like as a female dancer from Syria. She said,

> People, like my teachers here in Germany when I first met them, come up to me and are like "really? You are from Syria? But you don't look like you are from there [Syria]." When I joined my class, they also occasionally said things like "oh, I thought you'd wear a veil" or "I thought you might look more like a belly dancer." I say to them, "really, why? What should I look like?" Often, they don't say anything and are like, "oh, I just didn't think women danced there [in Syria]."

Sara's reflections highlight some stereotypes of what a woman from Syria might be, but particularly assumptions of a dancing woman from Syria. It can be noted that to a large extent past scholarship and the popular media have frequently offered simplistic, stereotyped images of women in the wider Middle Eastern region (see for example: Al-Faruqi 1978; Buonaventura 1983, 2004, 2010; Helland 2001). Western media frequently portrays women in this region as passive victims, veiled, invisible, and submissive, and there has often been a desire from media sources, scholars, anthropologists and writers to liberate these women. Such representations perpetuate existing assumptions, and in turn form the basis of what many people understand about women from this part of the world.

The Arab woman who dances tends to conflict with the notion of the hidden, veiled, exotic woman. In Sara's encounter, the cultural legacy of Orientalism permeates perceptions. As Aaleh Afshar (2016) explains, "the perception of westerners has been formed by alluring literature from the East presenting ever more seductive e and mysterious images of the oriental woman" (xi). While it can certainly be acknowledged that perceptions held by those outside of the Middle Eastern region are varied and diverse and Afshar's comment is a broad sweep of what those in a Western context might perceive, the notion that a woman dancing who was from Syria was a surprise was not limited to the experience shared by Sara. Leila noted that "people often look at me with surprise when I say 'I am a dancer'," and Nadia shared, "I think people don't expect me to be a dancer, they seem to think this is something special for a woman from Syria." Alongside assumptions regarding aesthetics, there were also moments where the dancers found they faced certain expectations over what their prior dance learning experiences might be, and what their intentions were in pursuing dance education. Nadia explained,

> I've had people – teachers, students, even one person who was the director of a department at University – ask me why I am doing this [studying dance]. They assume that I started dancing only once I arrived in Germany. I get comments such as "that is great you can finally do what you love" and "having this freedom to be a dancer must be great." When I say that I am studying dance I have had comments like "is that for therapy – you know, to deal with the War?" I tell them I have danced since I was five years old and I was a professional dancer in a company in Syria before I left. You see their expression change, they are so confused.

Nadia's narrative reveals that there are expectations that others might have about her dance background, and also what she might want to achieve and pursue through dance education. Similarly, Leila mentioned "in my audition for dance school here [in Germany] they asked me if I was choosing to study dance because I now had 'freedom' to make my own decisions." The idea that dancers such as Nadia might only be engaging in dance learning now that they are in a different cultural context continues to perpetuate assumptions about dance and dancers from certain parts of the world. Prior to the Civil War there was a rich and diverse artistic scene in Syria, and visual arts, music, dance, theatre, handcrafts and poetry were readily accessible to many (Adwan 2016). Within the wider artistic scene, dance education in Syria has a long history (Silverstein 2012). The ignorance that dancers such as Nadia encounter in passing conversations may also further exacerbate feelings of isolation and displacement that they may already be grappling with. In the new dance learning environments Nadia, Leila and Sara have faced everyday racism, stereotypes and assumptions. Simultaneously it is evident that within these new contexts they have opportunities to challenge these situations and representations. The three women appear to be repositioning not only how they are understood in their new dance communities, but also how refugees, women, and those from geographical regions neglected in dance discourse are portrayed in a more general sense.

"I WAN'T TO BE KNOWN FOR MY DANCING, NOT BECAUSE OF WHERE I COME FROM": RE-ESTABLISHING IDENTITIES THROUGH DANCE EDUCATION AND CREATING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

In the narratives of searching for community and the challenges faced in the dance education environment, the three dancers also spoke about re-forming and re-shaping identities through their dance learning encounters. It appears that dance communities are significant in this process. The dancers discussed how they had experienced being identified by a national identity in dance classes. Sara shared,

> I've been introduced to people as the Syrian dancer by my peers. One of my teachers singled me out when we had a visitor from the government – she pulled me aside and was like, "this is Sara, she's from Syria". In those sorts of situations I don't know what to say. I feel like I am on show. What I would like is for people to just allow us to be who we are without the label of Syrian. To be known even as an artist first, before being Syrian.

Sara's thoughts resonated with those offered by Nadia and Leila. Leila shared, "I'm more than just Syrian," and Nadia reflected on this saying "I have to wonder why it is so important now for us to be labelled as 'Syrian' at any opportunity." Alongside such discussions were conversations about how the dance class gave space for reflection and exploration of past experiences, particularly those to do with the context of the Syrian War, or alternatively the chance to not focus on these experiences at all. Lauren B. Wilcox (2015) argues that the body can be a location for "opening up space for thinking about politics and resistance" (5). The notion of 'carrying' their experiences of war inscribed on their bodies was something that Nadia, Sara and Leila all mentioned in discussion. Some expressed that this was something they had sought to incorporate and draw on in relation to their dance work, and others explained that their feeling towards this had shifted over time. Leila shared,

> I'm not so interested in the idea of preserving 'Syrian-ness' through dancing. I think I am more interested in creating a new community through dance, one where we bring our backgrounds and experiences into the conversation and this can inform our artistic work. My class at university is from all over the world, not just Germany, and not just Europe. I think this has really helped me feel that I can be just who I am and take time to figure that out.

Leila's narrative returns to the notion of creating community, and she specifically refers to a new dance community that was relevant to her re-establishing her identity as a dancer in Germany. The diversity of the dance education environment seems to have assisted her to explore this and feel embraced in this context, reiterating the significance of fostering and sustaining community for refugee dancers. Nadia also shared her experience, explaining,

> When I started to take choreography classes at university in Germany, everything I was doing was all about the War. I guess it was because I felt I needed to, and my class and teacher was super supportive of this. It was choreography as therapy I guess. But then after about one semester I was thinking: do I really want to keep revisiting these feelings? Do I really want to keep exploring this trauma through my body? I decided that while I might explore this in the future right now I needed to give my body positive experiences and I had so much more to learn. I realized that my body was tight, frightened, and holding a lot of troubles because of what it had endured in the War. My movement was rigid, contained and scattered – not unlike what I had been through. Slowly, I started to explore other ideas of movement, to let my body feel different things and to be a little more in tune

> with the new environment I was in. Having people who I was learning from and working with being really open to what I had been through gave me hope that I would find my way and figure out for myself who Nadia needed to be as a dancer in Germany.

It has been noted that “people live in wars, with wars, and war lives with them long after it ends” (Parashar 2013, 618), and there is substantial literature that investigates issues about war and the body (see for example: Basham 2013; Sylvester 2011, 2013; Wilcox 2015). However, as Nadia’s reflections highlight, there may be diverse ways that individuals want to express or explore their past embodied experiences in the dance class, and this may shift over time. This is an area of research that could warrant further exploration to understand, especially in relation to the context of dance education. Nadia’s narrative also mentions the idea of hope – that the context she was learning within gave her hope for who she might become. Like Nadia, Sara also spoke of hope, sharing that “to continue to dance, to continue to learn gives me hope for my life here in Germany. It means I can now think about the future and that I might achieve something.”

The concept of hope in and through dance education has been critically queried and untangled in multiple ways. Such thoughts resonate with Paulo Freire and Ana Maria Araújo Freire’s (1997) text *Pedagogy of the Heart*, where the notion of hope is grounded in the philosophy that hope is characterized by its behavioural dimension as “the impatiently patient wait” (81). From a Freireian perspective, such behaviour is distinguished from passive resignation of a situation because it requires courage, boldness, endurance, and perseverance, to lift above trials of life and to be patient in

hope. From experiences such as Nadia's it is clear that Syrian refugee dancers are finding hope in their dance communities in Germany and also through the act of dancing. Freire's understanding of hope allows us as dance educators to revisit the meaning of hope, and consider how this might be a quality that can be valuable to those dealing with situations of change, turmoil or upset. In a number of Freireian texts (1972, 1994, 1997) hope is equated with waiting – not in the passive sense, but rather "active waiting" (Marcel 1976, 280) – where one persistently seeks and struggles. The dancers experiences illustrate how they engage with hope that is active, and their attitudes connect with Freire's (1972) remark that, "[i]f I fight with hope, then I can wait" (64). The notion of hope might appear to suggest a utopian ideal, an end-point, or a conclusion. However, as David Halpin (2003) expresses, without utopian views of hope within education, we would be existing in a soulless world. Halpin shares that "being hopeful, radical, and realistic are powerful motivational forces" (8), and through the utopian imagination of hope there is the potential for transformation to occur, moving one towards humanistic action. The views shared by Leila, Nadia and Sara remind us of how through opportunities to engage with dance and communities that are supportive of this, hope might be sustained, fostered and extended.

CONCLUSION

In a world that is becoming more complex, with a volatile global political climate, and xenophobia, othering and marginalisation all too visible, now more than ever issues of diversity in dance education need to be attended to with sensitivity and care (Rowe, Martin, Buck and Anttila 2018). Refugee dancers and dancers in exile are

cohorts that are often negated from dialogue and discussion in dance education scholarship. The experiences offered by Leila, Sara and Nadia illuminate questions for those inside and outside of dance education to consider, such as:

- Where are activities and practices such as dance education viewed and encouraged as integral to the refugee resettlement process?
- How are dance educators encouraging a celebration of knowledges and experiences from a diversity of backgrounds in the dance learning environments?
- Is there the potential to further create space for dancers such as Nadia, Leila and Sara to access spaces to participate in dance education, dancemaking and performance?
- Within a broader philosophical shift, how can dance educators foster identities in dance learning to be fluid and different?

Drawing from these three narratives, it appears that there are key issues of note for refugee dancers, particularly those who have resettled in Germany. Finding community – whether that be a studio with certain teachers, a group of dancers to work with, or a certain physical space – has been vital for the three dancers to re-establish social and professional relationships. Within this expression of community, it can be observed that various facets of support (as per the Cohen and Willis (1985) understanding) are reflected through dance education, even if this is not the explicit agenda of the dance learning practice occurring. At the same time however, the dancers have encountered stereotypes, assumptions and expectations that permeate the dance environments they find themselves within. Examples of everyday racism are shared, and while this is potentially a way for individuals to

navigate difference they are encountering, there is a need for further care and attention to shift such behaviours. In further reflections, Leila, Sara and Nadia spoke about the possibilities offered within their dance education encounters to explore and re-establish identities. Connected to this was discussion of their negotiation of the embodied impacts of war and management of past traumatic experiences in the learning contexts, while also offering a sense of hope that dance education might offer them in their new home location.

The experiences shared by Nadia, Leila and Sara raise numerous issues for dance education and dance educators to consider. While this article has only shared three dancers reflections on sustaining dance education in exile, their encounters reveal times of support, empathy and encouragement within their dance learning in exile, while also highlighting moments of feeling included or excluded from communities, confrontation with stereotypes and assumptions, perceived expectations and identities. Through further exploration of dance learning experiences of marginalised and silenced groups, there is the potential for further understanding, empathy and support to be offered by those in the global dance education community.

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